

Missionary to the United States: The Influence of Little Angels

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In 1965, the author is seen off by his father (far right) and Reverend and Mrs. Moon as he leaves for America as a full-time missionary

When my original three-year tour of duty at the embassy was completed, I was ordered to extend my stay by six months, in recognition of my outstanding record. I finally left the embassy and returned to Korea after three and a half years. By this time, Ambassador Chung had been appointed to the post of minister of foreign affairs. Soon after, he became prime minister.

As I returned to Korea, I made up my mind to retire from the military. It had been fourteen years since I first entered the Korean Military Academy, determined to someday wear a general's stars on my shoulders. By the time I completed my mission as a diplomat, however, I was beginning to dream of stars of a very different variety. Instead of those earned by killing people in war, I now dreamed of earning the stars of an army that sought to make people live. I wanted to stand on the world stage and shout with all my might the words of life that

would bring salvation to all humankind. My new dream was to become a modern-day Apostle Paul.

I realized it was for this purpose that God had given me the ability to communicate in English and had given me diplomatic experience. In fact, it was for this work that God had saved me from certain death on that bloody riverbank many years before.

“That’s right,” I told myself. “My stage is the world. I’ve switched from an earthly army to the army of Heaven. What job in this world could be more rewarding than that of spreading the teachings by which God seeks to establish His kingdom on earth?”

I returned to my homeland with a heart filled with hope. This was in October 1964. I retired from the army, and just a few months later, in January 1965, I returned to America, this time as an official “missionary to the world.”

Though I had left the military, I was still a soldier of Christ, only now my weapons were truth and love. I was no longer the emperor’s secret emissary.” Instead, I landed on American soil as “God’s ambassador.”

Launching the Korean Cultural and Freedom Foundation

I did miss being able to wear my uniform. The Republic of Korea’s flag and the uniform of its army were two items that had been integral to my life for a long time. Naturally, I wanted to begin my work with a patriotic project to elevate the position of my homeland and its people.

In the America of 1965, the aftereffects of the Korean War were still evident. The word “Korea” was most closely associated with war, poverty, and orphans. Korea was the place where Americans sent used clothing and other goods for refugee relief, and Americans were adopting war orphans from Korea. I was grateful to them, but as a person who took great pride in Korea and its people, this association with neediness was hard to bear.

I wanted to proclaim that Korea has a rich history of five thousand years and that Koreans possess a praiseworthy culture. I wanted to let people know that Koreans had an unparalleled anti-communist spirit and that we had sacrificed more than anyone, not just for our own freedom but for that of all the world’s people. After much thought, I decided that the best way to do this would be to emphasize “culture” and the spirit of freedom.” This is how I came to create the Korean Cultural and Freedom Foundation.

I sought advice on this matter from former Ambassador Yoo Chan Yang, whom I had first met following my long taxi ride from Georgia in 1952 and who was living in Washington at the time. The ambassador was enthusiastic about my ideas and assured me that he would cooperate in any way he could. His words made me feel as though I had gained the help of an army of a thousand men.

Ambassador Yang was an extremely gifted diplomat, a fervent patriot, and a strong anti-communist. His English was excellent, and he had a sense of humor that was well appreciated by Americans. He was a wonderful person with whom to work.

I set up an office in Washington and took the necessary steps to establish the foundation. I asked Ambassador Yang to take the position of vice president and the legendary American naval hero Admiral Arleigh Burke to become president. Because of these two men, we were able to have former U.S. Presidents Dwight D. Eisenhower and Harry S. Truman serve as honorary presidents, which made it possible for the foundation to establish contacts with many of the most important people in America.

It was decided that the official name would be the Korean Cultural and Freedom Foundation, Inc. People who loved Korea came forward to be its supporters.

It was well known that President Eisenhower and President Truman had never gotten along together, so it became quite a story in the news media at the time that these two men had come together to create a foundation to promote Korea's culture and spirit of freedom. Many senators and congressmen agreed to become advisers to the foundation. The Internal Revenue Service quickly approved the foundation for tax-exempt status, making donations tax-deductible.

However, although the foundation had a name and a structure, it lacked one essential—money. As the foundation's secretary-general, it was my responsibility to procure funds, and in order to raise funds, it was necessary to come up with a concrete plan of action.

