

The Testing of a Missionary: Geoge Shannon McCune and the Korea Conspiracy Case of 1910-1913

Shannon McCune*

Introduction

At seven o'clock in the morning of June 28th, 1912, "small groups of prisoners began to arrive" at the special building which had been erected behind the District Court in Seoul. (This was in the area now occupied by department stores along Chong-bo.) Eventually they were seated "in the middle of the court, divided into two groups of 67 and 56 men," according to the Special Correspondent of *The Japan Chronicle*. He continues: "As soon as the prisoners began to arrive, the spectators were driven back as far as possible from the gates, and eventually were kept at a distance of about 200 yards from the entrance, after a good deal of hustling and pushing. Only about 200 persons were admitted . . . All those Koreans who gained admission by ticket were searched one after another at an inner gate before being allowed to enter the Court. About 20 foreigners, including three members of the Salvation Army, were among those admitted to the Court." Thus on this day 64 years ago "the long-expected trial of the 123 Koreans charged with being concerned in a conspiracy to assassinate Count Terauchi, Governor-General of Korea, was commenced."¹⁾

This so-called Conspiracy Case and my father's involvement with it are the subject of this paper presented on this 64th anniversary of the opening of the trial. Among Koreans the Conspiracy Case is better known as the 105 Incident, since 105 persons were sentenced to prison terms at the end of this trial. It became a test of the Christian faith and missionary spirit of George S. McCune.

It is a pleasure to be lecturing at Soong-jun University and to have a Share in some of the activities preliminary to the celebration of the 80th anniversary of Soong-jun Univer-

* Fulbright Visiting Research professor.

1) The quotations are taken from the account of the First Day's Proceedings by the Special Correspondent of *The Japan Chronicle: The Korean Conspiracy Trial, Full Report of the Proceedings, The Japan Chronicle*, Kobe, Japan, 1912, 136 pages.

sity. I have greatly enjoyed the opportunities for research which have been afforded to me as a Visiting Research Professor at Soong-jun University this year. This paper reflects some of this research.

My earliest contacts with Soong-jun University were with its fore-runner, Soong-sil College, The Union Christian College of Korea, in P'yongyang in the period from 1928 to 1931. My father had returned to Korea in 1928 to become the fourth President of Soong-sil. At that time I was a high school student and particularly enjoyed playing basketball against Soong-sil College students. One of the pictures in the Christian Museum shows me in my P.Y.F.S. (Pyeng Yang Foreign School) uniform; my face is hidden by the ball I am shooting in the warm-up session before the first basketball game to be played in the new Gymnasium-Auditorium at Soong-sil College in 1930. Today I am glad to be lecturing rather than playing basketball. Both years and pounds have been added since my basketball days!

Episodes In The Life of George S. McCune

My father arrived in Korea in 1905. The small Japanese boat on which he and my mother were travelling was shipwrecked on the west coast of Korea near Inchon. Thus with high drama he reached Korea and for the rest of his life was intimately involved in many episodes of modern Korean history. In his first years he combined Korean language study with teaching at Soong-Sil College and Academy. In 1905. In 1908-1909 he was Acting President of Soong-sil in the furlough absence of Dr. William E. Baird. But it is for his period as President from 1928-1936 that my father is better known in Soong-sil College history. He had a great love for Soong-sil and for the students of Soong-sil, many of whom remember him vividly and with affection.

There are no 'typical' missionaries, perhaps, my father was more atypical than some. However, he was similar to other American missionaries in Korea in 1910 in his deep concern for the feelings and aspirations of the Korean people for their independence from the recently-imposed autocratic and dictatorial power of the Japanese. His life spanned much of the period of Japanese control over Korea. Three episodes in his life—the Conspiracy Case of 1910-1913, the Mansei Movement of 1919 and the Shrine Issue of 1936—were particularly significant in their relations to Korean independence aspirations. A paper in which I discussed my father's relations to the Mansei Movement has been published by the Center for Korean Studies of the University of Hawaii.²⁾ I have been

2) The paper on the Mansei Movement I gave at a symposium at the Center for Korean Studies at the University of Hawaii on February 26, 1976. It will be published shortly.

gathering some materials on the events surrounding the Shrine Issue of 1936 which resulted in the closing of Soong-sil College in 1938. It is a complex subject involving subjective and emotional attitudes. I do not yet feel ready to publish on it. Today I am discussing only one of these episodes, the Conspiracy Case.

