



LEGACIES OF THE KOREAN WAR

Oral History Project

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Interview with:

Reverend Hi Dong Kang

First Generation

Born 1928, Hamkyungnamdo Province

Interviewed by:

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Japanese Colonial Period

I was born in the province of Hamkyungnamdo, south Hamkyungnamdo, . . . in 1928. We were seven brothers, sisters. And my father was a converted Christian when I was three years old. And he became minister. And I was, I think, eight years or something like that. So we came out from the village where I was born, and to the bigger town. And he was ministering.

At that time, Christianity was a very, how do you say, not as strong in my area. Buddhist and Confucianist. And in the village, my clan of Kang, nobody was Christian. But another clan among them, [there were] many Christians. And I think they influenced my father, and he was converted. And he went to the seminary in Pyongyang. And so he became minister. Until that time, he was a farmer.

Today, it is very difficult to imagine that Korea was one. But at that time we were never thought that Korea can be two Koreas. And Japanese dominion was trying to make Korea like Japan. So we were nearly forced to be Japanese. Our names were changed. We were all being educated in Japanese. And if I spoke in Korean at the school, I was punished.

Can you imagine from my town to Seoul was only two, three hours trip by train? Now, it is so far away.

Yeah, I had to register with a Japanese name because if I didn't have a Japanese name, I couldn't go to school. Yeah, something like—I forget the name. When I was a boy, small boy, Japanese government was not discriminating Christians.

But when it was going to be in world [war] with America, they started to discriminate because Christians—they thought that they were pro-Americans. So 1940, something like that, they started persecution. They were forcing the people to how to worship at Shinto shrine, and they were forcing [us] to raise Japanese flag on the national holidays and forcing [us] to speak more Japanese. And all the industries, big industry, were being managed by Japanese. And the police station, the police chief was Japanese, and the common policemen were Koreans—all these things. The upper crust of the society was all Japanese. I don't have such a good memory. But I could see how we were exploited.

Because, in my town, which was an industrial center of Japanese industry in Asia, [were] many Japanese. Then a section of our town was entirely Japanese, and this part of the city was so rich while Koreans were living in very humble living condition. So only I thought that how we are discriminated, and Japanese are just living in such a prosperous state. That was a real idea content against the Japanese—was not so strong, but my father was against it.

And when it was going to be in war, they were forcing Christians to worship at Shinto shrine. So my father was escaping from police. I remember that. And many people were jailed, because they didn't worship Shinto shrine.

And my city's close to Russia. My province, or my state, is having border with Russia. So many people went to Manchuria, Russia. Even my father went once to Russia, but he got sick and he had to return.

Liberation from Japan

Pre-War Period

So for other people, the anti-Japanese feeling was very strong. Because, as the end of the war [Pacific War] is closing, we knew that the Japanese government were going to be defeated, so the persecution was very strong. So we were so anxious. And liberation came so suddenly, because Russia was coming close to Manchuria. Then they agree, Japanese agreed to armistice. And when war stopped we were still under the Japanese military government. Japanese soldiers were [still] there [in South Hamgyong province].

And it was really exciting, because for 36 years, we were being occupied by the Japanese. But there was a lot of confusion because no central government or something like that. And here it was confusion—confusing time. Then soon came Russian soldiers. Russian Army. Then Russian Army brought some Korean Communists from Russia. And they start to make Communist Party.

And it was starting [to] form government by the Communist Party. Then at the beginning, there was no such feeling that we can be divided because of this Communist ideology, or something like that. Because, anyway, Communist government is all the same for self-government, self-rule, our people. So we were not so concerned about this Communist takeover. But, as it is a really revolution movement, it was very radical, changing so much. And it was very—the beginning of a class struggle: those who didn't have and those who have, proletariat or semi-proletariat. And then there was starting the conflict between the people. But, as the Communist leader was brought in from Russia, and he became the chief of the State, then at the beginning, they allowed that the Democratic political party. But, when Democratic Party was initiated, many people were going there. So they outlawed this one. And then started their Communist rule [in] 1948 or something like that. As I told, in the beginning, there was not a strong reaction against this Communist rule.

