

Japanese TV Features Unificationist Economic Engagement with Pyongyang

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The Tokyo Broadcasting System (TBS) aired a 26-minute video clip that featured the history and current undertakings of the Unification Church on April 21, 2012 at 5 p.m. Japanese Unificationists noted that the documentary was serious, well-researched and for the most part respectful of the church.

“That Japanese media, for the first time in history, fairly presented the Unification Church is a result of the efforts we’ve invested into public relations in Japan,” said Luke Higuchi, president of Survivors Against Forced Exit (SAFE). “Under the direction of Kook Jin Moon, Japanese leaders of the Unification Church are promoting transparency in all activities. Yes, the video contains certain controversial topics about our church, but I am very sure that our influence in North Korea will strongly impact the audience. Many Japanese people have realized that without the work of the Unification Church, a peaceful unification between North- and South Korea cannot happen.

“This video was a great victory for our movement. It’s telling that TBS sought us out for information about our church instead of going to anti-Unification Church groups. The anti-UC groups even complained about this fact on their blogs and through Twitter. I hope that such coverage will help stop the abductions of our members in Japan by faith breakers – something that continues to this day.”

“This was the first documentary on our church that treated the Japanese Unificationists as human beings,” wrote Tomiko Gordon, an early member of the Japanese Church who resides in Atlanta.

As an opening statement for the video, narrator Masaki Kusakabe said, “The Unification Church, led by Rev. Sun Myung Moon, whose activities have raised many eyebrows in Japan, [is] now showing a different side in South Korea such as strong links with North Korea and major developments. What does the Unification Church have in mind and what is it up to?”



The Unification Church and North Korea

The video emphasized the church's involvement with North Korea.

“Politically, the Unification Church has advocated strong anti-communism, but it has moved beyond the religious dimension,” said Kusakabe. He continued: “The Unification Church has an important side that should be reckoned with. The Unification Church and North Korea have retained strong rapport with each other. Last December, at the funeral of Kim Jong Il, only three South Korean groups were allowed to attend. They were the wife of the former president of South Korea, Dae Jung Kim, the chairman of the Hyundai group, as well as the Unification Church group led by the seventh son of Rev. Moon, Hyung Jin Moon.

“The honeymoon period between North Korea and the Unification Church dates back two decades, when Rev. Sun Myung Moon, a fierce anti-communist, abruptly paid a visit to North Korea in 1992 beginning the association of ‘blood brothers.’ A symbol of their intimate relationship has developed as a car manufacturer affiliated with the Unification Church. Peace Motors Corporation, now managed by Sang Kwon Park, a Unification Church follower, was set up as a joint venture with North Korean authorities and is manufacturing and marketing automobiles. Car parts of Italian auto manufacturers are imported through China and assembled here. The company produced 2,000 vehicles last year.”

During an interview with Kusakabe, Park said, “I came here convinced that the unification of North- and South Korea as well as world peace will be realized according to Rev. Moon's teachings. But business is business. It has to make profits. My goal may be to create a conglomerate in Pyongyang. Without financial resources, the unification is hard to achieve. Under the slogan ‘Strong and Vibrant Great Nation,’ this year we'll see much higher yields, I expect.”

Kusakabe continued to explain that Park is optimistic about North Korea's economic prospects despite the gloomy consensus of many. Park is reported to have exchanged words directly with Kim Jong Un during the funeral ceremony for Kim Jong Il in December of 2011.

In response to Kusakabe's question of why the Unification Church collaborates with North Korea, Kook Jin (Justin) Moon, chairman of the Tongil Foundation says in the film: “Our father [Rev. Sun Myung

Moon] teaches us that the Unification Church has to become strong not because we hate the devilish socialism, but so that the North Korean people will not go the path of slavery after the collapse of the socialist system. North Korea is becoming more isolated in the international community. In sympathy towards the North Korean people, blood brothers must continue offering helping hands. Our father always prays for the unification of two Koreas. The unification must be achieved in a manner that affirms the existence of God.”

Next, Chairman Moon answered the question of how he evaluates the church’s activities that have caused “social problems” and whether he is aware that the church in Japan is “heresy, or rather an anti-social organization” with the following statement:

“There are numerous misunderstandings lying between the Japan societies and the Unification Church. We are making efforts to improve our business transparency. One thing that we want Japanese people to recognize is that we are a true religion with firm faith in God. I want you to understand that our activities are based on that faith.”

The video included interviews with various church officials and segments on the Marriage-Blessing ceremony in South Korea on March 24, 2012, at which “about 2,500 couples newly matched across racial and national lines,” as well as the Blessing in New York, which broadcast the ceremony live from Korea via satellite. Kusakabe reported the exceptional quality of the Tongil-managed Yongpyong Ski Resort, which will be hosting the Winter Olympics in 2018 and was also a film site for the popular 2002 TV drama “Winter Sonata.”

Much of the documentary focused on the Unification Church’s financial activities in Japan, which “since the latter half of the 1980s have caused social problems such as its members donating their whole assets.” Projects of the church, such as the construction work in Yeouido, South Korea’s political district, which is reported to have been “deadlocked” because of a “feud between Moon’s family members” and the church’s attempt to build a tunnel from Japan to Korea were also explored in the film.



Financial Expenditures of the Church

In an effort to understand better the finances of the church, the video featured a “gigantic project that the

Unification Church has been undertaking for the last thirty years,” which is an undersea tunnel that would connect Japan and South Korea. The distance of the tunnel was projected to be 25 kilometers, but the video reported that “the work has been suspended since 2006, primarily because of the fund shortage.”

According to TBS, the church’s involvement with North Korea and massive projects such as the undersea tunnel are funded by the donations of Japanese members, of which there are reportedly 600,000.”

The church’s director of public relations in Japan denied allegations that donations are collected through psychological coercion. “I believe that no one causes the members to donate money with fear or pressure,” he said. “Following court cases where the church’s managing liabilities have been questioned, we have improved the relevant practices. Members are free to engage in commercial activities, but if they do it as if it were a church operation, or not in compliance with laws and norms such as the law on specified commercial transaction, they are cautioned or encouraged to discontinue it.”

At the conclusion of the documentary, anchorman Shigenori Kanehira said, “Much ambiguity persists over the funding for the Japan-Korea tunnel and the church’s fundraising schemes. But more than anything else, the video showed today amazed me that the staunch anti-communist Unification Church has approached North Korea so closely.”

As a closing statement, Kusakabe said, “The Unification Church has become a factor that cannot be ignored with regard to North Korea. What are the aims of the Unification Church? When we requested for interviews, they responded positively. Through the subsequent interviews, the church officials stressed repeatedly that the church has changed after the resignation of the Japanese church president in 2009, taking responsibility for a series of illegal activities and following the church-wide instruction not to engage in illegal practices.”

"One injustice of the TBS documentary is that they did not mention one word about the 4,000 Unification Church members who have been kidnapped or tortured to convert to another faith during the last 40 years. This important human-rights issue was missing from the program," commented Tomiko Gordon.