

Korean Ecumenical Movement and Minjung Churches with Focus on the Area of *Guro* in 1980s

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I . Introduction: Concern and Method of This Study

This paper aims to discover unspoken historical events in the Korean ecumenical movement. It searches for the development of Christian labor movement in 1980s, which was active so as to take an important position in the history of Korean labor movement during the period of 1970s and 1980s, and yet became withdrawn later. The object of this research is the movement of minjung churches, which was a kind of Christian social movement, and has continued to show activity until now ever in reduced scale. There have been some studies on minjung churches. but they are limited in perspective and resource due to the lack of empirical data based on primary sources. Besides, there have been few researches exploring personal experiences about the relationship between labor movement and minjung church in the social context of 1980s. This paper intends to overcome these limitations and to clarify the process of organizing minjung churches and development of labor movement in the Guro area during 1980s, and establishment and the social role of minjung churches in the area of *Guro* in 1980s. This work shows that minjung churches preserved the legacy of the previous Christian social movement as a transformative ecumenical movement during 1980s.

Minjung church was a type of church participated at labor movement in industrial areas.¹ Korean established churches in 1970s and 1980s kept silence under the military government and took a role of the ideological guardian of anti-communism. The mainstream of the churches maintained conservative political position and emphasized the church-individualism only for the quantitative growth. The pro-government churches form the mainstream even now and represent the Korean church. However, different from this trend, a group of reformatory churches emerged in 1980s in the name of 'minjung' church. The church resisted against the authoritarian government, participated at social reform movement, and brought up minjung as the liberative subject not as the object of mission.

This paper is going to analyze the emergence of the reformatory churches and discusses their contribution to the labor movement of Guro industrial area. The area has been developed since 1960s accommodating factories categorized as labor intensive light industry goods for export. In 21st century, instead of manufacturing firms which had moved into overseas escaping high wage of Korean workers, advanced industry firms flourish in the area. We tried to look into the movement of minjung churches in Guro area, affiliated with the Korean Methodist Church (KMC), the Presbyterian Church of Korea (PCK), and the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK). This study confines the period of analysis within the 1980s because of the gradual shift of the church activity from labor movement to local social movement since 1988. This shift would be another important theme of study.

¹The Association of Korean Minjung Churches (*hanminyeon*), *Church of Minjung, Hope of Nation* (1996), 421. We can broaden the concept of 'minjung' church as the faith community in which the oppressed people, minjung, could be the subject for the works toward the Kingdom of God. Yet, this study uses a narrower concept of it just for the purpose of this research of a particular area in particular time.



Landscape of Guro in 1980s
(The Guro Industrial Complex in south west of Seoul)

This study focuses on the Guro area of 1980s in which we can see the culmination of minjung church and therefore the obvious implementation of Christian value in the labor movement. For this research, we will utilize interviews with important ecumenical figures, collections of oral witnesses, and analyses of documents about the experiences of pastors and lay people and organization staff who participated in the minjung church movement and urban industrial mission.²

II. Korean Ecumenical Movement and Minjung Churches in Guro Area

1. Ecumenical Movement and Urban Industrial Mission

In 1970s and 1980s, the Korean ecumenical movement including Christian social movement has three main values; cooperation and unity, *missio Dei* as social participation, and liberation of the oppressed. These Christian values shared by various Christian organizations generated became an ideological foundation of the social movement against the military regime. One of the most valuable achievements of Korean ecumenical movements was made by industrial mission launched from late 1960s. The economic development plan of Park's regime brought forth the growth of the national economy in quantitative terms; however, the growth accompanied by the sacrifice of laborers resulted in the violation of human right and the increase of the gap between the rich and poor. Urban Industrial Mission (UIM) began to act in this social context.³

The early work of UIM was named 'industrial evangelism(*saneopjeondo*)', that aimed at the conversion of laborers to Christians. Among denominations, PCK first learned the

² Interviewees are listed in the end of reference. An oral witness is named in the text like as 'Case 1.'

³ Sang-Jeung Park, *Korean Church and Ecumenical Movement* (Seoul: The Christian Literature Society of Korea, 1992), 87.

industrial evangelism from the church of USA in 1957. The evangelist work expanded to the Anglican Church of Korea (ACK) and KMC in 1961, and then to PROK in 1963.⁴In the beginning, pastors from the denominations were trained upon the basis of industrial evangelism and then were sent to factories to work. However, experiencing the tragic reality of laborers, they began to realize the problem of the 'evangelistic' way of ministry. The mission-workers with such self-reflections participated in a workshop for the urban industrial mission held at in Bangkok in January of 1968, organized by East Asia Christian Conference (EACC), and began to seek an alternative way of the industrial evangelism. In this workshop, liberative values of World Council of Churches (WCC) such as importance of human dignity, realization of social justice, achieving the goal of social reform through ecumenical actions, and change of industrial mission for non-Christian laborers. On the basis of this new orientation, the Korean industrial 'evangelism' could be turned to the industrial 'mission'. The organization of the industrial mission was officially called the Center for Urban Industrial Mission (*Dosisaneopseongyohoe*).⁵ The Center discarded its old position of evangelism and newly adopted the theology of *missio Dei* of WCC for its social responsibility.

The Center for UIM had performed an outstanding role in the Korean labor movement until democratic labor movement initiated by rank and file workers appeared in 1980s.⁶ There were two key organizations among the UIM movement, Incheon UIM Center (*Incheonsanseon*), affiliated with KMC, and Youngdeungpo UIM Center (*Youngdeungposanseon*), affiliated with PCK.



Incheon UIM Center in the 1970's (Source: Ecumenian, 2005.09.16)⁷

⁴Sook-kyeong Jang, *Industrial Mission and Labor Movement in 1970s* (Seoul: Seonin, 2013), 38.

⁵Ibid., 65~67.

⁶Hae-keun Ku, *The Formation of Labor Class in Korea (Korean Workers: The Culture and Politics of Class Formation)*, trans., Kwang-young Shin (Seoul: Changbi Publishers, 2002), 152.

