



Soonan Uimyung School built in 1913.

Photo courtesy of Soonan Academy.

Soonan Academy

KUK HEON LEE

Kuk Heon Lee graduated from Sahmyook University (B.A.), Newbold College (M.A.), and Sahmyook University (Ph.D.). From 1990 to 2009, he served as a pastor at Korean Union Conference. In 2010, he joined Sahmyook University as a lecturer and professor at the Theology Department. His research and teaching interests are in Church History. He wrote several books and published several papers on the subject. Currently, he is also the Dean of Planning at Sahmyook University.

Soonan Academy (Korean Industrial School)¹ was the first secondary education institution in the Korean Adventist Church and was established in Soonan, Pyeongannam-do, in 1909 and operated by the Adventist Church until 1937. This academy was converted to a public school in 1937 and left the Korean Adventist Church's Institution. Soonan Academy was located in Pojeong-ri, Soonan-myeon, Soonan-gun, Pyeongannam-do, where it is now transformed into Pyongyang International Airport in North Korea. When Soonan Academy was

converted to a public school, there were 373 students and 21 teachers.

Organization

Soonan Academy began with a workers-training school founded by William Smith and Mimi Scharffenberg, the first missionaries. Pastor Smith, along with Scharffenberg, established a school on September 12, 1907, to train workers of the Korean Adventist Church. At that time this school was named as a workers' training school, and it was marked as Korean Schools in the Adventist Yearbook.² The school building was a seven-room Korean-style tile building (60 feet x 12 feet), with 11 students (5 men and 6 women), and teachers were Smith, Scharffenberg, and Gi-ban Im.³

The Korean government issued a private-school decree in February 1908, requiring all schools to be registered with the government. Under this law the workers' training school established in Soonan was also required to be officially registered. Pastor Smith briefly returned to the United States in March 1909 to attend the General Meeting of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists (GC), and Dr. Riley Russell, who was in charge of the Soonan dispensary as a medical missionary, was also in charge of the workers' training school. Russell decided to register the workers' training school with the government in consultation with the leaders of the Korean Mission. According to the decision, the leaders of the Korean Mission registered this educational institution under the name of Uimyung School and was officially approved as a secondary-education institution. The year this middle school was approved was in September 1909.⁴ The school was converted into a public school, Soonan Academy, in 1937.

History of the Institute

When Uimyung School was approved as a secondary-education institution in September 1909, the number of students was 25 and the number of teachers was four. Uimyung School built a dormitory for male students in 1909 and became the beginning of a modern secondary-education institution with dormitories in Korea. In addition, in April 1911, with financial support from the General Assembly, four acres of farms were purchased to provide industrial education, which became a model for modern Korean education. Students took classes in the morning and worked on a farm in the afternoon to cover tuition and food expenses.⁵

In April 1910, Howard M. Lee entered Korea as an educational missionary. He was a teacher at the South Lancaster Academy and volunteered for Korean missionary work. He worked as a general manager and teacher at Uimyung School and was appointed principal from the fall semester of 1911.⁶ He served as the principal of Uimyung School for more than twenty years from then until he returned to the United States permanently in December 1936.

In March 1913 the first graduation ceremony of Uimyung School was held. At this graduation ceremony, six students graduated, and four of them became ministry workers at the Korean Adventist Church. After the graduation ceremony, Uimyung School built a new school building and a female-student dormitory. The GC provided financial support for the construction of this school. The building was completed in October 1913 and was the most modern building in the Soonan area at that time. The main building of Soonan Uimyung School had an auditorium and chapel in the center, and male classrooms and female classrooms were arranged on the left and right sides.⁷ With the completion of this building, Soonan Uimyung School was promoted to a four-year secondary school and was officially operated as a coeducational system.⁸

Soonan Uimyung School conducted manual-labor education as an important educational program based on Adventist education. In particular, the school purchased farmland in addition to the school building to educate students on labor. In 1911 four acres of land were purchased, and the farm started its operation, and in 1917 the land increased to 45 acres. Soonan Uimyung School built farms, orchards, ranches, and wood factories on this land to allow students to work in manual labor there, and the students earned tuition and food expenses through the labor. Considering these characteristics, the Korean Conference⁹ also named the school Korean Industrial School in English.¹⁰