The American Missionaries And Korean Independence Aspirations

The American missionaries in Korea in the days of Japanese control had to follow a difficult path. In order to keep the sufferece of the Japanese goverment for their missionary work, the missionaries felt they ought to maintain a neutral position in political affairs. They took the Biblical injunction "render unto Caesar the things which be Caesar's" very seriously. Yet it was exceedingly difficult to remain neutral and impossible to ignore political events that were taking place among their Korean friends.

Arthur Judson Brown, Secretary of the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church, visited Korea in 1909 and discussed the situation with many missionaries and Korean church leaders. He wrote in 1912: "From all political movements, however, the missionaries and the leading Korean Christians resolutely sought to keep the Churches aloof. Obedience to 'the powers that be' was preached from every pulpit. The Church must have nothing to do with politics, the Christians were told. Some Christians who were suspected of activity in political movements were not permitted to hold office in the Church, and in some cases were excommunicated. So strong was this determination of the missionaries and Korean Church leaders that it was not uncommon for Koreans outside of the Churches to taunt Christians with being on the side of the enemies of their country and for the missionaries to be told that if it were not for them, a revolution would have started long ago."³⁾

In spite of American missionaries tried to keep a neutral attitude, the Japanese, newly in control of Korea, were very suspicious of them. The Japanese resented the successes of the American missionary endeavors among the Korean people. Arthur Judson Brown quotes the influential Japanese editor of a Tokyo newspaper, the *Fukuin Shimpo*, as saying that "the foreign missionaries in Korea seem to be moved by various baseless imaginations resulting from a misunderstanding of the facts."

Some years later in 1920, after the Mansei Movement, a Japanese newspaper in Seoul, the *Chosen Shimpo*, noted that "The striring-up of the minds of the Koreans is the sin of the American missionaries. This uprising is their work . . . There are a good many

3) The quotation is from Arthur Judson Brown, *The Korean Conspiracy Case*, 156 Fifth Avenue, New York, November 20, 1912, Foreword and 27 pages.

shallow-minded people among the missionaries and they make the minds of the Koreans bad and they plant the seeds of democracy.”

Arthur Judson Brown in defending the American missionaries stated: “We do not insist that all of the several hundred American missionaries in Korea have been wholly without fault. In the midst of a frightened and helpless people, seeing what they believe to be severity and injustice, anxious for the churches and schools which represent the toils of many years, they cannot reasonable be expected to act as if they were deaf and dumb. Let it be conceded that some of them have contributed heat as well as light to the question under consideration. But the arm-chair critic ten thousand miles away may discreetly ask himself whether he would not have acted worse than they have. As a matter of fact, the missionary body as a whole has acted with remarkable moderation, dignity and selfrestraint.”

The gospel of Jesus Christ which the American Protestant missionaries were preaching in Korea was a simple gospel—but it was also a revolutionary gospel, for it called upon the Korean believer to renounce some of the traditions of his past. It was a gospel that recognized the dignity and the worth of the individual in the midst of a changing world. The American Protestant ethic held by the missionaries called for a separation of church and state and for the assurance of the freedom of religious worship of the individual and of the church without government control or interference. This was contrary to the Japanese idea of the relation of church and state. Of particular concern in Korea was the relation of the church and missionary supported schools to the Japanese government’s tight control over educational activities.

The Life Of George S. McCune

My father, George S. McCune, was active as an educational missionary for decades in Korea. His relations to the Koreans and to their aspirations for political independence from the Japanese merits study and discussion. I do not think of him as one of the “shallow-minded people” among the American missionaries, though he may have been one of those who “contributed heat as well as light” to the discussions. He loved the Koreans and shared their aspirations. He had little regard for overbearing police tactics of the Japanese. Before discussing the Conspiracy Case and his relations to it, it seems wise to give some biographical data on my father, for he was an individual with personal attributes, family ties and educational background that influenced his activities.

George Shannon McCune was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, on December 15, 1873. His father was in a amily construction and painting business. Unfortunately, his father died when George was 12 years old. George and his brother stopped school in order to help

support their mother and sisters. George McCune worked in various jobs, by the age of 22 he was the Assistant Cashier of a Pittsburgh bank. Realizing that he had gone about as far as could be expected with his level of education and yet desirous of a more rewarding and Christian-oriented vocation, George McCune decided to go to college. (Incidentally, probably because of his own experience he was particularly interested in helping older persons continue with their education.) His brother and eldest sister were able to support his mother and his two younger sisters, so he was free of his family obligations.

to gain an education he needed to enroll in an institution where he could work his way through school and where he could acquire both a high school and a college education. Park College, a Presbyterian school in Parkville, Missouri, answered these requirements. Park had been founded by John Armstrong McAfee. A number of the McAfee family were on the faculty during while George McCune was enrollment there. In 1901 he graduated from Park College after seven years of study. He stayed on for another year teaching Latin and doing advanced work which enabled him to receive an extramural Master's degree from the University of Pittsburg a year later in 1903.