⁷<http://www.ecumenian.com/news/articleView.html?idxno=183>



YoungdeungpoUIM Center in 1976 (Source: Pck-goodnews, 2013.11.03)⁸

While these centers mainly educated laborers in small groups and helped them to take their rights as laborers, the Incheon Center cultivated small groups of laborers that had developed into the core of labor movement under the oppressive government. In the list of labor movements, connected with UIM, we can find *Wonpungmobang* incident with the Youngdeungpo Center, *Dongilbangjik* incident with the Incheon Center, YH incident with the youth movement group, and etc.⁹

Jang Sook-kyeong summarizes the legacy of industrial mission labor movement as following: Industrial mission helped Korean laborers to recognize the importance and necessity of a labor union and taught them tactic and knowhow of labor movement. Besides, union movement and small group activities assisted by industrial mission became an educational place of democratization in which laborers could acquire the consciousness of equality.¹⁰ The legacy of the UIM Centers in 1970s prepared the ground for full-scale labor movement in 1980s. The activity of the Centers were continually oppressed by Park's regime in 1970s and became almost standstill in 1980's because of the cruel crackdown by the newly-arising military regime. Therefore, the Christian labor movement turned its way of action from the education and training program based on centers to the organization of minjung church in the local community of industrial area.

⁸<http://www.pck-goodnews.com/news/articleView.html?idxno=971>

⁹Sook-kyeong Jang, *Industrial Mission and Labor Movement in 1970s*; Chong-ku Lee, et al, *Labors' Culture of Working Place and Their Identity* (Seoul: Hanul Academy, 2006).

¹⁰Sook-kyeong Jang, *Industrial Mission and Labor Movement in 1970s*, 266-74.

2. The Emergence of Progressive ecumenical Pastors

Some progressive Protestants criticized Christian conservatives with pro-government attitude, who remained indifferent to suffering of people, and began to raise their voices through ecumenical organization against the despotism of the authoritarian regime. Among cases of progressive Christians had persistently protested and demanded the restoration of democracy in 1970s and 80s. In this stream, emerged a group of young pastors who established minjung churches so as to reform church and society. They worked in ecumenical organizations such as the UIM, Ecumenical Youth Council in Korea (EYC), the Christian Academy, the Korea Student Christian Federation (KSCF), and etc. In spite of the various backgrounds, they commonly looked for a different form of ministry from established churches, that is, Christian mission as active participation in social problems for liberation of oppressed minjung peoples. Now, we'll see several witnesses of the minjung pastors to show how they became progressive and what kind of Christian values they sought after.¹¹

Lee Kwang-il was in his twenties protested against the military regime and continuously involved in social issues in 1970s. He received trainings at a Center for UIM, the Educational Institution for Mission in PROK, and KSCF and learned about the right way of the church in the conflictual social context. He dreamed a church for laborers and worked as preaches in Shin-myeong Church. He took an important role for the revival of the church later. (Case 1)

Noh Chang-sik began to participate in social issues through the Christian student movement when he attended in Korea Theological University (now Hanshin Univ.). He also took an educational program of Youngdeungpo Center for UIM and got influenced from some progressive Christian leaders to have a concern with labor movement. When he was imprisoned because of the student movement, his concern for labor issues had much grown. After on being released from prison, he served as the senior pastor of Shin-myeong Church and took an important role to support labor movement of Guro area in 1980s. (Case 5)

Lee Jae-yoon was an ordinary student before he attended a Methodist seminary where he experienced a conflict of conscience for being a good Christian in the cruel social/political context. The struggle led him to participate in Christian student movement such as Methodist Youth Fellowship in Korea (MYFK), KSCF, and EYC and to live for several years with poor shoeblacks in a humble village of rag-pickers. Later, he actively participated in labor movement after taking an educational program in *suwon* Center for UIM. (Case 8)

Choi Jang-il was influenced by pastors and church senior fellows and decided to enter a seminary hoping to achieve social reform. He experienced there a student movement and more actively participated in actions to solve social problems, organized by EYC. An ecumenical spirit has been flowing in his life. (Case 7)

Kang Woo-kyeong was awakened to social problems through two important historical events; the National Federation of Democratic Youth and Student (*minchunghakryun*) event, which was triggered after the retreat of KSCF, and the May 18 Kwangju Rebellion for Democracy against the military regime. He learned the progressive Christian values underlying these events in a study group of modern theology during Presbyterian seminary. He participated in minjung church movement, on completing training program of

¹¹ This study selected six pastors and five minjung churches because they are relatively accessible and well matched with the purpose of this study that investigates the minjung church movement of Guro area in the 1980s. The contents of the interviews received a minor edition for a vivid witness.

youngdeungpoCenter for UIM. (Case 4)

Lim Jin-cheol got a critical mind in watching the corruption of police and developed it, being a members of progressive Christianstudent gatherings at KyungdongPresbyterian Church, in which he was influenced by Rev. Kang Won-yong to decide to enter the seminary days. He studied various social sciences at the group of 'Young Second'in church, heard the radical voices of Christian leaders though the journal *Sasangye footnote : The World of Ideas*, and participated in the activities of KSCF and EYC. Through the series of these experiences, he decided to devote himself to minjung church movement. (Case 6)

Most of the pastors of minjung church illustrated above planned a new way of ministry in criticism of the pro-government established churches. They all agonized for a right way of the Christian life in the oppressive socio-political situation and determined to take the side of the weak and oppressed. They developed critical ideas by way of experiencing Christian student movement and broadening dynamic interaction with progressive intellectuals and religious leaders, finally transform themselves as progressive pastors. In sum, the emergence of such young pastors is related to the critical reflection about the conservative churches, faithful anguish for Christian life, and critical studies and various experiences in seminaries and ecumenical organizations, all of which have collaborated to beget the young pastors of minjung churches who follow only after 'the vocation of the Christ' and seek out the participatory love of the oppressed and poor.

3. Minjung Ministry and MinjungChurch

Now let's see the process of the establishment of Minjung churches reflected in the witnesses of the pastors and staffs.