We decided to work in two areas. First, in the area of culture, the foundation decided it would support performances of the Little Angels, a Korean children's dance group specializing in traditional Korean dance. The Little Angels were "angels of peace," and they effectively used dance and song to introduce people around the world to Korea's unique culture. Second, the foundation chose Radio of Free Asia to promote the Republic of Korea's shining spirit of freedom in a world where the ideological conflict of the cold war continued and also to broadcast truth to the masses of people living behind the Iron Curtain.



The Little Angels in a scene from: The Fan Dance

The Little Angels

The Little Angels dance troupe was founded in 1962 by Reverend Moon. Since then, they have gone on numerous world tours and visited almost every corner of the globe. They were awarded the gold medal for promoting the global position of the Republic of Korea.

It is amazing how popular this children's dance troupe has been with audiences all around the world, accomplishing things with cultural diplomacy that state diplomacy could not. Over the past several decades, the Little Angels have become the face of Korea both in name and in fact.

It was Reverend Moon who foresaw that such a troupe could bring wonderful results and took the initiative to found it. I was still working at the Washington embassy when he sent the message that he was concerned about the future of the country and that he intended to create a children's dance troupe whose role would be to let the world know about Korea's rich traditions in both dance and music. He said it was important that this group be able to travel throughout the world and that he wanted me to create a base for this in the United States.

I completely agreed with his proposal. More than anything, I was moved by Reverend Moon's deep patriotism and his desire to restore Korea's image in the world. There was part of this proposal that I couldn't understand, however. "Why," I asked him in a letter, "does this have to be a troupe of children? Are you sure you want me to take a group of runny-nosed children and put them on stages around the world?"

Reverend Moon's reply was very inspiring. He said: "Children symbolize peace. All the people of the world love children. Children can transcend differences of race, religion, and ideology. Jesus said, 'Unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.' [Matthew 18:3] The Book of Isaiah [11:6] says, '...and a little child shall lead them.' The purity and honesty of the children is what the world needs. They're not after money or glory. They're not caught up in relations with the opposite sex. They just dance and have fun. They are the best symbol of the Kingdom of Heaven. No one can express Korea's love of peace better than our children."

I have accompanied the Little Angels on tour around the world for the past thirty-some years, and I have seen again and again that Reverend Moon prophesied correctly. There has been no place in the world where the Little Angels were not welcomed with open arms. These young angels truly have been the messengers of peace.

We discovered that the Little Angels possess incredible power: the power of love and beauty. They have been able to break down every barrier. No one has been able to keep their hearts from melting. The Little

Angels were invited to the White House many times. President Richard M. Nixon invited them to perform at a state dinner held in honor of British Prime Minister Edward Heath. All the dignitaries present were spellbound by the children's playfulness, their singing and their dancing. They completely upstaged the main attraction of the evening, which was the "David Frost Show."

The General Assembly Hall of the United Nations Building is rarely used for performances, but the Little Angels are the exception that proves the rule. They performed in this hall – despite objections from the Soviet Union. The traditional Korean melodies echoed in the General Assembly Hall as the music of peace.

Queen Elizabeth II invited the Little Angels for a command performance. Afterward, all members of the troupe were invited to a royal reception. This was unprecedented. After this, the Little Angels were flooded with invitations from heads of state and royal families of European countries.



The author with Queen Elizabeth II after the Little Angels command performance

Even the Iron Curtain could not stop the Little Angels. At a time when the Republic of Korea and the Soviet Union had not yet established diplomatic relations, Soviet First Lady Raisa Gorbachev invited the Little Angels to Moscow for a historic performance. The performance hall was packed with dignitaries.

During more than three decades of world tours the Little Angels have performed in sixty-seven countries. Their more than three thousand stage performances and more than three hundred television performances have substantially raised the world community's respect for Korea and its culture. Their accomplishments are

unprecedented in Korean history.

In 1967, the Little Angels performed at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. At the finale, the audience of journalists and other media people went wild with applause and cheers. Afterward, Mrs. David LeRoy, wife of the president of the National Press Club, came backstage and said as she wiped the tears from her eyes, "I've never regretted the fact that I am not rich more than I have this evening. If I were rich, I would devote all my wealth to send the Little Angels around the world seven times. Then our world would become a world of peace."