But when Communist rule becoming—was becoming so radical, changing everything, then the reaction became very strong. And for example, in the Japanese regime, we didn't have such a different class, rich ones, but Communist rule started to discriminate in two class, saying that this Communist movement is a class struggle. So we have to eliminate this ruling class. This class—which was who are being a police member, police of the Japanese government, or some other even state governor, Koreans, or these people who is educated more than high school—were treated [as] a reactionary. Of course, landowners all. ... These people who had some privilege in the Japanese dominion were on the one side. And all the Communists were on the other side. And there started conflict.

I nearly—I cannot understand why we're so discriminated because, Communist government always discriminated the villager's people and more educated people who were more liberal-minded people—discriminated against, how do you say, *ban Banyoo poonja*, anti-Communist. So I didn't have such a strong idea against Communism ... because before the Communists came to our country, in my village, there were so many Communist people because they had contacted Russia, and many people went to Russia and Japanese persecution was becoming severe. Then only political ideology against Japanese dominion was Communist idea so I think that influenced most strongly.

Korean War Memories

As you know, that 1950, 25th of June, it was Sunday. And lady [on radio] was broadcasting that the South Korea was invading the north. And so we thought that it was the beginning of the unification of our country because, with the war being fought, we thought that South [Korea] was strong. Because Americans are helping. We were believing like that. But it was not real. North Korea attacked the south.

And so we were very frightened because until that time, persecution was not an open one. That's where they were pointing, something like that. And I was a member of the Communist Youth League, and I was attending all the meetings, and all these things. So openly they couldn't persecute, but if all Korea was dominated by the Communist Party, then they don't need to save us from persecution. The persecution can be open. So we were very scared, but when United Nations Army, Americans and others, came back, pushing North Korea [the People's Army] to the north, we thought that it will be unified by South Korean government.

But at that time, then, North Korea was losing so much. And conscripting from seventeen years to thirty-five years old, all went to army. But I had some problem, heart problem. I even stopped my study for one year so Communist chief of my town knew that. So I told [them] I am sick, then I could be free from the Army. But 1950 September was not so peaceful in North Korea. ...So they sent me to Army. At that time, in the town,...no one under 35 years old was there. All went to army. But we were supposing that pretty soon it would be united, our country.

I didn't take part in battalion. I was conscripted, and I went to the state capital. There I started my military life. But we didn't even have a uniform, or something like that. And we went to Pyongyang. My town is—seemed [on the]—east side, and Pyongyang is on west. There are about, I think, 300 kilometers distance. It took more than one week, because the train was traveling only at night. And at night, if the U.S. airplane was coming, they stopped. And in early morning, we went out from the train and hiding on the mountain, and at night, we were traveling.

October 1st, we arrived in Pyongyang. At that time, I was 22 years old. And when we arrived there, they checked everybody and put in every regiment. I don't know why they put me, how do you say, in regiment of reconnaissance. And I thought, "Why they put me something, in such an important regiment?" But the U.S. bombing was every hour, every day, so intense. So we were spending more time in the bomb shelter.

Then I tried very hard to get a license from army to go home, saying that my disease about. Then, at last, I could get permission to go home with my friend, but when we went to the captain of the regiment to get this license to go home, he asked me, "Do you have civilian clothing?" As I had this plan to escape then, always I had civilian clothing under the military uniform. "Yeah," I told him, I had. The other guy told him he didn't have. Then he told, "No, then next time. Today, it is not possible to leave."

POW Experience

Then, next morning, U.S. Army came to Pyongyang so I didn't have hard combat experience. I spent 10 days in the army, and I spent three years and a half in prison camp.

Actually, when we were trying to go home, escaping from the army, it was really very certain that the country can be united very soon. And we were trying to go home, walking all day. But we were in danger, if we meet a South Korean soldier or North Korean soldier. Because, if I meet North Korean soldier, I am quitting from army, so [I] can be hurt, and if I meet South Korean soldier, he will be treating me as an enemy.

So one day when we were starting to walk to my home, in the village I met North Korean officer all armed. If he were real Communist, he would kill me, shot [*sic*] me. But he was not so. He was having some, how do you say, understanding of our situation. He told it [us], "You cannot roam around like this. No. President ordered if anybody meet those who are escaping from the army can [be] shot." And he went away. So I thought it was impossible, to go to home—such a distant place.