Shin-myeong Church in 2014

First, Shin-myeong Church began with a group of laborers and activists who organized a night school (*yahak*) for young poor laborers and had a form of church with the appointment of Rev. Lee Jong-won. However, the church was faced with difficulty because of the arrest of some student members and finally broke up with the growing conflict between the pastor and young progressive members. While the pastor emphasized the ecclesiastical function as a church, the members preferred the social contribution for democratic movement. Sooner or later, one of the members together with Rev. Lee Kwang-il founded a bookstore, named as *Shinmyeongmunwhasa*, located at Shinchon, in Seoul, and began to have a service with Rev. Lee Jong-won and Rev. Noh Chang-sik, which was the revival of the church. Again, the church got a difficulty due to the arrest of some members who publicized the news about the cruel repression of Kwang-ju democratic movement. Rev. Lee Kwang-il, then worked for UIM in the Educational Institution for Mission in PROK, restart the service in his office with the former members. The church moved to Shingil-dong in 1984 with an appointment of Rev. Noh Chang-sik, moved again to Guro, and began to actively participate at labor movement in that area. (Case 1, 5)

Nam-bu Church originated from Kyungsu Center for UIM. When Rev. Lee Jae-yoon was inaugurated as a director, the Center did barely function. Groping for a way out of inactivity, he met a group of people to work together. There were 13 small groups of laborers and activists in Doksan-dong area for a night school (*yahak*). As the school grew, it needed a wider and more safe space from the government repression. The empty space of Kyungsu Center was perfectly matched with the need. So the UIM Center united with the night school to form a basis for establishing Nam-bu Church in 1982. Rev. Lee Jae-yoon took a charge for the pastoral work of the church composed of laborers. (Case 8, 13)

Guro Eun-kang Church was formed by some activists of labor movement; however, it could not operate in its first phase as a minjung church because of the pastor's way of thinking. After Rev. Choi Jang-il came, the church began to cooperate with other minjung churches in the spirit of solidarity. Originally, the church was built up with the sponsor of Mapo Eun-kang Church. Core members of MYFK attended in Mapo Eun-kang Church and hoped to have a space for labor movement. They became founding members of Guro Eun-kang Church. As Rev. Choi Jang-il led them from 1986, the church transformed itself as a minjung church with newcomers, having mosaic composition of members of MYFK and ten laborers. (Case 7)

Didimdol (*Stepping Stone*) Church started with the volunteer teachers of a night school (*yahak*) for workers preparing the qualifying examination, so as to entitle middle school level education. On preparing to participate at training program for labor ministry in Youngdeungpo UIM Center, Rev. Kang Woo-kyeong was invited by young Christians who needed a church for a place of night school. They had been members of the youth group in Young-nak Presbyterian Church in which Rev. Kang's wife also attended. Rev. Kang led them with a bible study meeting in every Wednesday night and established Stepping Stone Church in Oct, 1985. (Case 4)



Yiootsarang (Neighbor Love) Church in 2014¹²

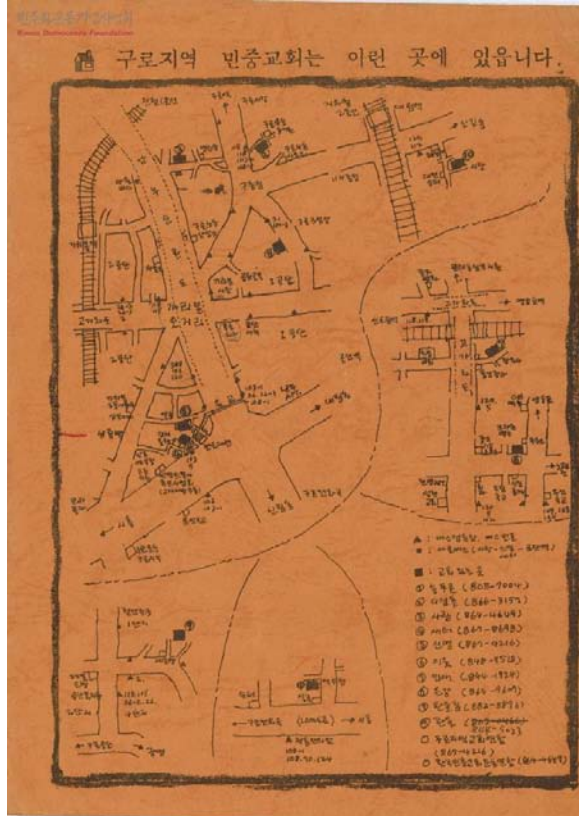
Rev. Lim Jin-cheol founded the Yioot (*Neighbor*) Church with 20 or more people who were the members of 'Young Second' in Kyung-dong Presbyterian Church. 'Young Second' was a Christian college student study group including some activists in student movements. When the senior pastor, Rev. Kang Won-yong, took the chair of the Advisory Council on State Affairs of the military regime, the church became split. Some criticized Rev. Kang's political stance and came out of the church. Rev. Lim led the group and continued the bible study meeting. They later met together in the minjung church movement and established Neighbor Church in May, 1985. (Case 6, 11)

As we see above, Minjung churches were organized on the basis of the need and request of student activists, filed workers, and labors. Young and critical minded pastors corresponded with them and performed a specific ministry for the oppressed labors. They differentiated their work from the center-oriented industrial mission, which had foreign financial supporters, and organized financially independent and self-supporting church among suffering labors. Therefore, they could naturally and successfully come together with the participants of labor movement. The pastors called their work as minjung ministry. They understand minjung ministry as "to bring good news to the poor, and to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free."¹³ Likewise, minjung churches commenced in solidarity with the progressive pastors, who needed minjung. As minjung needed church'.

Minjung church had an innate tendency of consciously supporting labor movement. Therefore, minjung church, having a form of religious institution, had features of movement organization for laborers. That is, minjung church from the initial phase tended to be a social movement organization rather than a religious one. Now, let's see the role of minjung churches in Guro area in 1980s with an emphasis of its difference from UIM in 1970s.

¹²Yioot (*Neighbor*) Church and Sarang (*Love*) church joined together and founded Neighbor(yiootsarang)Love Church. The Neighbor(yi-oot)Love Church is placed at which Love church was located.

¹³The Association of Korean Minjung Churches (*hanminyeon*), *Church of Minjung, Hope of Nation*, 179.