I have seen many people weep as they watched the Little Angels perform. These are not tears of sorrow. People are often busy and lonely as they go through their lives in this spiritually polluted world, but when they see our pure and beautiful young angels, their original nature is stimulated and tears well up from deep within them tears of joy. The Little Angels are innocent and adorable. People feel like they are experiencing something that is not of this world. They are getting a taste of the Kingdom of Heaven.

This is the power of the Little Angels that I often talk about: the power of natural beauty, purity, and love, a power that builds rather than destroys.

However, the beginning of the Little Angels was neither grand nor illustrious. We rented a humble house in Seoul – the roof leaked every time it rained – where about a dozen children of Unification Church families received dance lessons. No one imagined then that these children would reach a level where they could perform around the world.

I met these youngsters for the first time in 1964, after my return to Korea following my assignment at the Korean Embassy in Washington. Miss Soon Shim Shin, the founding president of the troupe, was waging a lonely battle armed only with his faith that the impossible could be made possible. I stood before the children and declared that they would make their first tour of the United States in the following year, that is, 1965, as the first project taken on by the newly established Korean Cultural and Freedom Foundation. It sounded unbelievable, but it inspired the children to put all their effort into their lessons. I simply trusted my own faith and the words of Reverend Moon. I did not want to disappoint Miss Shin and the children, who were carrying on a lonely struggle.

Even though we had no money, a miracle happened and the tour became reality. On September 20, 1965, after flying halfway around the world, the Little Angels visited former President Dwight D. Eisenhower, honorary chairman of the KCF. The Little Angels' first performance on American soil took place in the garden of the Eisenhower residence in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania.

President Eisenhower applauded and smiled his famous "Ike smile" throughout the performance. At the end, he praised the children saying, "The angels in heaven are in big trouble because of you angels from Korea. The angels in heaven are going to have to work hard to keep up with you."



A delighted President Dwight D. Eisenhower receives a gift from one of the Little Angels after a special performance at the former presidents home in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania

The next day, the Little Angels officially opened their American tour at the Washington Hilton in Washington, D.C., with a performance before an audience of dignitaries associated with the KCFF.

The Little Angels' first American tour was a tremendous success. They performed in a number of cities around the country and created a sensation. Reverend Moon's judgment had been correct. The reason the children were so popular everywhere they went was that they were undefiled girls and boys – actually, the boys were very few – between the ages of eight and fifteen. Once they got onstage, however, they demonstrated total mastery of their repertoire. Being children, they had unlimited energy. At the same time, they demonstrated a high level of accomplishment in their dancing skills.

The children enjoyed themselves throughout the tour. When they were not performing, they were usually laughing and singing. They helped each other as though they were real sisters and brothers. They usually stayed five to a room in hotels, and the older ones were responsible to watch over the others. Even when bus trips lasted many hours, they were never bored. Our buses were always filled with the sounds of the

children talking, playing, and singing. Eventually, they would get tired and fall asleep.

We started a tradition of praying together onstage immediately before each performance. It was a simple prayer, but the sound of the children praying was beautiful: Our Father in heaven, thank you very much. Our Father in heaven, thank you very much. We pray in the name of our Lord, amen.”

Then the curtain would go up. The bright stage lights would shine on the children, their faces carefully made up. Their beauty was not of this world. In fact, the word “beautiful” does not even come close to doing them justice. There was a sense of sacredness about them. As I watched them perform, I felt as though I was in God's presence.

At every performance, the Little Angels excited and inspired the audience. The children were happy and put all their energies into each performance. There were never any feelings of regret following a performance. They did not care about money or fame. They weren't interested in impressing members of the opposite sex. They danced and sang solely for the honor of Korea and the glory of God.

At the end of a performance, the audience would always give a standing ovation.

This is how the children planted a different view of Korea in the hearts of everyone in the audience. They were impressed in a way they were unlikely to ever forget.

Once the curtain was down, a kind of controlled chaos would break out. We had to pack our gear as quickly as possible and load it all in the luggage space in the lower section of the bus. While this work was going on, everyone had to be fully involved; it didn't matter if a person was old or young, man or woman. Even the elderly musicians who played classical Korean music on traditional instruments had to work. Nor were exceptions made for the youngest children on the tour. Everyone would work together, and we would finish loading in a half hour.

They were better than the most well-trained army – and they were not being coerced. As they rode the bus through the night, the children would still be excited from all the applause that they had received. They would start singing as soon as the bus began moving.