George S. McCune's first full time teaching position was at Coe College, a Presbyterian college in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Here he was Dean of Men, Principal of the Academy and Professor of Educational Psychology. During this three years, 1902-1905, he read and studied so that he might be ordained as a Presbyterian minister by the Iowa Synod. Obviously the standards for professional education in theology before ordination were not at that time too high! Some years later in 1914, Coe College bestowed on George Shannon McCune the honorary degree of Doctor of Divinity.

In 1904, George S. McCune was married to Helen Bailey McAfee, the only daughter of John Armstrong McAfee, the founder and president of Park College. My mother, having gone through academy and college at Park college, was able to graduate at the age of 18. She then took a post-graduate year at what is now Western College for Women in Oxford, Ohio from which she also received a B. A. degree. She returned to become Dean of Women at Park College and had become acquainted with George McCune during his student days. After their marriage, she joined my father at Coe College where she became Dean of Women. There in 1904 they received appointment as Presbyterian missionaries and were awaiting assignment but the Russo-Japanese War delayed their departure for Korea until late in 1905.

The Early Missionary Work Of George S. McCune

My father and mother spent their first years in Korea in P'yongyang. Studying the

Korean language intensively. During all of the years he was in Korea my father put aside some time each day to study the Korean language, for he found that it was constantly changing. He began to teach in the Pyeng Yang Union Christian Academy and College—the Soong-sil schools. At that time institutions were sponsored by both Presbyterian and Methodist churches and missionary groups, hence the name Union.

My father George Shahnnon McCune, took as his Korean name Yun San-on, It was derived from the last part of his family name and his second name, the family name of his mother. Yun was an established Korean family name and San-on could be translated rather aptly as a Mountain of Energy, or jokingly as “a volcanic mountains ready to explode”. In the Christian Museum on the campus of Soong-jun University there is a Diploma 1909 of from the Pyeng Yang Union Christian Academy which he signed along with Carl W. Rufus, Arthur L. Becker and William N. Blair. (Incidentally Dr. Blair was my father-in-law and Dr. Becker was my brother’s father-in-law! All of which proves my contention that my father arranged our marriages with the daughters of his good friends when my brother and I were very young!!)

In 1910, upon the completion of their language training my father and mother were assigned to Sŏnchŏn, or as it was romanized by the early missionaries as Syen-chun. This was a small city of some 8,000 persons, almost half of whom became Christian. It was located on the railroad between P’yongyang and the Manchurian border at Sinuiju. My father became Principal of the Hugh O’Neill, Jr., Industrial Academy, or Sin-sung as it was known in Korean. My mother was principal of a school for young widows, a particularly ‘lost’ group in Korea at that time. This school later became Po-sung Girls Academy. Both my father and mother set up self-help departments in their schools, following the Park College tradition. Thus students by earning their way and got practical as well as theoretical learning. My parents enjoyed being in Sŏnchŏn where the missionary group was small and congenial. They had close and rewarding friendships with many Koreans as well, especially Pastor Yang of the North Church. It was with this background and in this setting that my father was involved an interesting political episode—the Korean Conspiracy Case, a real time of testing for him.

The Origins Of The Conspacy Case

It is fitting that today, June 28th, we should be discussing this episode, for the trial opened in Seoul on this day 64 years ago. In my discussion I am using largely family memories and English language materials, including the trial records published by *The Japan Chronicle* of Kobe, Japan at the time and the report on *The Korean Conspiracy Case*

by Arthur Judson Brown, which was prepared for “all of the missionary organizations of the United States which are conducting work in Korea”.⁴⁾ In addition a compilation of article on *The conspiracy case in Chosen* was published in 1912 by the Seoul press, a Japanese-controlled English-language newspaper of that time. I am very sorry that the English language diaries of Baron Yun Chi-ho, the eminent Korean patriot who was involved in the Conspiracy Case, have not yet been released for publication, for they will cast new light on the Conspiracy Case. I have had valuable discussions with L. George Paik, my Korean brother, who loaned me some of the source materials I have used. Donald Clark, a graduate student in history at Harvard, and Yi Chae-sun, a graduate student in history at Ewha Women’s University, who have worked on this period have shared with me some of their ideas. Naturally I am solely responsible for the ideas presented. And now for a brief account of the Conspiracy Case.