Map of minjung churches' locations in the Guro area in 1988
(source : Korea Democracy Foundation)

III. Minjung Church and Labor Movement in Guro Area in 1980s

1. Labor Movement and Church Space

First of all, minjung church and UIM had a difference in the style of action. As UIM had been under surveillance and had faced difficulty in maintaining contact with the rank and file laborers, which had the legitimacy based on the principle of religious freedom included in the constitution, could provide a sanctuary for the illegal underground labor movement. It is the most important contribution of minjung church in Guro area that it provided the public space open to the labor movement. Minjung church in 1980s was a physical space as a basic and crucial resource for labor movement. Especially, from 1983 when the suppression of the government grew severely on labor movement, the church became much more important because it is the only place for movement open to people. Although the role of minjung church appeared small, its status as a legitimate organization functioned as a fence protecting

labor movement.

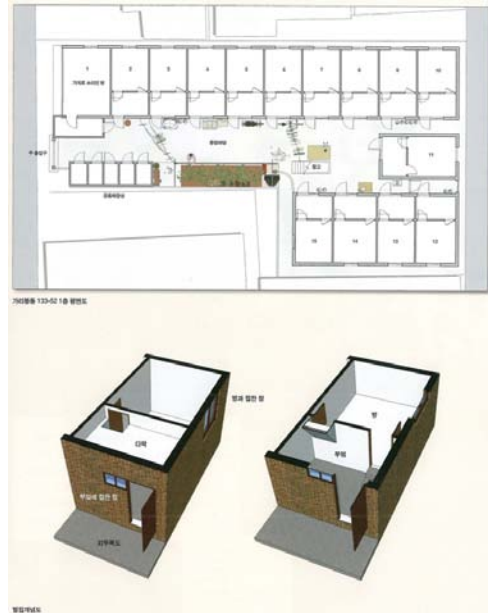
From a sociological perspective, space is defined as a social product because space is not an objective substance separated from a society but a product of social interactions.¹⁴ The legal space in minjung church during 1980s is also considered as the outcome of social interactions. How could the church space function as a fence for labor movement when no other space was allowed? The legitimacy of minjung church had two aspects. There were international support and cooperation in the world-wide network of Christian ecumenical movement. The world network protected Korean churches from the oppression of the government. Besides, ironically, the government could not offend the church because the anti-communist ideology of the established church created itself as a free space from the government repression.¹⁵ The protestant church maintained the power of unity, so that action of government against the religious service and church activity necessarily caused the resistance of the church. Moreover, the fact that majority of the established churches took a conservative stance, and support the government, made it difficult for the police and intelligence agency to label minjung church as an illegal rebellious group. Therefore, we can acknowledge the legitimacy of minjung church, as a symbol of church in the social context of the extreme suppression of the authoritarian regime. Also minjung church had a legitimacy as a member church of established denominations. Consequently, minjung church could openly work for labor movement thanks to the social status of Christianity and the symbol of 'church' as the politically liberated space.



The so-called "beehives", housing structure for laborers' residence in the Guro Industrial Complex (source : Seoul Museum of history)

¹⁴Henri Lefebvre, *La Production De L'Espace*, trans., by Young-ran Yang (Seoul: Ecolivres, 2011), 25-26

¹⁵In-cheol Kang, *Democratization and Religion* (Suwon: Hanshin Univ. Publishing, 2012); In-cheol Kang, *Resistance and Surrender* (Suwon: Hanshin Univ. Publishing, 2013).



Floor plan(upper)and conceptual diagram(under) of the laborers dwelling
(source : Seoul Museum of history)

The physical space of minjung church was as narrow as 33m,² but it remained very important for labor movement. The space made possible the exchange of thinking and information. Hence, minjung church then became the ‘refuge’ and ‘shelter’ (Case 12). It provided activists of labor movement with a psychological place of safety from the surveillance system built in community. Its open space was the safe place for resistant groups to study and to communicate. The area of Guro in 1980s was full of student activists who concealed their identity, so as to organize labor movement in the industrial complex¹⁶. They tried to develop underground small group activity. Minjung church was an adequate place for the activists to meet and educate laborers (Case 13) and to communicate each other. Minjung church opened various classes of guitar, Korean quadriad musical instrument (*pungmul*), and etc to meet and cooperate with labor. Moreover, it was a place for making fire bomb and leaflets for a use of demonstration (Case 4, 11). Minjung church as a legitimate place could take different roles from the UIM center because it was located in the living place of laborers and its religious place provided protection and resources. In sum, minjung church practiced ecumenical movement with a social responsibility by providing its space as a sanctuary for the socially oppressed and weak.

2. The Praxis of Christian Laborers

¹⁶Kyeong-soon Yu, “A Research of the Formation and Division of Transformative Labor Movement in 1980s,” doctoral dissertation in Korea University, 104.

Another feature of minjung church, different from UIM center is that it was a church-member-centered ecumenical movement, not the one led by some clerical leadership or staff members. While the main activity of the UIM center was the staff members' *diakonia* activities to care and serve laborers, minjung church has a feature that rank and file members planned and carried out activities.

The fact that minjung church was built upon the praxis of the laborer members, as noted before, is confirmed by the motivation of minjung church which was launched by the need of early members for an alternative form of church. Although it may be true that church is not possible without clergy, early members of the minjung church believed that one of the important factors of the church activities was the voluntary participation of laborers. This self-reliable activity of the members of minjung Church was made possible by forming a joint organization of laborers and students, in which laborers and activists met together.