So we were talking about how we go to the American army camp. And so we went there, and we [were] brought back to Pyongyang from where we escaped two days ago. For Americans, all North Korean youth were enemy soldiers. So when they meet these people surrendering, all put into POW camp. So in the POW camp there were three categories: those who really caught by U.S. soldier or South Korean soldier; those who were conscripted in the South (because South was occupied by North Korean army, many people were conscripted to go into the Communist Army); and those who were not the army soldiers—civilians. So there were three categories. So in POW camp, there were three kind[s] of people. But Americans, they don't know this delicate psychology so they treat all equal. But, in Pyongyang, it was terrible because it was a very front line, right?

In the small factory [makeshift POW camp], they just packed the people because so many people surrendered. Then Chinese army came to North Korea. Then we were brought into Busan—south, southern part. And that was a permanent camp.

Three years, yeah. Condition was, cannot be good, no? Because so many people—about 140,000, something like that—and we were living in a tent. I think you might have seen the U.S. military tent. There is a small one. Each tent, there were 50 people. One lying down, head to that side, [and] another one contrary so we can fit more people. And food was just a bowl of rice and soup. So I felt, no, I cannot survive this now. So I went to the doctor, and I was, how do you say, intern. And I kept myself in the hospital camp so it was much better. The hospital camp was in Busan, and it was belonging to the U.S. military hospital—I think 11th military hospital or something like that. And one section for POWs. Then in the camp, all were in tent. Each tent, there was a POW doctor—North Korean—and there were two nurse[s] we called "aid-boy." Then I became aid-boy. So [for] three years I worked there as aid-boy.

Can you imagine, at that time, 1950, in winter, it was very cold, and diarrhea was devastating people. One morning, in my tent, there were two rows of beds, twelve and twelve. In the morning, I found twelve dead, and I had to tie ticket here, dead body here. And they had to carry

all these people to the tent where they were keeping dead bodies. So the Americans tried very hard to improve life condition, and many people died.

At first, there was no classification or division—all mixed together. And then they started to fight each other. Americans are very, how do you say? They are keeping the police problem—how to treat a POW. They were giving all the freedom for POWs in the camp, inside camp. Only American GIs are keeping around [outside] the camp.

And we had in the common camp, about one thousand people or something like that. There was, how do you say, captain and a sergeant, all POWs, and even POW police, we had. And we had, like, self-rule inside. Then, when our camp captain was Communist, he was dominating all the people. Then anti-Communist people were suffering. And another case when there the captain was anti-Communist, then Communists were being killed even. Fighting was very serious, even in my camp. One night, five people were being killed, just close to me because my camp was anti-Communist camp. The captain was a Christian and all order and I was an aid-boy then. Everybody who had some kind of leadership [were] all Christians so anti-Communists cannot make trouble. Then as the fighting was so severe, killing each other, then Americans decide to separate [the groups].

Because, at that time, there was also the idea that when war finishes, those who were willing to go back to North [Korea] and another group was refusing repatriation, in their mind they had decided. Then Americans are seeing this fighting each other [so] they separated [the groups].

One day, many American soldiers with bayonets came in to push all people in a corner of the camp. And here, two Americans—we have to pass each one. If I go back to North Korea, then I went to other camp. Then we were divided. [For] those who wanted to go back north, those who refused repatriation, [there were] two camps, and then, the, how do you say, the fighting was stopped.

But even those who once decided not to go back to north, they were so unhappy with that decision because they cannot meet again their parents. Then [they] secretly changed ideals [so that they could go back north]. Then this anti-Communist camp, the [POW] police, they were guarding these people—they did not allow [them to change their minds]. So one day, five people from general camp came to the hospital, and Americans are very, how do you say? Just when POWs are moving to another camp, like to hospital, always one GI and POW police were accompanying these people. Then these people came to the hospital because they were sick. Then they were from the anti-Communist camp. Then the POW police of the previous camp saying that these guys are going back [north]. They changed their mind and they like to go back to north so you have to kill them. Oh, no. Then my POW police got that note and they start to prepare to kill these people. At night, I was so, so concerned but I couldn't say nothing because, at that time, if I defend these people, our POW police can do something against me. But, at night, they saw that one were killed, or something like that. At midnight, U.S. soldiers came in with the [00:35:37 unintelligible] and chased [them] out. Then we were all gathered outside the camp tent. Then the American counted, and five was missing. It told that five were beaten to death, but one didn't die. Then he crawled to the fence, and he told U.S. soldier because around

the camp were U.S. soldiers. Then we went out the tent. All camp was surrounded by tanks, all these things.