In the summer of 1911, the Japanese police arrested some Koreans on burglary charges. Two of these persons ‘confessed’ that their burglaries were to provide funds for the support of anti-Japanese activities on the part of Koreans in Korea and in the Chientao region of Manchuria, across the northeastern Korean border. On the basis of these contrived confessions the Japanese police proceeded to develop a theory that an elaborate Conspiracy Case had been in existence in late 1910. They arrested many people, predominantly Presbyterian and other Christians in northwestern Korea. Through torture and chicanery these persons were made to “confess” to the supposed Conspiracy.

The Conspiracy plot as the Japanese police sought to develop it had many ramifications. Christian and other schools and a supposed secret society, the New People’s Society, the Sin-min-hoe in Korean, were accused of being involved. One key action was supposed to be the assassination of the Governor-General of Korea, Count Terauchi, when he went on a trip from Seoul to Sinuiju in northwestern Korea on the Manchurian border. There were supposed to have been three separate attempts, all of which were unsuccessful. On the first two occasions the Governor-General never went on the journey.

The third attempt at the assassination of the Governor-General was to have been made (according to the ‘confessions’ which were extorted from the prisoners) at the railroad station in Sŏnchŏn on December 28, 1910. The alleged assassins included Sin Sung Academy students. They were to have been on the station platform or surrounding the

4) In addition to the sources already cited, there is a second publication by *The Japan Chronicle: The Korean Conspiracy Trial, Full Report of the Proceedings in Appeal*, *The Japan Chronicle*, Kobe, Japan, 1913, 307 pages. Another source, difficult to obtain and rather highly pro-Japanese, is *The Conspiracy Case in Chosen*, Seoul Press, Keijo, 1912, 64 pages. It is interesting to note, by the way, that there is more original materials in English than in Korean, for there was strict censorship in Korea at the time of the Conspiracy Case and Trials.

station and were to have fired pistols at the Governor-General.⁵⁾ George S. McCune was to signal the assassination by shaking hands with Count Terauchi. The weirdness of the supposed plot is obvious when one considers that the person shaking hands with a potential assassination victim would himself be in a rather dangerous position!

The Conspiracy Case Trials

The first trial was largely ignored by the Japanese press; there were no Korean newspapers. However, a Britisher, Robert Young, the editor and publisher of *The Japan Chronicle* in Kobe, Japan, became very interested, in part at my father's urging and had a special correspondent follow the trial day by day. The account printed in a separate booklet makes fascinating reading. Some years later, A. Morgan Young, Robert Young's son, wrote a chapter on "The Korean Conspiracy" in a book *Japan in Recent Times, 1912-1926*. He noted that the case "deserves a prominent place among famous trials and preposterous mares' nests." In his words, ". . . according to Mr. McCune's own account, on the great day when he was supposed to have played Judas, he turned out, with his whole school, by official order, but did not know whom they had to meet. The boys in line obediently bowed at the order of the police when the Governor-General lighted from the train, and Count Terauchi, whom Mr. McCune had not met before, came and shook him by the hand, saying how pleased he was at this spontaneous welcome."⁶⁾

During the trials there were many statements about the torture used to gain 'confessions'. One illustration is the testimony in the Court of Appeals of Kim Ik-kyom, a Presbyterian and a teacher in Sŏnchŏn who said "that several days running he was hung up in a doorway, five or six hours at a time, and beaten daily. The police told him also that many others had confessed, implicating him, and that Mr. McCune, who had been intimately concerned in the plots, was also in prison, and being a man of high morality, had confessed everything and handed over sixty or seventy pistols. With these persuasions and blows they urged him to confess, and knowing that some had already been tortured to

5) At the close of my lecture on June 28, 1976, Dr. L. George Paik shared with those present his memories of this event. He had entered Sin Sung Academy in September, 1910 and remembers the way that all of the students were required on December 28th to march to the railroad station. They were all thoroughly searched; even pen knives were taken away from them as dangerous weapons. They were then marched to a remote part of the platform. When the train stopped they all bowed at a signal and could not really see to whom they were bowing.