In July 1917 the Korean Conference decided to establish a department of Theology to train official pastors. According to the resolution, a department of Theology was opened in Soonan Uimyung School on September 1 of that year. The Theology Department produced two graduates in March 1919. The Theology Department was operated within Soonan Uimyung School until the establishment of the Chosen Union Training School in Seoul in 1931.¹¹ Since September 1920, Soonan Uimyung School has opened a department of Education to train teachers. However, this Education Department was suspended after producing the first graduates in 1922.¹²

Since Soonan Uimyung School was a secondary-education institution representing the Korean Adventist Church, Adventist young people from all over the country entered this school. According to the list of freshmen in 1916, Adventist young people from Gyeonggi-do, Gangwon-do, Hamgyeong-do, and Gyeongsang-do entered this school.¹³ Among the graduates who attended the fifth graduation ceremony held on March 21, 1917, students from Hwanghae-do, Gyeonggi-do, Hamgyeong-do, and Pyeongan-do were included. According to the report of the 8th General Meeting of the Chosen Union Mission held in 1933, there were 186 students in total, 150 young people, including three students from Gando, 24 from Central Chosen Mission, 16 from South Chosen Mission, and 143 from West Chosen Conference.¹⁴

The following status appears in the report of Soonan Uimyung School published in October 1934. "Uimyung Middle School is a five-year secondary school with men's and women's divisions, with a total of 150 male and 55 female students, and 237 graduates, 20 times by 1934. The middle school's teachers are 12 Koreans, one Japanese, and four Americans."¹⁵

In 1935 the repression of Japan, which dominated Chosen, caused great difficulties in Soonan Uimyung School. In November of that year, the Japanese government-general of Korea ordered Soonan Uimyung School to participate in shrine worship. Principal Howard Lee and leaders of the Chosen Union Mission decided to accept shrine worship to protect the school after discussing with the leaders of the Far Eastern Division. The leaders of the Chosen Union Mission decided that visiting the shrine was a national ritual, not a religious ritual, and accepted the order of the Japanese government-general of Korea. The majority of Korean Adventists criticized the decision. In particular, Soonan Uimyung School students and teachers also criticized the decision. Due to the negative public opinion, E. J. Urqhart, the superintendent of the Chosen Union Mission, and Howard Lee, the principal of Soonan Uimyung School, left Korea.¹⁶

In order to overcome the crisis of Soonan Uimyung School due to the controversy over shrine worship, the Chosen Union Mission held a counsel meeting in November 1936. At this meeting Pastor Lee Seong-ui was appointed as the principal of Soonan Uimyung School.¹⁷ However, he was unable to take office as the principal due to opposition from the faculty and staff of Uimyung School. The Chosen Union Mission appointed H. F. Benson, the director of the Department of Business at Uimyung School, as the principal.¹⁸ However, members of Uimyung School opposed the operation of Uimyung School as an educational institution for the Korean Adventist Church. In July 1937 the Chosen Union Mission transferred Uimyung School to Soonan Church members for free and withdrew from the operation of the school.¹⁹ As a result, Soonan Uimyung School was converted to Soonan Middle School, a public school unrelated to the Korean Adventist Church. At that time the Soonan Academy consisted of 373 students and 21 teachers.²⁰ The Chosen Union Mission gave up the operation of the Soonan Academy and instead established Gyung-sung Sahmyook Institute in Seoul in April 1938 and operated a new secondary education institution.²¹

Role and Position in the Country

Soonan Academy was the first secondary education institution run by the Korean Adventist Church. This school has had a great influence on the local community as a representative secondary-education institution in the Soonan region. In particular, the Soonan Academy contributed to the development of the local community by building excellent buildings as modern-educational institutions with the support of the GC. Soonan Academy secured a large farm based on the philosophy of Adventist education and provided manual-labor education. Students earned tuition and food expenses at this farm and received education. In addition, agricultural products produced on this farm were supplied to the local community. Soonan Academy played a role in promoting the excellence of Adventist education to the Korean society.

Above all, the Soonan Academy played an important role as a workers' training institution in the early history of the Korean Adventist Church. Students who graduated from this school became major figures in missionary work, education work, and medical work of the Korean Adventist Church. In particular, the Korean Adventist

Church opened a two-year Theology Department in this school to train pastors and opened an Education Department to train teachers for Adventist church schools. As such, the Soonan Academy played a role as a workers' training institution for the first 20 years of the Korean Adventist Church.