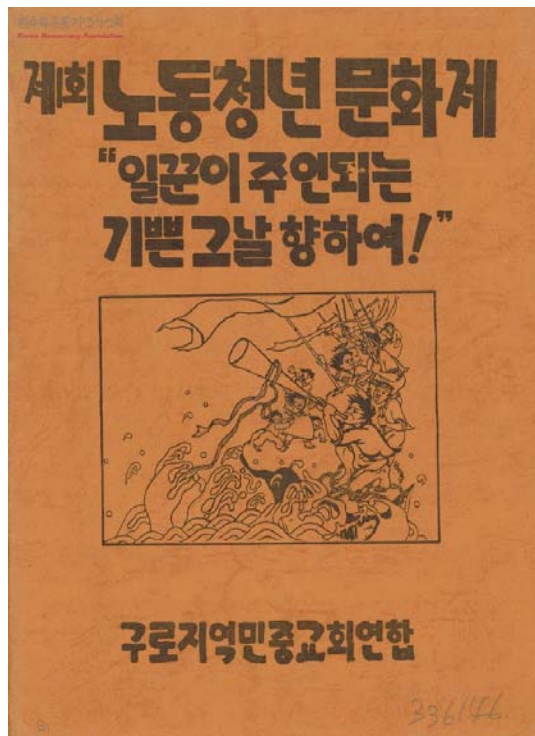
The joint organization is called 'the Solidarity for Students and Laborers' (*nohakyaeondae*), which outwardly organized a demonstration or collective protest action on an issue raised by laborers and students."¹⁷ But the undercover action included the infiltration students to factories as laborers without mentioning real identity and organization of informal circles, in which student activists met laborers face-to-face to make relationship filled with solidarity. In other words, this form of solidarity of Students and Laborers was one of the main features of labor movement in 1980's. The minjung church played an active role in forming the Solidarity by providing a sanctuary. The minjung Church had not only played the role of **an helper sending** student activists to factories for labor movement, but also educated the laborers who participated in various programs with the networks of the student labor activists(Case 13). The Solidarity of Students and Laborers via the Min-Jung churches was built up by various programs carried out by the activists. These programs included Poong-Mool class (to learn how to play farmer's musical instruments), guitar class, kindergarten, night school, laundry, Chinese character class, cultural activity, public lecture series, tracking, mountain climbing, religious retreat, and so on.¹⁸ These programs were ran by 2-3 activists who were the full-time staff members of the church, and the programs became places for laborers and activists where they could make friends and know christianity. As the number of church-going laborers increased, it was possible to have some group meeting in which 10-15 laborers were gathered on a regular basis in the churches. Especially Sunday became a festival, in which laborers, activists disguising as laborers and church staff members gather together, enjoying the feast (Case 13). According to an interview of In Tae-Yung, laborers then thought church as a place of rest and joy.

On the basis of the solidarity formed in this way, the church members practiced various forms of labor movement. At the peak time of Guro Joint Strike in 1985, there were Sarang church, Nambu church and Shinmyung church in Guro. The members of which distributed the fliers to inform the situation of the strike (Case 13). The members of minjung churches substituted the press and media, when freedom of press and communication was extremely restricted. These kinds of activity were repeatedly performed even after the Guro Joint Strike. On summer in 1985, minjung churches around Guro area jointly had a retreat whose topic was Gross Capital. The participants included the members of various underground circles as well as the staff members of the churches. It became a discussion site for labor movement

¹⁷Eui-bong Hwang, *The Student's Movement in 1980's*, (Yaejogak, 1986), 186.

¹⁸Ick-SangCheon, *The Ecclesiology of Korean Min-Jung Church and an experiential reflection on its practical programs*, (The Press of Presbyterian University and Theological Seminary, 1989).

(Case 4 & 13). Trying to realize freedom of press for democracy, Han-gye-rae newspaper was launched in 1989. The members of Minjung churches distributed the newspaper to local places and became the branches of the newspaper (Case 9). Besides mentioned above, the Christian laborers participated in various street demonstrations and played a role of outside supporter for factories on strike (Case 11). They also organized and opened in the name of young laborer cultural festivals (Korean Democracy Foundation, Resource 8).



The 1st Working Youth Festival in 1988 (source : Korea Democracy Foundation)

In addition to the voluntary praxis of the church members, the pastors also let the laborers themselves lead the church activities. The pastors of minjung churches aimed at a church in which laypeople, laborers, become the owner. In this sense, they wanted to run a religious community emphasizing value of equality and tried to introduce this ideal into worships. They put down their privileges as religious ministers and had laborers preach by turns. They changed the method. They shared experience in life world and conviction inspired by the bible passage from the perspective of the laborers, not relying on the interpretation given by clergy man(Case 1 & 5). By not intervening in any activities of church members, the ministers of minjung churches offered a stage on where the church members performed roles of their preference. The churches provided its space for underground circle activities, in which activists and laborers around Guro area were brought together for study and organization activating, and the church members also used the church space for preparing

메모 [U1]: 권진관 선생님

By not involving in any activities of church members, the ministers of minjung churches offered a stage on which the church members themselves played ~~took~~ their roles as they pleased. The churches provided ~~it's~~ a space for private circle activities, in which activists and laborers around Guro area ~~gathered~~ were brought together to study, and church

and planning demonstrations with other activists (Case 4 & 11). The churches strongly resisted against any police search without warrant issued by court, and, in so doing, it functioned to protect and support the participation of the church members in the labor movement. Further, in their local activities for enlarging network of solidarity, they separated pastors from laypeople so that the church members could stand on their feet.

In this way, the minjung church was a mission activity which aimed at social participation of pastors for workers who were weak and oppressed. Also, the minjung church tried to arouse voluntary participation from its members. On the basis of the minjung church, the activists and workers could participate at social movements more freely and more independently. This affirmed that the minjung church was an ecumenical movement firmly based on laypeople.

3. Church and Regional Solidarity

While the UIM was a movement led by autonomous mission agency affiliated at denomination, the minjung church was a movement based on local solidarity, hand in hand with other labor movement groups. The pastors of minjung churches sincerely sought for cooperation with the society in real terms by way of social participation of the church. They shared an idea that the church should be open to people and try to maintain solidarity with the other parts of the society, not be confined itself to the realm of religion (Korean Democracy Foundation, Resource 7:3). Thus, they tried to organize network not only between activists and workers laborers but also between minjung churches. The minjung church, based on the ecumenical spirit, tried to develop local solidarity overcoming the restrictions caused by scattered and isolated activities. As a result, the Association of GuroMinjung Church Movement (AGMCM, *Guromingyo*) was organized as an organization for enhancing local solidarity.