6) A. Morgan Young, *Japan in Recent Times, 1912-1926* William Morrow E Co., New York, 1929, 347 pages. Chapter 111, The Korean Conspiracy, pp. 31-38, quotation from page 34.

death, he thought it best to agree to all their questions.’’⁷⁾

The Motivation Of The Conspiracy Case

The motivation and timing of the Case were of some significance. Viscount Ito, the Japanese political leader who had been instrumental in the Korean annexation process, had been assassinated by a Korean, Ahn Chong-Kun in Harbin, Manchuria on October 26, 1909. The Japanese, after various intrigues, had formally annexed Korea on August 29, 1910. Some small Korean groups had exiled themselves in Manchuria and were agitating for Korean independence from that border area. Within Korea many Koreans, including Christian pastors, businessmen and students, were opposed to the Japanese and their actions, particularly their seizure of lands and property. The Japanese were ‘jittery’ and feared coal Korean opposition. they were especially concerned over the increasing influence of the growing number of Christians and of Christian schools.

Just why the Japanese authorities in Korea embarked on the prosecution of the Conspiracy Case is not known. Some Japanese historians and advisers had pointed out that P’yong-an and Hwanghae provinces in northwestern Korea had never been really effectively controlled by the Yi dynasty in Korea. It may have been for this reason that the Japanese felt they must show their power and might to the independent-minded people of these provinces. These areas had considerable mineral resources of gold, coal and iron ore and forest resources; these the Japanese wished to exploit. They also desired to expand the rice acreage for their benefit. these provinces were areas of political importance and economic value and the Japanese wished to control them tightly.

In P’yong-an and Hwanghae provinces Protestant Christian missionary work was notably successful. The Korean Pentacostal Movement, a revival of great impact, had gripped this area a few years before.⁸⁾ There were many militant, evangelistic and independent-minded Korean Christians who were not exactly subservient to the Japanese. They were starting

7) *Op. cit.*, quotation from page 60. There are a number of other similar statements in *The Japan Chronicle* accounts. Some Koreans in later years have written biographical accounts telling of their experiences. A book by Sunoo Hyuk, one of the students involved, along with his brother Sunoo Hyun gives impressions. Sunoo Hyon’s father-in-law, Lee Myong-ryong, was also involved and years later was one of the 33 signers of the Korean Declaration of Independence of March 1, 1919. Another account is that of Kwak Tai-chung who left for studies and residence in America shortly after he was released along with the 99 in 1913. His American name was Lowell Kawhk; he returned to Korea after 1945 and died at the age of 90 in 1973, shortly after his autobiography was published.

8) An interesting account of this revival is by my father-in-law, William N. Blair: *The Korean Pentacost*, New York, 1919; this was reprinted as *Gold in Korea*, Topeka, Kansas, 1946, 114 pages; another reprinting is being made under the editorship of my brother-in-law, Bruce F. Hunt, by a British publisher.

new schools and establishing book stores. The number of churches was growing rapidly. As some Korean scholars have pointed out, the financial strength of the Korean Christians in north-western Korea was of considerable importance.⁹⁾

Part of the motivation of the Japanese was their fear of American missionary influence. Also they were quite insensitive to the Koreans concerns and culture. Many of the Japanese officials were ex-Army officers with their own limited appreciation of the Korean situation. Some years later after the Mansei Movement, A. Morgan Young epitomized one of these persons, General Hasegawa who was Governor-General of Korea in 1919 in these words: "General Hasegawa was now ruling in the peninsula, and, like most military martinets who find themselves in high administrative office, his mind could not soar above the barrack-room idea that inflexible discipline is all that is needed in the government of a people. . . . He was remarkably like the typical military reactionary all over the world: distant and invisible dangers were plain to his mind's eye, but to salient facts right under his nose he was entirely blind. There were many like him in Korea; the most preposterous of petty tyrants could never understand that his own actions provoked public sentiment against him: always the instigation had to come from malign source. . . . Less responsible people freely aired the opinion that American money was causing the mischief."¹⁰⁾

The Development Of The Conspiracy Case

The Conspiracy Case had no basis in fact, but the Japanese police and court authorities once embarked on their course of trying to prove its existence could not disentangle themselves without a serious loss of prestige. It was only after independent Japanese lawyers and newsmen became involved, with resultant publicity in Japan and America on the crudeness of the Conspiracy Case, that they sought to extricate themselves.