If we like to understand the question of POWs in Korean War, we have to understand the political situation in the north because POWs in the previous war always were enemy of the part[y] who win the war. For example, POWs, Japanese POWs by Americans, were enemies against Americans but in Korean War, it was not so. Those POWs—many of them surrendered. They were not against Americans. They surrendered. They were more against the North Korean government. And the real POWs were those who were fighting until death, and they were caught by Americans. So there's two kind of POWs: POWs who refuse repatriation [and] those who like to be repatriated. Two kinds—not like in the previous war [when] all POWs were against Americans. Because people in North Korea were not united people—as Korean against somebody, no. Among North Koreans, there were two kinds of people: those who were dearly faithful to the government, Communist rule [and] those who were against the Communist rule and so they were conscripted. Their identity was different so when they went to war—battlefield—those all escaped from the North Korean army. But one group of people who escaped from the North Korean army—they were not happy with idea to return to North Korea because they can be punished. Then they refused [repatriation]. And those who were really faithful Communists wanted to go back to North Korea. ...In the camp life, the ideological difference was a big question.

At first, when started Armistice conference in Panmunjom, there were no idea that one can have a third option. Only two options: to go back to north or stay in the south—South Korea. For Chinese: to go to mainland or to go to Taiwan. So when one had to decide to go back or to stay in the south, in a certain sense, each one already decided, because each one knew what would be their fate if they go back to north because they were pointed as an anti-Communist in the new north. So the choice was, in a certain sense, was forced by circumstance—not by his own mind, no. But problem was that if I refuse to go back to North Korea, I cannot meet anymore with my parents, my family. Then it gave some agonizing experience. Then, at the armistice conference, North Koreans were insisting that all Communists—all the POWs—must go back to North Korea. And United Nations [responded], “No, must be according to the free choice of the person.”

Then do you know that—how the conference decided to give a chance for North Koreans to explain, convince people to return to North Korea? Then it was, how do you say, organized commission, neutral commission of the repatriation of POWs [Neutral Nations Repatriation Commission]. The chairperson was an Indian. And the two Communist countries, Poland and Czechoslovakia, [were represented]. Two. Sweden and Switzerland—four. Then Indian government sent five thousand soldiers to compose this commission of repatriation of the POWs.

And they built a POW camp in neutral zone, in Panmunjom. And we went to a neutral zone camp. Then there was no Americans or Indians. Then started to this, how do you say, explanation to convince the North Koreans all go back to North Korea. Then one day, each one has to go to meet with the North Korean officers. The tent was very interesting. There was two representative peoples of Communist country, Polish and the Czechoslovakian people. And there was Swiss and Swedish, two Democratic countries. And there were some observers from

the South Korean government, and from North Korean and Chinese people—both sides. And there was, at the center, Indian officer as a chairperson there.

Then I entered there. There was a table. And behind the table all these people. It was terrifying. And on the table, I sat there; on the other side were two North Korean soldiers—officers. And some people who refused to go back to North, they were fighting there, to show that they are really anti-Communist. I was not so mad, no.

The accent of Korean is very strong in my province. It is very easy to know from here I came. And these people, two soldiers or officers, were from my province. Because my province had very strong Communist members because Russia was close so in the North Korean government, many of my province people were occupying very high positions. Even in Pyongyang, there were not so many real Communists.

And they told [me,] “How you suffered in the camp, being exploited by Americans. You have to come back to your country. Our president decreed that we have to welcome you. Your parents are waiting for you.” He was so friendly. I told it, “As I know about North Korea, I cannot go back.” He found I was not hopeful to go back. When they found that this guy can be convinced to change mind, they were talking. But, when they found that I was not a person to change mind, they ordered [me] to go out. And I was separated like this.

Then all—everyone—all passed through this interrogation. Then all divided. Then, at that time, there was a new move that they are going to give a third choice, option, but they didn't publicly announce because if it was announced publicly, and everybody was free to choose, so many people would come out. So they kept it secret. I think that both sides agreed because South Koreans, they don't like to see many people go out of the country and North Korea, also, they don't like to see that. Then, no, there was no public announcement.