The beginning of AGMCM was the discussion of 2 clergymen joined at the workshop of 3 days convened by Christian Academy in September, 1985. On exchanging critical opinion about the established churches 'all night long', Rev. Kim Kwang-Hoon (Sarang church) and Rev. Kang Woo-Kyeong (Didimdol church) came to an agreement on the judgment about the circumstances and decided to help each other firmly. They began to see frequently since Rev. Kang moved from Incheon to Garibong district of Guro area in February, 1986. Immediately, on March 1st, 1986, Nambu church, Sarang church and Didimdol church held friendly soccer matches together. It became first joint program. In April, GuroEungang church, Yioot church, and Shin-myeong church joined. These 6 churches had a joint outdoor worship program. In that summer, they gathered around 140-150 people for a united retreat program. In 1986, on finishing the athletic gathering during the united retreat program, being held at Donbosko Technical Training Center in Shindaebang-dong Seoul, a group of labor activists began agitation and led participants into street demonstration¹⁹. AGMCM²⁰ was organized passing through such a process, and succeeded in exerting strong influence among labor movement organization, so as to be capable of mobilizing resources for action. It played the pivot of the labor movement in metropolitan Seoul. AGMCM was the main force of

¹⁹ An interview with Rev. Kang Woo-Kyung by The Institute of the history of Labor, Sungkonghoe University, on April 11th, 2003.

²⁰ At first, the minjung churches in Guro area originally used the name of Small Church. minjung Church, sometime after their discussions about it.

theSeoul Christian Workers Federation(SCWF, *Seoeeeno*), a branch of the Korea Christian Workers Federation. SCWF inherited, maintained and propagated the practice of joint struggle, which had appeared at the Guro Joint Strike in 1985.

Activists and workers, minjung churches of Guro area could mobilize human resources and networks to support labor movement. The activists of minjung churches, regardless of the time of participation whether they were initial members or late comers, could utilize relatively stable basis of organization and cooperate with lay people, thanks to the legal protection prescribed in the constitution, guaranteeing freedom of religion. On supporting labor movements at workplaces or planning a street demonstration, AGMCM had been utilized as a network to mobilize available supporters. Most of all, each church had at least 10-20 members for Sunday worship, who were ready to participate at rallies and struggles over the weekends (Case 12). The minjung church also functioned as a center for local labor movements by supporting them from the outside, whenever industrial conflict occurred, by providing shelters for workers. As a part of local labor movement, the minjung church offered their spaces for meeting and gathering. For example, Shin-myeong church became a place for ceremony commemorating Labor Day on March 10th, 1985. Due to the political circumstances, it was not possible to remember the Labor Day, the chapel was full of 60-70 laborers who came to participate at the gathering (Case 5).



Workers' paper reporting the Inauguration of Seoul Regional Union of Christian Workers (source : Korea Democracy Foundation)



Flag of the Korea Federation of Christian Worker



Business Card , Seoul Christian Workers Federation (*Seogeeno*)
(source : Korea Democracy Foundation)

There were efforts to support local labor movement groups outside of the church in the spirit of solidarity. At that time, SCWF, mainly composed of young workers in AGMCM and UIM, tried to arouse public opinion about working conditions. “When it was not easy even to find any meeting place, SCWF convened an assembly, so that activists and workers of various political positions could come to discuss and exchange. In this way, the minjung church helped oppressed people”(Case 12).

In 1985-1986, labor activists felt the need to secure the safe space open to public for the

workers involved at underground labor movement organization called as The Seoul Labor Movement Federation(SLMF, *Seonoryon*). After May 3rd Incident at Incheon, where thousands of workers and students collided with riot police, SLMF faced two difficulties. On the one hand, SLMF was under strong oppression of the regime, on the other hand, it suffered the internal conflict between the members involving the direction and way of the movement as a whole. These external and internal hardships forced SLMF on the brink of stopping function at the end of 1986. As a result, the situation of the labor movement had become worse. Under such a situation, alternative labor movement organization was required to lead action such as demonstrations, rallies, distribution of leaflets and etc. The SCWF was inaugurated at that time so as to fulfil the needs mentioned before(Case 12 & 14). The inauguration of SCWF reflected the political situation that the regime hesitated to blame Christian activists as communists or conspirators (Korean Democracy Foundation, Resource 6).

The SCWF was launched on September 14th, 1986, and the first president was Han Myung-hoe. Formally, it was a united organization of the missionary service for workers in four churches (Yongsan church, Moohak church, Dolim church and Yangpyungdong church) and *Youngdeungpo* UIM Center²¹ (Korean Democracy Foundation, Resource 1 & 5). Due to the conflict between the pastors of minjung churches and the leadership of the SCWF, AGMCM was able to involve in the reorganization process of the SCWF only in the middle of 1987. But AGMCM, the UIM activists and Christian laborers actually work together from the beginning. SCWF was not an organization of religious leaders or pastors but an apparatus of activists and workers. Pastors supported the organization by way of participating at the advisory committee (Case 12; Korean Democracy Foundation, Resource 2 & 3).

SCWF put into practice three kinds of action including regular action of mass,

²¹In those days, Yeongdeungpo industrial mission had a different name, that is, Seungmunbak church.



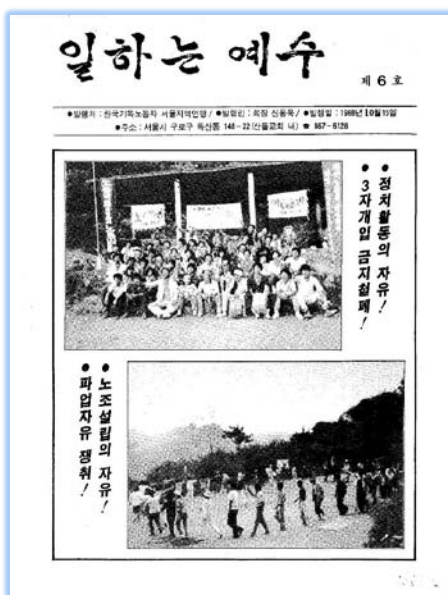
Present Seungmunbak church.