A number of Koreans died under torture as the Japanese police sought to extract supposed information on the Conspiracy. Others were too ill to be brought to trial. Finally, on June 28, 1912, 122 men were brought to trial in Seoul. There were supposed to be 123 but a short while before one man, on the pretext that he could obtain more proof, duped his guards and escaped to Manchuria. We are commemorating the opening of the first trial today by this discussion. On September 21, 1912, though 17 were freed, most of them young students, 105 of the defendants were convicted of conspiring to cause the 'uncommated murder' of Governor-General Terauchi. The sentences of the

9) One such study of the Korean Christians and their economic activities in northwestern Korea has been published by Soogu-jun University.

10) *Op. cit.*, quotations from pages 154 and 157.

ranged 105 from 2 to 10 years.

The Geography Of The Conspiracy Case

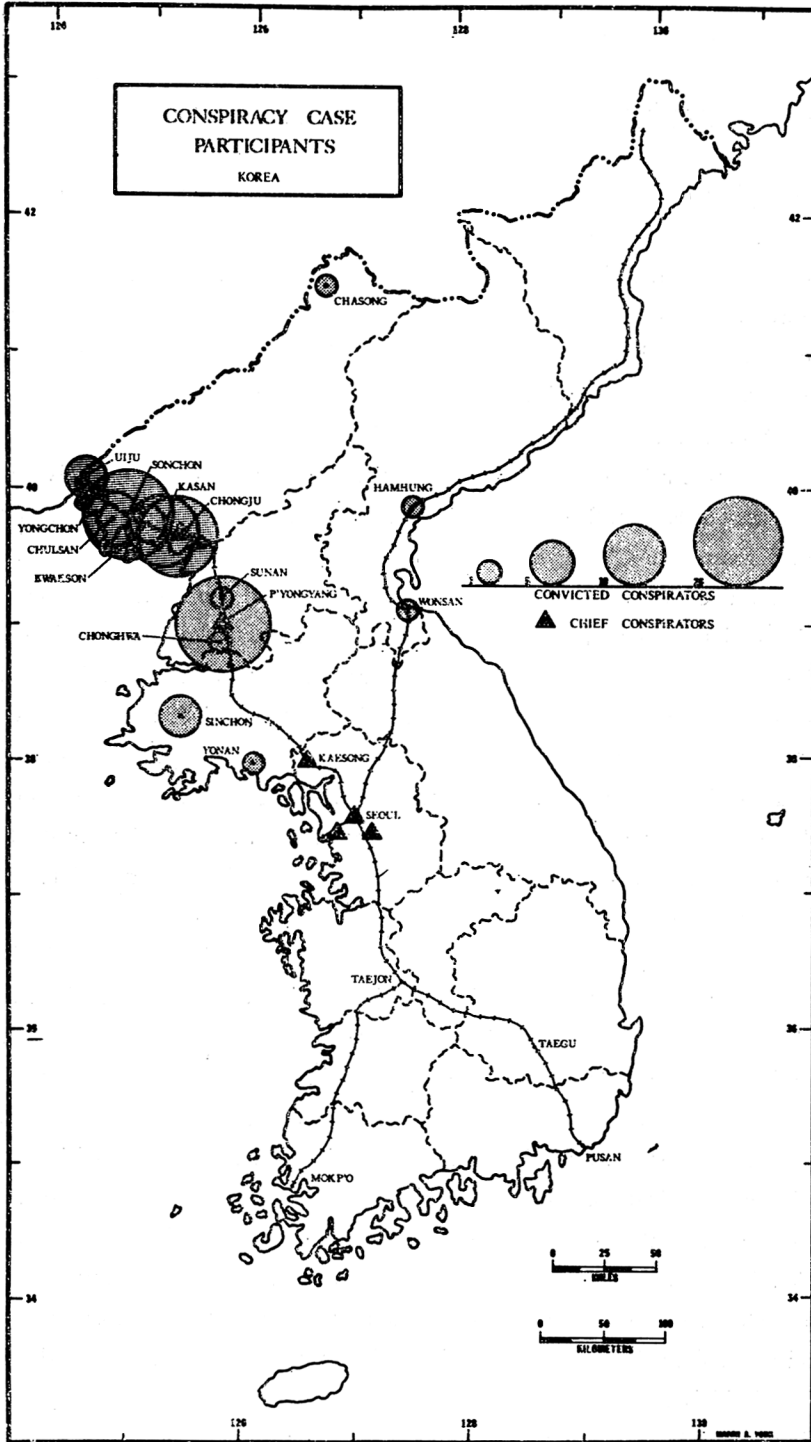
As a geographer I have been intrigued by the occupations and the areas from where the 122 'conspirators' came.¹¹⁾ The distribution of the places of residence at the time of their arrests of the 122 men is shown on the accompanying map. The six 'chief conspirators' came from Seoul, Kaesong, P'yongyang, and Chŏngju. Two from Seoul were really from northwestern Korea and were only living in Seoul at the time of their arrests. There was one other 'chief conspirator' from Seoul; other conspirators came from Wonsan and Hamhung in South Hamgyong, Chasŏng in far North P'yong-an and Yun-an in southern Hwanghae. The rest all Twenty-two came from towns in P'yongan and Hwanghae, the northwestern part of Korea. 22 came from P'yongyang, 20 from Sŏnchŏn, 16 from Chŏngju and 12 from Kasan, near Chŏngju. Others came in smaller numbers from Uiju, Yŏngchŏn, Kwaksan and Chulsan in North P'yongan Province and from Sinchŏn in Hwanghae.

