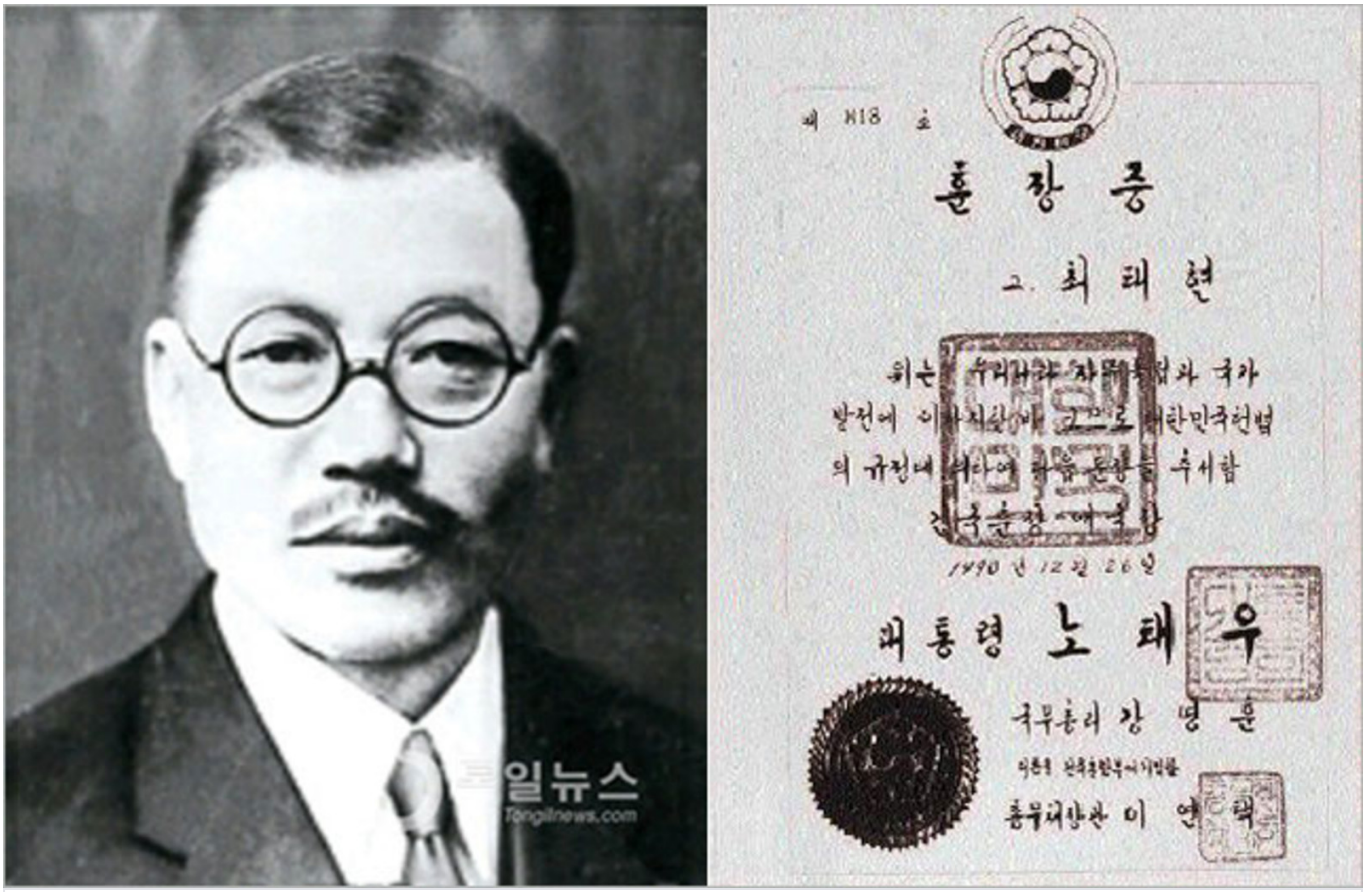

Presidential Medal awarded to Pastor Choi TaeHyun for his contribution to Korea's independence and national development

Photo courtesy of Northern Asia-Pacific Division Archives.

Choi, Tae Hyun (1888–1943)

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.