But I decided no. I don't know why. Because I thought that if I go to South Korea, so close to my people, and I cannot meet, cannot say something to them, it must be terrible. I have to make choice to go far away from this country.

So, but in the camp all they were going to stay in the south. They were watching who are going to go to neutral country. They kept watching anti-Communist POWs who were going to stay in the south. They were watching and keeping them—cannot make the choice and surrounded by all Indian soldiers. And in the camp, my friends—POW soldiers were watching [them] so it was very dangerous. But at that time, I was responsible for medical treatment. so I could go to the main hospital freely. Then one day, when I went to the medical center, I told the Indian captain that we three are going to choose a neutral country. So, but our friends are very mad against us. It is very dangerous. So if we come out from the gate, you have to pick up very soon. He told, “Yeah, I can.” He can do that. But, when I returned to camp, one of the three—my friend—he went out. He didn't speak English so he went out from the gate saying that Switzerland, Switzerland, because Switzerland is neutral country so one can choose for Switzerland. Then my people knew that this guy was choosing to go to neutral country. They started to throw stones. So many people were throwing stones. It was dangerous for him. Then Indian soldiers put him on the Jeep, and he was safe.

Then I was in great danger because my friends knew that I was very close with this guy so I told one other one, “We cannot stay here anymore, no—danger.” So I ran out and this captain came and took me. And not so many people, when I went to the camp tent, were these people who wanted to go to neutral country was there.

Then, after this screening, those who go to north and who were going to stay in the south, and those who opted for neutral country [were] all separated. Then started repatriation first. First, those who were going to north were released. It was a—it was a very emotional as they were going back to the country, for the country that they fought [for]. But they became prisoner. It is not so honorable, and they were sure that North Korean government was not going to welcome so well so they have to show that they are really Communist. Then, when they were leaving the camp, they were singing North Korean military song and marching to the North. And we could hear the singing. Do you know that the No Return Bridge? They were passing there.

And after that, those who were going to live in south, they were leaving from camp.

Emigration from Korea

Interviewer: How many went to the north and many went to the south?

About half-half. Almost all POW was 140,000. About half went to the north and [half] to the south and eighty people opted for a neutral country. After a week, when the others went to north and south, it left eighty with the Indian soldiers. Then we could have a country, any country who'd like to accept us.

If we can [be] observed superficially, people can say that we are against Communist. So we refuse to go back to the north and we were to stay in the south. But then they don't care about that. They say that we were against the south also because we didn't stay in the south. That is a common opinion in the south. So many of my friends who stayed in South Korea—many of them, they hide themselves, that they were POWs because they feared that in the south they were being discriminated. One of my friends, he was a pastor now [of] a big church. When I was going to there, he told, “You cannot mention that I was POW.” Something like that.

So it really, we can say—people can say that we opted for neutral country, because we didn't like north and the south. And especially we didn't like North, of course, because first we refused to go back to north and later we opted for neutral country, refusing to stay in the south. So South Korean government was not so happy with us. Then for myself, because I knew that how we were treated by the North Korean government when we were there, then after being POW and return there doesn't make sense. And my family was—I don't know how to help them so I couldn't think of returning there. Then in the south during three years, I didn't have any contact with my relatives in the south and South Korea was really a strange place for me. And I thought, “To live in south being so close to the north, it will be more unhappy. I can go to a country far away from this business.” So and interesting. So I had a very close friend, American friend, whose wife[‘s friend] was [the wife of] a U.S. ambassador to Korea.... They were colleagues,

and she sent me an English magazine in Seoul. And I published an article that people are thinking that we are anti-South Koreans, and we are Communists. We are not such because of such idea anti-Communist or anti-South Korean. We chose neutral country. No, we just like to [be] free from this confusing situation. Then President Rhee's wife, Franziska, she wrote me: "And no, we don't treat you anti-Communist or anti-South Korean." And she sent me records and slides. I still have the slide.

So being rejected, something—to be rejected by South Korea and the North Koreans, of course. I felt very interesting, exciting to [go to] other country. And when we were staying in India for two years, no country was willing to accept us. So twenty people stayed in India. But I didn't care about it. I was sure that I—I can find a country, and then after two years, Brazil and Argentina wanted to accept. And I think the choice of Brazil was very nice one. Brazil was very nice. At that time, how I can say, our mind was so confusing—without knowing where we are going, where we can live, and everything is uncertain, and we were surrounded by Indians, so strange people, and just full of something, anxiety, not the hope or something like that.