The 105 convicted 'conspirators' included 28 teachers, 10 grocers, 10 brass workers and merchants (mainly from Kasan), 9 other merchants, 9 farmers, 7 students (though in addition 12 students were tried but not convicted), 6 pastors, 5 drug merchants, 3 clerks, 2 tailors, 2 rice merchants, 2 book sellers and one of nine other professions ranging from a doctor to a cookie maker; only four persons had no designated profession. 98 of the 122 persons who stood trial were Christians. The ages of the 122 ranged from 19 to 56, but only 4 were over 50. Forty-four were younger than 26 and 47 were aged 27 to 35. Thus it was a relatively young group of persons who were accused of being 'conspirators'.

The most prominent person convicted was Baron Yun Chi-ho, a Methodist layman of moderate wealth who had been principal of the Anglo-Korean College in Kaesong. A member of the Korean aristocracy, Mr. Yun had been educated in Japan, China and America and before the imposition of the Japanese Protectorate over Korea in 1907 held a number of official positions. Five other persons, including a well-to-do businessman and the manager of a bookstore, were declared the 'chief conspirators' along with Yun Chi-ho.

The 99 lesser conspirators, so-called, were a mixed group, though most of them were Presbyterians from northwestern Korea. Included were some students and teachers from Sin Sung Academy. George S. McCune was the Principal of the academy and according to some of the 'confessions' instructed the students to carry out the assassination attempt. Other foreign missionaries were also implicated. However, the Japanese authorities were

11) I'm grateful to Munam Chon, the President, and staff members of the Korean Research Center in Seoul for translating materials from their library in the 122 'Conspirators'.



careful not to arrest any of these foreigners and did not allow them to testify at any of the trials.

Appeals In The Conspiracy Case

The Conspiracy Case was appealed to a higher court; from November 26, 1912 to February 25, 1913 an open hearing took place in the Court of Appeals. The prisoners were brought to the court each day, manacled together, wearing wicker hoods over their heads. Yun Chi-ho and others, including American church organizations, had hired Japanese lawyers for the defense in the Court appeals. Full publicity was given to the appeal in Japan in the United States. The prisoners were allowed to make statements about the tortures they had undergone. In the United States leading magazines of the period contained articles on the Korean Conspiracy Case and the tortures of the prisoners.

Many missionaries attended the fifty-one day trial. George S. McCune, whose Sin Sung Academy had had to close since so many of its teachers and students had been arrested, attended most of the open hearings. His name came up often during the course of the trial. In the first eleven days of the first trial his name was mentioned 135 times in *The Japan Chronicle* account. He was also mentioned often in the Appeal Court hearings. Requests made by the defendants for him to be called to the witness stand were not considered by the court.