As a pastor of the early Korean Adventist church, Choi Tai-hyun was one of the martyrs who were persecuted and eventually executed because of their faith by the Japanese military during Japan's occupation of the Korean peninsula in the Second World War.[1]

Early Life

Choi Tae-hyun was born November 4, 1888, in Buyong-dong, Wonsan-si, South Hamgyeong Province, Korea, as the eldest son of his father, Choi Byung-ho, and his mother, Song.[2] He began his primary education at Seodang in 1894 and graduated from Wonheung Middle School in Wonsan in 1903. He began his studies in theology at Baptist Seminary in 1907. After graduation, he became a Baptist evangelist and began to work in Anbyon, Hamgyeongnam-do. In 1909 he married Lee An-na, a Baptist. Then, in January 1910, he attended a camp meeting of the Seventh-day Adventist Church held in Wonsan. Thrilled with the "Three Angels" message, he decided to become an Adventist.

Ministry

After converting to the Adventist Church, Choi Tae-hyun began his ministry in Anbyon, Hamgyeongnam-do, in 1911,[3] and worked as a preacher in Sariwon, Hwangju, and Jinnampo, Pyeongnam. From 1915 to 1920, he worked in Gyeongsan, Gyeongsangnam-do and Naju, Jeollanam-do. After being ordained as a pastor in 1921, he was appointed Head of Missions at Bukgando (now Yanbian, China), and worked there until 1926, becoming the first Korean missionary.[4]

After six years of a successful ministry at Bukgando, Choi Tae-hyun was appointed director of the Central-Chosen Mission in 1927 and moved to Seoul.[5] Until 1930 he worked as a mission leader in the Gyeonggi area in Seoul. For the next two years, he served as a Bible teacher at Uimyeong Middle School, an Adventist secondary education institution in Su-nan, Pyongannam-do. In 1933 he again served as the president of the Central-Korean conference, and was appointed the president of the West-Chosen Conference Center in 1934.

In 1940, Japan, which had colonized Korea, planned the Pacific War, and sent American missionaries back to the United States. As a result, the Chosen Union Mission responsibilities in Korea were left with local Koreans. At this time, Pastor Tae-Hyun Choi was appointed Superintendent of the Chosen Union Mission.[6] He led the Korean Adventist Church amid the Japanese occupation, and handed over the presidency position at the Thirteenth Chosen Union Mission Session to Pastor Oh Young-seop in January 1943.[7]

Martyrdom

After the general meeting on February 3, 1943, while the transfer of the conference presidency was in progress, he was falsely accused by a Japanese criminal and was imprisoned by the Jong-ro Police Station. There he was subjected to severe torture. He was transferred to Gyeongsung Sanitarium and hospital but died 10 hours later that day at 8:45 p.m.[8]

The Korean Union Conference established a martyrdom memorial to commemorate Pastor Tae-Hyun Choi's death as the first victim of the Chosun Adventist Church.[9] Also, in 1995, the Central Library of Sahmyook University was named "Choi Tae-Hyun Memorial Library," and a commemorative copper plate was placed at the

library. His martyrdom will serve as an exemplary model for students in Adventist educational institutions.

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NOTES

1. The author has written on Korean Adventist church history, as a professor of Church History at Sahmyook University. Additional information for this article was sourced from the writings of Clinton W. Lee, Gi Ban Lee, Eung Hyun Lee, Keun Ok Lee, Heung Jo Sohn, Harold Adof Oberg, Helen May Scott, etc.

2. Ok Man Choi, "Pastor Tae Hyun Choi's History of Martyrs," in *The Pioneers of the Seventh-day Adventists in Korea*, ed., Yeoshik Lee (Seoul: Korean Publishing House), 1987, 140.

3. Jae Shin Kim, *History of the SDA in North Korea* (Seoul: Korean Publishing House, 1993), 171.

4. *Church Compass*, August 1923, 15.

5. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Takoma Park, Washington D.C.: Review & Herald Publishing Association, 1928), 166.

6. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Takoma Park, Washington D.C.: Review & Herald Publishing Association, 1943), 103. At this time, the Japanese government changed the names of Koreans to Japanese style. Therefore, Tae-hyun Choi was named M. Hirayama.

7. This situation was not reflected in the Adventist yearbook because the Korean Adventist Church was disbanded by the Japanese government at this time. Man Kyu Oh, *History of One Hundred Years of Korean SDA, 1904~1945* (Seoul: Korean Publishing House, 2010), 691.

8. Ibid., 708.

9. Jae Chin Kim, *A History of Sahmyook University: 1906-1996* (Seoul: Sahmyook University Press, 1998), 528-529.

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