And the South Korean government, first they didn't allow to travel [from Korea]. We [couldn't] travel to South Korea, to Incheon, because we're persona non grata. They were like this. Then I think Americans convinced them, and we could get train with Indians to Incheon. And so even about this, we didn't feel nothing—just we are going away from this country. Just that. And when we embarked on a ship, ship was a very big one. Five thousand Indians, can you imagine? Among five thousand Indians, eighty Koreans were nothing. Then came those who had left the POW camp and went to South Korea—came by the boat, shouting, "Why are you going to neutral country? You have to stay in the south. Not it is too late. You can come!" All shouting. And I was so mad. Why these people are so implicated with our ideas? Then I went to my cabin and just stayed quiet and it was late so the ship couldn't leave on that day. Next day morning, they started.

Interesting. When the ship was starting to navigate, all—all people went to the [deck] and watching the Korea was disappearing. Nobody was talking. And I found it interesting. And just leaving Korea after one day, all ocean. No land. And it was a very amazing, to have such an ocean trip by the first time. And I could be free from this anxiety. And try to make friendship with Indian soldiers and they were very nice because I was very concerned with my English. So I have to improve English to—before reaching India. So I was very close to an Indian sergeant. And just something subconscious—not conscious feeling—because I am leaving my country. I don't know [if] I can come back. Not such an ideal thinking. But just something instinctive. I am leaving this country—this land of mine. Just that.

And Indians are so excited because going back home and interesting. This sergeant, Indian sergeant, was a really smart man. He was not so highly educated person but he told that, "I wanted to stay in Korea, because my country is so poor. But when I was thinking about my parents, I couldn't stay in Korea." He talked like that. And he told that, "When India...my country's becoming very close—closer, closer—I don't feel so excited." He told that.

I got to know how poor a country is—sad thing—to poor life in India. And we landed in Madras. Oh, India was so poor—so hot, so poor. We were just staying a few hours in Madras. Beggars were coming, asking me something. Very sad—much worse than Korea. Then we took a train, went to New Delhi—took very distant, a long trip—and the southern India, it's very black desert. Not so beautiful. And the impression of the poor people in Madras was so touching so we were just keeping quiet.

And part of New Delhi, when we were around New Delhi, there was a ceremony receiving, welcoming these soldiers. All Indian dignitaries were there. Nehru's daughter was there. All this. It was a very exciting ceremony and I still remember Indira Gandhi, Nehru's daughter, taking—shaking hand with everybody. And we recovered some animation—hope this country's nice. Then we were staying in a military camp, New Delhi, called “Delhi Encampment.” And Indian major was responsible for us. And we were being treated well because of UN was paying our expense there. And they giving everything. And I was studying so English—English very poor. And New Delhi is very flat. It is nice to bike. And we rent bike, and we went to New Delhi, and doing sightseeing.

And in the camp, the life was very different in India. India, we cannot eat beef, only mutton. Every day, mutton, mutton. Then a friend of ours went to Mosley Market, and he could buy some beef and Indian cooked for us. Then Major found that [out]. Oh, he was so angry. “It is barbarians—Korean barbarians! They don't respect—they don't have respect for others' religion.” He was so mad. He was sick. And our friend told, “How [are] beef-eating peoples barbarian? Beef eating people are dominating the world.”

But they couldn't speak with the major like that and we were thinking that we can have, very soon, a country to accept us. But nobody—not appearing, a country. Then I thought, “Oh, how I can spend life here?” And actually we were not knowing how we were being conducted our life because UN was having contact with many countries to accept us.

And then, after one year, I thought I couldn't stay here for a long time without doing something so I thought that I have to go to seminary to study. Then I could do it—I could meet with a Methodist bishop in New Delhi and he arranged me a place at the seminary. And it was a nice seminary—about 120 students from all over the country.

And after one year on the seminary, [I] came to notice that the Brazil is going to accept or Argentina and we have to make one country, choice for one country. Then I found interesting more Brazil because, I probably, American professor at the seminary told me, “You have to go to Brazil,” and he showed me a picture of a Brazilian seminary. There was a lot of Japanese. “And you see?” So at that point, there are so many Japanese, so “You have to go Brazil.” And we went to Brazil. And we went to Brazil by airplane rent by UN. Making this particular route, started in New Delhi, Bombay, London, Dakar, and Rio de Janiero. It was a long trip.