On March 20, 1913 the Court of Appeals reduced the sentence of five of the so-called chief conspirators to six years and the sentence of the youngest chief conspirator to five years. The court said that "All of them were obstinate and conservative and unacquainted with the general trend of things in the world. Not being wise enough to know what was the cause of peace in the Far East, they wished to exclude the influence of the Japanese Empire from the ancient land of Korea." The court, however, acquitted the other 99 alleged conspirators since "sufficient evidence has not been produced to establish the facts."¹²⁾

On April 6, 1913 Mrs. George S. McCune gave birth to her fourth child, a son who was named Shannon. Knowing that he needed a Korean name, some of the 99 suggested that he be given the personal name, Pak. Thus his name in Korean is Yun Ahn-pak, which may be translated as the Peaceful Hundredth One! Because of its connection with Korean history This is a name in which I take very great pride

The six so-called Chief Conspirators appealed their conviction to higher courts, but after various hearings the only result was that the youngest conspirator had his sentence

12) *Japan Chronicle, Op. cit.*

extended to the length of the other five, six years. However, at the time of the coronation of the Japanese Emperor in February 1915, all of the so-called conspirators were granted pardons and released from prison. Yun Chi-ho became Secretary of the Y.M.C.A. in Seoul shortly afterward, Count Terauchi made a sizeable cash donation to the Y.M.C.A. This gift was considered by some Koreans as a tacit admission of the injury done to Yun Chi-ho.

Aftermath Of The Conspiracy Case

The Conspiracy Case had a considerable influence on the life of George S. McCune. He left Korea shortly after the conclusion of the trial at the Court of Appeals and the release of the 99 so-called conspirators for a year's furlough in the United States. He had become quite well known in Presbyterian circles in America where the trial had been given considerable publicity. During his year in the United States he told the story of the Conspiracy Case often and of the suffering which many of his young students had undergone because of their religious convictions.

Though it was quite obvious that there really had been no conspiracy, George S. McCune was a marked person in so far as the Japanese authorities were concerned. As Principal of a small academy in distant northwestern Korea in the small town of Sŏnchŏn, George S. McCune was not well known by many Korean people. The publicity of the trial made his name, Yun San-on, well known throughout Korea. His constant attendance at the trial and his solicitude for his teachers, students and friends who were being wrongly accused made a deep impression on many. His pro-Korean attitude became well known, along with his contempt for crass actions by the arrogant Japanese police.

It was really the Japanese police who were on trial in the Court of Appeals and the acquittal of the 99 was a verdict of guilty on the Japanese police and the Japanese methods. The verdict would not have been made if George S. McCune and others had not insisted that the trials be open and that full publicity be given to the trials in the United States as well as in Japan. This opening of the trials and the glare of publicity were instrumental in lessening the stupid and inhumane actions of the Japanese police who feared the American Christian ideas which were being widespread throughout Korea.

Conclusions

The Conspiracy Case was a time of testing for my father as a missionary. It was a test of his own religious faith. He believed rather simply that God would punish the evil and

would reward the good. He also believed that his prayers for the release of his teachers and students would be answered. The freeing of the 99 and eventually of all of the 105 Korean ‘conspirators’ gave him a renewed confidence in his personal Christian beliefs and in the effectiveness of prayer.

The Conspiracy Case was a test of my father’s love for his fellowmen. He suffered with his students, teachers and friends as they were being tortured and in their trials. When they were released he was overjoyed and greeted them with great affection.

In a more subtle way the Conspiracy Case and Trial was a test of my father’s belief that if the truth were brought out—if publicity were given in the outside world, then the serious situation in Korea would be rectified. He was instrumental in getting Robert Young of *The Japan Chronicle* and other newspaper men interested in the Case. This publicity in the Japanese and American press was of fundamental importance in the Trial in the Court of Appeal where the 99 were released. My father’s faith in the power of openness seemed justified to him. The strong support given by the American mission boards who mobilized American publicity and influence was also important.

Finally, my father had a test of his own sense of humor, of his optimism and of his desire to look ahead rather than behind. It was probably a very discouraging time for him in that hot summer of 1912. He attended the trial day after day. His school had had to be closed. Yet he used to tell stories of how his students grinned and winked at him and how he smiled and made gestures in return. It has been said that he used his hearty laughter, which everyone in the court room, the judges included, could hear and recognize, to very good advantage. For example, one young student who obviously had never seen a pistol had ‘confessed’ to having carried 70 pistols, 30 in one pocket and 40 in another pocket. When this ‘confession’ was read my father’s booming laughter underlined the ridiculousness of the so-called Conspiracy. Though discouraged, he kept his sense of humor and his optimistic viewpoint.

His faith in a Christian God, his love of his fellowman, his belief in the power of a free press and his optimistic and joyful human nature, these were hallmarks of my father’s life and work in Korea. The Conspiracy Case with its Trial was also a time of strengthening and development, making a deep and lasting impression on the life of this American missionary who loved the Korean people and who shared with them a hope for a free and independent political existence.