developing and practicing education program for workers, and keeping solidarity with the workers involved in labor disputes (Case 12). First, the regular mass actions could be numbered such as spring fight for higher wages, summer retreat, culture festival for workers in memory of Jeon Tae-II in November, and so on. The summer retreat at Hanshin University in 1987 was participated by many workers in metropolitan Seoul area including Christian labor movement members. Education program was composed of culture class, activist class, bible study class, practical guide to labor law and management of labor union, history study class and so on. In order to support and cooperate with labor movement groups outside of the church, SCWF made and distributed pamphlets for propaganda such as *Jesus, the Workers*. Especially in 1988, as joint struggle was vigorously expanded, there occurred the joint struggle against the disguised shut down of MaxTech, the joint struggle of workers belong to Daewon Electronics and Korean Rinnai, the joint struggle of democratic workers with the labor union of Daehan Optics and with the workers oppressed at Sinae Electronics and Motorola (Kim, Jang-Han et al., 1989, 258). SCW actively involved in the activities supporting struggles at Seotong, Daehan Optics, and Sinae Electronics (Case 11 & 12; Korean Democracy Foundation, Resource 5).



'Laborer Jesus' vol.1

(Source: Sungkonghoe Univ. Demos Archives)



'Jesus Working' vol.6

(Source: Korean Democracy Foundation)



Sit-in Demonstration of Women Laborers at Shinmyung Church
(Source: The Hankyoreh, 1988.12.25)



Laborers Festival in February, 1989 – Seoul Christian Workers Federation (*Seogeeno*)

Besides the actions of workers and activists at the local level of labor movement, there was the active involvement of pastors. One of the typical cases was the sit-in strike at the building of the Federation of the Korean Industries(FKI). Even while the democratization process had been put into practice in the life world after nationwide massive Citizens' Struggle for the Recovery of Democracy at June 1987, workers were still oppressed by the state and capital. Under such a circumstance, the pastors started a fast prayer for the improvement of human rights of alienated laborer-brothers in Korea, following the guidance of the Holy Spirit. In the midst of praying period, they heard the news that FKI reported at the cabinet meeting in government false and distorted stories about the voice of workers demanding justice and fairness at workplaces. On protesting against the hypocritical behavior, a group of 23 pastors entered FKI building to begin sit-in strike on September 18th, 1987. The pastors on strike demanded the apology of the FKI, the punishment of the responsible person, and the promise of management side to eliminate the inhuman working conditions. In response, the FKI, accusing the pastors of housebreaking and business interference, called police. In 5 minutes, about 150 police officers with plain clothes came to assault. As a result, 5 pastors were arrested (Case 3 & 4; Korean Democracy Foundation, Resource 4). This case showed the real features of the local joint strike, in which the pastors actively participated to support the movement of rank and file workers.



Minjung church pastors being arrested by the police at FKI(source :Ecumenian, 2012.09.17)²²

²²<http://www.ecumenian.com/newsarticleView.html?id=xno=9140>

4. MinjungChurch and the Liberation of Labor.

The minjung church had an ideological tendency emphasizing the liberation by workers themselves. They saw the reality of minjung from a perspective of social structure. Minjung was regarded as the subject to improve the social conditions by themselves. In this way, the minjung church believed that Christianity had to seek for the liberation of oppressed minjung. In contrast, UIM apparently put emphasis on the social responsibility of Christian and church to provide help for workers. .



Women workers in Guro during 1980s (source : Seoul Museum of history)

Rev. Hong Sung-Hyun evaluated minjung church as “a liberating community to remember the liberating event of Jesus and to creatively inherit it in human actuality”²³. That is “a model of community to realize liberation by joining the tradition of liberation in the Bible, which is none other than “the realization of an egalitarian community of liberation,”²⁴ with the minjung tradition of liberation in their history. According to a presentation by co-authors at the PCK policy conference about theminjung church, “minjung church” is defined as “a community, in which minjung, who are the poor and oppressed people of God, realizes the Kingdom of God, in which they become the master by arming themselves with a faith of liberation, by becoming a subject to liberate themselves, by transforming the situations of oppression and exploitation, and by recovering the image of God.”²⁵ Acknowledging the value of liberation theology or theology of minjung under the influence of ecumenical

²³The editorial committee of the Association of Han-Kook Minjung Church (*hanminyeon*) Resource book, *The Church of Minjung, the Hope of the Nation*, (the Korean Federation of the Minjung Church Movement, 1996), 138.

²⁴The editorial committee, *The Church of Minjung, the Hope of the Nation*, 146.

²⁵The editorial committee, *The Church of Minjung, the Hope of the Nation*, 241.

movement, the ministers of minjung churches interpreted the oppressed minjung as the subject of social transformation and oriented themselves toward the liberation of minjung in this world.

Not only the pastors but also the activists attending the minjung church regarded the liberation of minjung as their fundamental value. One of the characteristics of the student movement in 1980s was the concern about the minjung. May 18th Gwangju Uprising for Democracy in 1980 awakened the students, that any social reform or transformation should be carried out from bottom-up, not from top-down and led the various groups of student movement to an agreement, that the subject of social transformation should be the force of minjung, the majority of which were workers.²⁶ Since then, the student activists went to industrial area so as to participate at labor movement and to build up solidarity between students and workers.²⁷ The concept of minjung, defined as “those politically oppressed, the socially alienated, and the excluded from the benefits of the economic growth,”²⁸ functioned as a pivotal frame of student movement since the massacre at Gwangju. This is the reason why many student activists involved in the places of workers and became members of minjung churches.

In this way, both the activists and the pastors in minjung churches shared a goal to activate the worker-centered organization movement, because workers are the reality of minjung. They regarded it as the top-priority task to struggle for the liberation of workers, who would be the subject of social transformation. Many workers around Guro area experienced the various programs carried out by minjung churches. The number of workers who attended minjung churches in Guro area on a regular basis reached about 700. Among them, 350 members participated at church retreats and meetings. Active participants were about 70 members actively joined church program. It was the group of 5-6 activists who could organize and lead the demonstrations and struggles on the street (Case 13).