We arrived in Brazil in February 7, 1956, and it was terrible heat. Everybody was so hot. And we went to the immigration center. At that time, many Europeans are coming to Brazil. Immigration was very big number, and at the immigration center, it was on an island. And

beautiful place called “Island of Flowers,” “Flower Island,” and very beautiful. And so many Italians. Italians were so excited, and Italians are very talkative. They speak a lot....

And when we arrived in Brazil, at airport, four Koreans were there and they were all speaking Japanese. And I told one person, “It is very strange. You are saying that you are Korean and are speaking Japanese.” Then he told, “You guys can live here long enough to forget your language. You can’t know.”

And nearly everything is strange but Brazil at that time was a very prosperous country—in comparison with Korea, very rich. And Brazil beautiful. And the people at the immigration center were very kind. Then the government provided a woman social worker for us, and she start to teach Portuguese, we remember. Then she—she was very young, [a] young woman, but she was so extroverted, not like Korean women. And she would start to teach Portuguese, and the first word she was teaching was “love.” Amor. And she wrote down, “A-M-O-R,” “amor,” and ordered us to repeat, “amor.” And I found it interesting, in every culture, love is very important.

And then Brazilian government was providing jobs for us and found a job for a person. Then he was going away from us, but our group of Christians was about 15 people. And we have contact with the Brazil church, and I went to seminary. And Brazilians are very hospitable—not like here. The human contact is very intimate, very close. A Protestant church in Rio de Janeiro arranged a camp for us to stay there, learning Portuguese and learning about Brazilian life. Then we 15 people went there and others, finding place[s to live and minister] and spreading all over the country.

And after that, when we were in Rio de Janeiro at this camp, we had a small group of singers, [a] choir. Then we were singing in Korean. And the many Brazilian churches invited us. And we were singing in many, many churches in Rio de Janeiro, and Brazilians are very open-minded. Just feel at home, in Brazil. And when we went to a Brazilian church in Copacabana Beach—that’s a very beautiful place—then I talk for a little bit about our life. Then after the church service, the pastor, with a Brazilian lady, came to me. And the lady told that she likes to support me at the seminary. And she told that she wanted her son to be pastor but it was not ideal reality, so she likes for me to [be] treat[ed] as her son and support at the seminary, so I went to the seminary. And seminary life was a very interesting—not like India. Later [I] came to know the life in seminary in America—quite different.

In India, we couldn’t talk with women and go. Even at the seminary, there were young Indian women, but in India, the, how do you say it, so isolated sexually, woman and men. There was no chance to talk. On the street, here we cannot marry a woman like this, no. But in India, nobody look at the woman. And no chance. But in Brazil, then they have a party or some festivity at the seminary. They told that we—“You have to bring your girlfriend.” Something like that—quite different. And every Sunday, Brazilian students were bringing me to their homes—not like here. And [they were] very interesting, Brazilians. And all Koreans in Brazil, they note how Brazilians are friendly.

Interviewer: So how long did you end up living there in Brazil?

I think forty-five years. I—I was admitted as a member of this Presbyterian church in Rio de Janeiro, but when I was at the third year at the seminary, a resident pastor from another state invited me because he heard from American professor that a Korean student came to seminary. Then he invited me at the Christmas season. He was saying that he was in Princeton [Theological] Seminary and they had two Korean pastors as a roommate and he liked very much these Koreans. So “You have to come.” It was in the interior—and a more rural area. Then he invited me to join to his church because Rio de Janeiroans is so confusing, no? So it is much better. So I moved there, and there were a lot of Japanese. And I was ordained in 1962. And I start to minister a Brazilian church, and can you imagine? Forty years, forty-five years in Brazil....

When I started my ministry in a Brazilian church, I spent three years in a rural area, and it was very hard because lot of difficulties of these people. Brazilian, Brazil life is the rich and the poor are so big. And in such a nice country, rich place, people are suffering so.