Heaven and Hell in the American Tour

The children referred to me as their “American daddy.” For as long as they were touring America, they were my sons and daughters, and I truly loved, served, and taught each of them as I would my own son or daughter. I tried to teach them three basic principles.

“You can dance beautifully,” I would tell them, “only if you have a beautiful heart. You can sing beautifully only if you have a beautiful heart. You can have a beautiful face only if you have a beautiful

heart.” These words were easy to understand, but they contained profound philosophical meaning. I was telling them that art is an expression of a person’s inner character and that they should first be people with beautiful hearts.

To have a beautiful heart, I told them, they had to practice honesty, kindness, and service. They could build a wonderful character for themselves by concentrating on those three virtues. Beautiful hearts take root and sprout in the child who is honest, kind, and serves others. In the terminology of the Divine Principle, this is the practice of true love.

Later, when the Little Angels Performing Arts School was established, these three words became the school motto. For high school students, a fourth word was added: “purity.”

The Little Angels on tour were a tiny community that lived by these principles, and for my wife and me it was always like living in heaven. My wife was busy fulfilling her role as their “American mommy.” She worked to prepare many jars of kimchi, and she made sure that the bulgogi [marinated beef] was cooked well. She prepared a party for each child who celebrated a birthday while on tour.

However, once the children completed their journey around America and returned to Korea, my wife and I went straight from heaven to hell. Why hell? As long as the Little Angels were with us in America, my wife and I did our best for them without any regard for finances or other issues that might come up after they went home. As far as we were concerned, they were royalty, little princes and princesses who were visiting America from Korea. The performances did not bring much revenue, however. Since they were supported by the KCFF, it was up to the foundation to provide financial support. The foundation itself, though, had only just been created. Funds were extremely limited.

So as soon as my wife and I saw the children off on their flight to Korea, we found ourselves buried under a mountain of debt. There are few things more painful than the suffering caused by worries over money. Creditors in various parts of America would start demanding that we at least pay the interest on our debts. My wife and I just threw up our hands in resignation.

By the time the Little Angels finished their autumn tour, stores and neighborhoods would be decorated with Christmas lights, and Christmas carols could be heard everywhere, but my wife and I found it hard to enjoy the holiday spirit. Our hearts were too heavy. How could we repay the debts that the Little Angels had left behind?

I wrote a letter describing our very difficult situation and sent it to twelve people among the many dignitaries who had formed a relationship with the KCFF. The letter included a sincere request for financial assistance in carrying out this very worthwhile cultural project. No one had replied. My wife and I were completely discouraged.

One day, we decided to treat ourselves to a meal at a restaurant as a way to give ourselves some encouragement. We each ordered a simple dish and were about to start eating when the restaurant manager came and told us we had a phone call. We both assumed it was another creditor demanding money, and this thought immediately ruined our appetites.

I took the receiver and was surprised to recognize the voice on the other end as that of my secretary at the foundation office. “Mr. Pak,” she said, “an extremely important piece of mail was just delivered. It’s from Mrs. Wallace.” Lila Acheson Wallace, co-founder of the Readers Digest, was one of the twelve people to whom I had sent letters.

“Really?” I told her. “Well, open it and read it to me.”

I held my breath as I waited. The secretary cut the envelope open and then let out a cry. “Mr. Pak, it’s a check. It’s a check. It’s a check for twenty-five thousand dollars! And there’s a note. It says ‘Merry Christmas to the Little Angels.’” I couldn’t help but burst into tears. When I returned to our table and told my wife, her head slumped down against her chest and she began to cry, too. God had not been unmindful of our situation after all. In tears, we prayed together in gratitude.

Twenty-five thousand dollars was a lot of money in 1965. It was enough for me to pay all the expenses for the tour, including the airfare owed to Northwest Airlines. I later told Mrs. Wallace, “You saved the Little Angels Performing Arts Troupe.”

From then on, Mrs. Wallace became a backer of the Little Angels. Every year, she would make a donation of \$25,000. In large part, it was due to Mrs. Wallace’s generosity that the Little Angels were able to continue their American tours during the early years.

Later on, Mrs. Wallace attended a performance and commented, “I have helped a lot of cultural projects, but none has given me as much joy as supporting these angels. These little angels are angels of peace.”