IV. Conclusion

This study examined the movement of minjung churches, which distinguished itself from Urban Industrial Mission active until the early 1980's as a type of Christian ecumenical movement. The ecumenical movement, which aims at unification and oneness of all Christian movements under the banner of *Missio Dei*, engaged itself in the liberation of the oppressed and carried out various works of social salvation under the context of Korea during the 1960's–1980's. The clergy from minjung churches, who had worker-oriented minds with the ecumenical spirit, tried to build up solidarity with labor movements and to establish minjung churches in reference to the demand of the labor movement and the church. These minjung churches functioned as a platform supporting labor movement in Guro area in the 1980s by providing human and material resources in various ways.

Despite such contributions mentioned above, the movement of minjung church had its own limitations, as the following: First of all, there were obviously conflicts between the pastors and the activists in the space of minjung church. While some activists regarded the

²⁶Soo-mi, Eun, “The impact of Korean Student’s Movement upon the Labor Movement in 1980’s,” *Memory and Perspective*, Vol.15(2006), 208-209.

²⁷Soo-mi, Eun, “The impact of Korean Student’s Movement upon the Labor Movement in 1980’s,” 184.

²⁸Hae-geun Ku, *The Formation of Labor Class in Korea (Korean Workers: The Culture and Politics of Class Formation)*, trans. by Kwang-young Shin (Changbi Publishers, 2002), 211.

space of church as a mere instrument for the labor movement, the pastors were critical of such attitudes, stressing the importance of worship attendance. Although both of them shared the same awareness of the oppressed situation under the military regime and regarded workers as the subject of minjung. There was an impassable gap on their understanding of the church, and this difference was often led to a serious conflict.

Also, there was another tension between the clergy and the activists when the latter trained small group of workers as progressive vanguards of labor movement. One of minjung church ministers expressed this as 'having another secret pocket.' This refers to the fact that the activists then strategically trained some workers with their conscientization program, so as to recruit new members for underground action groups without notifying anything to the pastors. Labor activists emphasized some negative aspects of the church and intentionally distanced themselves from the church. It became another cause of tension between the clergy and activists. Such a conflict can be seen as arising from the differences in their social locations and purposes.

The third form of tension between the clergy and the activists derived from the fact that the activists of minjung churches manipulated church events and/or church meetings as the place of struggle by mobilizing outside organizations with which they had connections. For example, when AGMCM held a social event like an athletic gathering at the Donbosko Technical Training Center, the activists manipulate it as a chance for street demonstration. The pastors were seriously critical of such an abuse of a church event and called it a "disguising integument strategy." Besides these kinds of conflict inside churches, there was some structural conflict between the pastors of the AGMCM and the leaderships of SCWF. Most of the events of SCWF were held on Sunday so that Christian Labor activists had to skip the church worship, thus the church became almost empty. This caused another trouble with the pastors. (Case 12) It was acknowledged that the ministers of minjung churches supported the activities of the SCWF providing a protective shield. The clergy had a different viewpoint on the ultimate role of the church. Pastors wanted Christian laborers to observe religious practices as Christians in their everyday lives, while workers had to participate in labor movement outside of the church. This kind of conflict brought forth the decision of temporarily suspending any relationship between the church and the SCWF at the end of 1988. In early 1990s, the SCWF was divided into three factions. At last, SCWF became a council of pastors and Christian workers (Korean Democracy Foundation, Resource 5).

As conclusive remarks, the implications of this study can be listed as the following: This article extends the width of the study of the minjung church movement by collecting the first-hand resources which past researches had not utilized as resources. This research utilized as the first-hand resources the various witnesses of the activists and workers who were belonging to the churches as well as those of the pastors, while the past studies had depended upon the writings the ministers left over and some related documents. Second, while the past researches had regarded the minjung church as a church formed by the Christian ministers under the influence of minjung theology, this article argues that minjung theology was a part of the ecumenical movement, and that minjung church was not formed by some leading individuals but by the spirit of solidarity between the Christian ministers understanding ecumenical movement and minjung. Most of all, it was the demand of minjung that became the starting point of the minjung churches. It points to the fact the minjung church was a movement, based on minjung as a subject. The minjung church, unlike the other ecumenical movement groups, was an autonomous movement not receiving any foreign aids including

financial support from churches of the West. Third, this article examined the social implications of the minjung church by analyzing it in the context of its relation to the labor movements outside the church, while the past researches had tried to find out religious meanings of the minjung church by examining its religious activities like ministry, worship, mission and so on. Finally, this research would contribute to enhance the level of historical research about Korean ecumenical movement by excavating historical facts of the minjung church and Christian social movement during 1980s.

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3. Appendix: Personal Information of Interviewees

Cas e	name	Sex	Membership Church and Organizations in 1980's	denominati on	type	Academic background
1	Lee, Kwang-il	Male	Shinmyung Church	The Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK)	Pastor	Hanshin University
2	Jeon, Sung-pyo	Male	Yiootsarang Church	PROK	pastor	Hanshin University
3	Lee, Gun-bok	Male	YoungdeungpoUIM Centeron&Sungmunbak Church	Presbyterian Church of Korea (PCK)	pastor	Presbyterian Theological Seminary
4	Kang, Woo-kyung	Male	Didimdol Church	PCK	pastor	Inha University & Presbyterian Theological Seminary
5	Noh,	Male	Shinmyung Church	PROK	pastor	Hanshin

	Chang-shik					University
6	Im, Jin-cheol	Male	Yioot Church	PROK	pastor	Hanshin University
7	Choi, Chang-il	male	GuroEungangChurch	Korean Methodist Church (KMC)	pastor	Methodist Theological University
8	Lee, Jae-yoon	male	Nambu Church (Inae Church)	KMC	pastor	Methodist Theological University
9	Lee, Do-hoon	female	Yioot Church	n/a	HighSchoolstudent	Youngdeung-po High School
10	No, Hang-rae	male	Korean Christian Workers Federation	n/a	activist	Yonsei University
11	Jung, Woo-chang	male	Yioot Church	n/a	activist	Seoul National University
12	Shin, Dong-wook	male	Seoul Christian Workers Federation	n/a	worker	Qualification exam
13	In, Tae-yung	male	Nambu Church	n/a	activist	Methodist Theological University
14	Han, Myung-hoe	female	Korean Christian Workers Federation	n/a	Activist	Unknown