And I was working very hard, and I felt tired. And I start to have seminar study here. Then my professor at the Brazil seminary, he was now teaching in Princeton, and I asked him, and he told me, “In Princeton there are some Brazilians so I can recommend you to the San Francisco seminary, who the president is my friend.” [I] came, and he gave me admission and a scholarship. Then we had—we were already three [family] members. Then seminary didn't like to receive Maria and our oldest daughter. Because scholarship was very limited, how I can support my [family]? Then I had a friend, American friend, who was living in Atlanta. She phoned to seminary. She will be responsible for us, and she paid our trip, and every month she was sending \$200 for me here. And at that time, the seminary president was very nice for us. He liked Koreans, and he helped me a lot, and it was very nice.

And after two years Master's degree, I wanted to go back to Brazil. And then at that time, Brazil in dictatorship, and American friend told me, “Why you are going back to Brazil? It is such a terrible country.” But I found this country [United States] was too good, too rich for me, and I return. And after three or four years, I came back and again returned to Brazil. Then at that time, Koreans from Brazil were all coming here, and say, “Why you are coming back from States when we are all going to America?” But I think I felt in Brazil more at home than here.

Life in the United States

Interviewer: And how long have you been living here [in the United States]?

Ten years. And nearly life is meaningless here...doing nothing for others, just for myself.

Interviewer: I'm sure your daughters like having you here.

Oh yeah, of course. So I was not thinking to come until last time but they were planning and they were buying house and checking so many houses because they wanted to buy

house like this. Two houses. And it was very nice to find here.

War Legacies

Interviewer: Do you feel that the Korean War is with you somehow? Does it still impact you?

Of course. Because of where I left my home, I cannot see my parents and brother for fifty years. And it is nearly hopeless, no, the unification. The, how do you say, enmity is becoming more strong year after year and there is no sign of reconciliation.

Interviewer: Do you have any regrets about the decisions you've made?

No, because it is very open fact—the fact that those who return to North [Korea] were not that well treated. Many of them are punished. And not a nice thing happened with my family. So no regret for something.

Yeah, yeah, because this going and pushing back—all these things. When South Korean Army went to my province, then anti-Communists moved around. And soon Communist—China's Communist Army came in, [and] all those [who wanted an] end [to] Communist order [were] in dangerous situation. Nearly all these experiences of life has deepened anxiety about life: what means to live in this world? On this world? Because with—without the root, cutting out the root all my life. And I have to see the life in a different perspective. So very confusing. Then it is very different. And it is almost impossible for immigrant to feel nearly at home in other countries. I think the next generation—my daughters and my grandchildren—they don't feel like this. They feel really at home here. So this first generation of immigrant always feels strange in a country that they live. So the, how do you say, fate of the first generation immigrant is a very something—very sad thing. But interesting.

Nearly, I don't have such a happy hope for the future. Only thing I hope is to return to my home [North Korea], but that is almost impossible. Then I don't have any definite hope to realize something. When I was working at Brazil, my, how do you say, the fundamental hope, ideal of my life is to serve people because people are poor, no? Here, I am becoming burden of others. And nearly, I dearly have certain perspective to go back to meet my brothers. My father might have gone. And the political situation in the country is not moving forward to be reunified, then I don't have such a hope. But, in the bottom of my heart, that is my hope.

And interesting, one night I dreamed, and went to my home but I didn't reach to my home. I think because I feel that they are displaced, no? And I didn't go—reach to my home, house. But near our property, there was some more here. Here, I was roaming many times, and I was taking, and I saw that I have to visit my neighbor, who was a chief of the Communist Party of the town. Evidently, he was quite friendly for us, and I thought, “I—I have to meet this—him.” And I have to talk with him. At the beginning of this Communist rule, we were so in conflict.

But all these things have passed away, and I am now living in a foreign country. So we

have to be more friendly in the future. Then I was thinking to go to his home. But I found he was much older than myself. Well, then, how he can be alive? Then I change my idea, and I went to another neighbor, and he was a very close friend, but he couldn't recognize me. and I could recognize him: him and his wife and children.

And everything was so strange. And I wake up. Then I thought, "Oh, everything became so different." And why I should dream for this fact which was so changed. Then at this perspective, or this hope to be with brothers. Also something very uncertain and ambiguous.

Interviewer: If you saw them again, what would you say to them?

I don't know. I—I feel so anxious to see them, but I don't have an idea how I can talk, how we can meet each other because so much changed. So everything is something otherworldly....