

Former Pyeonghwa Motors Executive Sang Kwon Park Honored by North Korean Government

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As of December 2012, former President of Pyeonghwa Motors Sang Kwon Park became the second Korean-American to receive honorary citizenship from the DPRK.

Mr. Sang Kwon Park, president of joint-venture automaker Pyeonghwa (Peace) Motors, became the second U.S. citizen and first foreign national under North Korea's new leader Kim Jong Un to receive honorary citizenship from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) late last year. According to Park, he received the citizenship at the Mansudae Assembly Hall in Pyongyang on December 18, 2012, but the news was not publicly announced until January 2013.

James (Chin-Kyung) Kim, who contributed to the founding of the Pyongyang University of Science and Technology (PUST), the first privately-funded university allowed in the DPRK, was the first Korean-American to receive honorary citizenship in 2011 by late North Korean leader Kim Jong Il.

"Both Mr. Kim and Mr. Park have done remarkable work in the DPRK," wrote Dr. Mark Barry, an adjunct professor at the Unification Theological Seminary (UTS), to Unificationnews.com. He continued: "Mr. Park has worked with utmost dedication in North Korea since the 1990s. As a U.S. citizen, he has made more trips to the North than any other American."



James (Chin-Kyung) Kim was the first U.S. Citizen to receive an honorary citizenship from North Korea. Photo: Benjamin Lowy/Reportage by Getty Images.

According to South Korea's Yonhap News Agency, Park "his citizenship has a serial number of 002 and has an inscription saying that the honor is being bestowed because of his contribution to the fatherland and the Korean people."

Pyeonghwa Motors, one of two car manufacturers in North Korea, is a joint-venture between Unification Church-affiliated Pyeonghwa Motors in Seoul, South Korea, and the North Korean Ryonbong General Corp. In 2002, when its first production line was completed, Pyeonghwa Motors sold only a few hundred cars, yet in more recent years, the number has approached 2,000, according to Park, and the company had turned a modest profit in the last few years. The company, along with the Potonggong Hotel, in which Unification Church affiliates also invested, was recently handed over to North Korean management.

"Our relinquishing management of Pyeonghwa Motors and the Potonggong Hotel to the DPRK appears to be a natural evolution," said Dr. Barry. "That may be why Mr. Park seeks new business opportunities there." On the same topic, Yonhap similarly reported that Park saw "a need to show that a wholly-owned (outside-invested) company that is not tied to a joint venture project with a North Korean partner can succeed in the country, which can act as an incentive for other foreign companies to invest."

"If 200 competitive South Korean companies operate in the North, there would be no reason for inter-Korean tensions, and it can actually help push forward the unification process," Park said in an interview with Yonhap. Park also mentioned North Korea's plans to develop a ski resort near the city of Wonsan that could attract tourists throughout the year.



An advertisement displays the image of a car from Pyeonghwa Motors in Pyongyang.

When asked how he is contributing to the reconciliation between North and South Korea during an interview with *Today's World* in December 2011 Park said, "I cannot tell you everything, but I am making great efforts. More important than the company is peace. In order to bring unity, we have to bring our hearts and minds together. We need to win the hearts and minds of the North Korean people."

Park said that his efforts to facilitate such reconciliation are "based on the idea of true love. True love wants to live together, coexist. We are the same. We have a common origin. We have the same lineage, the same blood, the same culture. Which religion will be at the center of unification? The church that has the most love, the church that loves North Korea the most, that sacrifices itself the most, that forgives North Korea the most, unconditionally. I hope that our church can become that one, because our name is 'Unification Church.'"



Park accompanied Rev. Hyung Jin Moon to Pyongyang last September, where they met Kim Jong Un's uncle and Vice Chairman of the National Defense Commission, Jang Song Taek, who conveyed Kim's personal condolences upon the passing of Rev. Sun Myung Moon. Park also accompanied Rev. and Mrs. Hyung Jin Moon on a trip to Pyongyang in early December 2011 to commemorate the 20th anniversary of Rev. and Mrs. Sun Myung Moon's original visit and meeting with the late President Kim Il Sung. In addition, Park accompanied Rev. Hyung Jin Moon in a follow-up trip in late December 2011 to attend the funeral of the late leader, Kim Jong Il.

In the same interview with *Today's World*, Park said, "Many people ask how I work in North Korea. It's very simple: I really love them. I deal with them honestly. In the beginning you may lie, but a month later, a year later or eighteen years later, it will be discovered. And they will think badly of you. But for 18 years I've been there, and I've never told them untruths. Therefore, they say, 'Oh, people sent by Rev. Moon don't lie.'

"There are a lot of wealthy people in the South. We in the South have not experienced hunger so much, but North Koreans often go hungry. They've shed more tears, they've shivered more often in the cold, they've suffered more, and they've faced more difficulties. The reason South Koreans live well now is not only for South Korea, it is for the North as well, to share with North Korea, to share with its neighbor. More than anything, we have to win the North Koreans' trust. We need to help them to trust us. That is the role I am trying to play. If I go there and do my sincere best, they will say they can trust people from the Unification Church."