Since 1937, Soonan Academy has been converted to a public school and has been removed from the educational institution of the Korean Adventist Church. However, based on the school's operational experience, the Chosen Union Mission opened a new secondary school, Gyungsuung Sahmyook-won, in Seoul. Soonan Academy was the beginning of the education work of the Korean Adventist Church, and today it has become the driving force behind the existence of Sahmyook University and many other schools in Korea.

After Korea was liberated from Japanese colonial rule in 1945, the Soonan Academy was incorporated into the North Korean region, and today the school disappeared, and the Soonan International Airport was established there.

List of Directors

William R. Smith (1907-1908); Riley Russell, 1980-1910); Howard M. Lee (1911-1920); C. L. Butterfield (1920); J. E. Riffel (1920-1924); Howard M. Lee (1924-1936); H. F. Benson (1936-1937).

SOURCES

Butterfield, C. L. "New Buildings at Soonan, Korea." *ARH*, January 29, 1914.

Church Compass. May 1916; August 1931; March 1933; October 1934; August 1936; October 1936; January 1937; February 1937; August 1937; October 1937.

Daniells, A. G. "The Korean conference." *ARH*, May 3, 1917.

Devenney, F. H. "Camp Meeting in Chosen." *ARH*, October 12, 1911.

Johnston, J. M. "Japan-Chosen-Manchurian Union Conference." *ARH*, February 6, 1919.

Lee, Clinton W. "Educational Work in the Chosen Union." *ARH*, August 25, 1938.

Lee, Yung Lin. *A Comprehensive Study in the History of the Adventist Church in Korea*. Seoul: Sunmyung Cultural Press, 1968.

Oh, Man Kyu. *History of One Hundred Years of Korean SDA, 1904~1945*. Seoul: Korean Publishing House, 2010.

Russell, Riley. "Medical Mission Work in Kora." *ARH*, December 16, 1909.

Scott, Hellen May. "Thanks For New Buildings Soonan." *ARH*, October 8, 1914.

Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook, various years. <https://www.adventistyearbook.org/>.

NOTES

1. The Korean name of Soonan Academy is Soonan Uimyung School, and it is written in English as Korean Industrial School. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review & Herald Publishing Association, 1912), 166.
2. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1908), 151.
3. Yung Lin Lee, *A Comprehensive Study in the History of the Adventist Church in Korea* (Seoul: Sunmyung Cultural Press, 1968), 144-145.
4. Ibid. Riley Russell, "Medical Mission Work in Kora," *ARH*, December 16, 1909, 20.
5. Man Kyu Oh, *History of One Hundred Years of Korean SDA, 1904-1945* (Seoul: Korean Publishing House, 2010), 313. *Church Compass*, February 1930, 6.
6. F. H. Devenney, "Camp Meeting in Chosen," *ARH*, October 12, 1911, 12.
7. C. L. Butterfield, "New Buildings at Soonan, Korea," *ARH*, January 29, 1914, 14.
8. Hellen May Scott, "Thanks For New Buildings Soonan," *ARH*, October 8, 1914, 13.
9. The Korean Mission was promoted to the Korean Conference in 1917. J. M. Johnston, "Japan-Chosen-Manchurian Union Conference," *ARH*, February 6, 1919, 16.
10. A. G. Daniells, "The Korean conference," *ARH*, May 3, 1917, 13.
11. *Church Compass*, August 1931, 32.
12. Man Kyu Oh, *History of One Hundred Years of Korean SDA, 1904-1945* (Seoul: Korean Publishing House, 2010), 319, 320.
13. *Church Compass*, May 1916, 25
14. *Church Compass*, March 1933, 29.
15. *Church Compass*, October 1934, 25-28.
16. *Church Compass*, August 1936, 32; October 1936, 32; January 1937, 32.
17. *Church Compass*, February 1937, 7, 8.
18. Yung Lin Lee, 148.

19. *Church Compass*, August 1937, 48; October 1937, 48.

20. Yung Lin Lee, 148.

21. Clinton W. Lee, "Educational Work in the Chosen Union," *ARH*, August 25, 1938, 14.

encyclopedia.adventist.org is an official website of the [Seventh-day Adventist World Church](#)

© 2020 General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists 12501 Old Columbia Pike Silver Spring , MD 20904 USA 301-680-6000