

A Contextual Analysis of Onnuri Church's

“Love Sonata” “Cultural Evangelism Gatherings” in Japan

REV. J. NELSON JENNINGS

Mission Pastor, Consultant, International Liaison
Onnuri Church, Seoul

ABSTRACT

SINCE ITS BEGINNING IN 2007 through 2019, Onnuri Church's Love Sonata musical outreach extravaganza has been held thirty times in cities all across Japan (and four elsewhere in Asia). Capitalizing on the wildly popular 2002 “Winter Sonata” Korean TV drama (“Fuyu Sonata” in Japan), Pastor Ha Yong-Jo instigated a “cultural evangelism gathering” involving Christian Korean musicians performing and himself preaching an evangelistic message. Hundreds of Onnuri Church volunteers have paid their own way to go and pray, make gift boxes, greet newcomers, and otherwise support each Love Sonata event.

As a Korean outreach to Japan, Love Sonata provides an illuminating case study of cross-cultural missions in challenging

circumstances. Korea and Japan are close in many ways, yet in other ways they are very far apart. Studying various aspects of the interpersonal interactions involved in the Love Sonata enterprise sheds instructive light on how mission service is embedded in actual history, often involving significant cultural barriers.

Supported by qualitative research from interviews with both Japanese and Korean participants, plus drawing on the author's thirteen-year Japan-based experience and five-year Korea-based experience, this study offers a multifaceted analysis of Love Sonata in order not to evaluate or make recommendations but to understand its overall contextual characteristics.

INTRODUCTION

NO ONE COULD HAVE foreseen, when it was first broadcast in South Korea from mid-January to mid-March in 2002, the broad ripple effects of the TV mini-series “겨울연가” (*Gyeoul Yeonga* in Korean; “Winter Sonata”). This twenty-episode drama of love and heartbreak accelerated the “Korean Wave” sweeping over the rest of Asia (Lee 2011), including when the series aired multiple times in Japan in 2003–2004 (KBS 2004; Ito 2006, 60, 62). The Korean-Japanese cultural connection forged by 「冬のソナタ」 (*Fuyu no Sonata* in Japanese; “Winter Sonata”) set the stage for the Seoul-based Onnuri Church's “Love Sonata,” an innovative evangelistic outreach in Japan that began in 2007 and continues to this day.

Two early studies of “Love Sonata,” one in English (Takamizawa 2008) and one in Korean (Do 2010), explored the event for its missiological strategy. This article updates and locates “Love Sonata” in a wider historical and multifaceted setting. Love Sonata is analyzed through considering the initiative's origins, planning, execution, reception, effects, and prospects.

BACKGROUND

Several factors coalesced to prepare the way for Onnuri Church's Love Sonata. There were additional historical trends that stretched back further than the "Winter Sonata" TV melodrama. The central figure who conceived the Love Sonata phenomenon was Onnuri Church Senior Pastor Ha Yong-Jo.

Ha Yong-Jo

The late Rev. Ha Yong-Jo (1946–2011) grew up in poverty and displacement. Ha was born to a Christian family in northern Korea in the immediate aftermath of the 1910–1945 Japanese Occupation. His family fled southward during the Korean War, and Ha's lifelong suffering from acute illnesses began soon thereafter. After coming to his own deepened personal faith at age twenty, Ha passionately gave himself to evangelism and eventually came to terms with his calling to become a pastor. Ha wanted to be a foreign missionary, but health limitations kept him in Korea. After beginning a church for celebrities, followed by a medical sabbatical in England, in 1985 Ha began with twelve families what became Onnuri Church. Especially after Ha began a Charismatic "Holy Spirit ministry" in the early 1990s, the church exploded in growth over the next two decades until Ha's death in 2011 (Ha 2017, 24–85, 275).

Onnuri Church's programmatic growth was spurred along by an awe-inspiring vision, announced by Pastor Ha in 1994, to send out two thousand missionaries and raise up ten thousand supporting lay ministers (Moon 2017, 210). Specifically regarding Japan, five years earlier Onnuri Church had begun a Japanese Saturday school and Sunday worship service for the several Japanese residents living nearby in Seoul. The first Onnuri "Vision church" (international branch church) in Japan began in 1994. Four more Vision churches were started in Japan around the time Ha was on a medical sabbatical there in 2001. During a 2002 retreat for the growing Onnuri network in Japan, Ha declared, "I have a vision that the church in Japan will stand up and jump. . . . Revival is

on its way, soon to be met by the Japanese church” (Moon 2017, 235–37).

Under Pastor Ha’s visionary leadership, Onnuri Church’s ministries grew dramatically with the launch of Onnuri TV in 2000, which expanded further into Onnuri’s global satellite TV network, Christian Global Network (CGN) TV, in 2005. Particularly noteworthy in terms of reach and capacity was the live broadcast of the Jerusalem Peace March in August 2005 (Moon 2017, 194–98). Soon afterward, Ha and some associates began visiting live productions in Las Vegas and elsewhere to research lighting, stage setting, sound control, and special effects. Ha described how God had given him a vision to direct Onnuri Church’s resources to Japan in 2007, which was surprising since that year was the centenary celebration in Korea of the 1907 Pyongyang Revival. After extensive prayer gatherings, Love Sonata events were held in Okinawa, Fukuoka, Osaka, then Tokyo (Ha 2017, 327–28, 334–37).

In Ha’s words, Love Sonata was “God’s love song for Japan,” using culture and evangelism directed toward the next generation as its main methods (Ha 2017, 328, 334). Ha’s heartfelt repentance before God, and public apology to Japanese, for being proud toward Japanese for having been the ones persecuted (CGNTV 2018, 9:50–12:14), as well as for not forgiving and harboring anger toward Japanese people for their atrocities against Koreans, is often cited within Onnuri circles as a special act of forgiveness and reconciliation (Ha 2017, 329–30; Takamizawa 2008, 158). While some critics point to his misuse of business models (Ha 2017, 255–62), it was Rev. Ha Yong-Jo’s vision, passion, innovation, leadership, use of entertainment techniques, and spirituality that instigated and shaped the Love Sonata phenomenon.

Korean Christianity

Rev. Ha Yong-Jo and Onnuri Church are part of Christianity in Korea. Like many other megachurches and their pastors in South Korea, Onnuri Church and Ha Yong-Jo came to prominence in the long wake of abject poverty, displacement, war, and suffering.

Korean Christians were among those most targeted for persecution by the Japanese military from 1910 and then by Korean Communists during the Korean War. Economic transformation slowly began to progress in the 1960s (Cha 2008). Revival, growth, passionate prayer, and zealous evangelism allowed many churches to emerge from those ashes of hardship and suffering, with Onnuri Church beginning in 1985.

Korean Christianity had experienced both struggles and revival before the Japanese Occupation. The Korean Catholic Church, its seeds sown through Chinese Christian literature in the seventeenth century and first confession of faith in 1784, suffered greatly under Korean authorities, particularly with the loss of around eight thousand martyrs in 1866 (Grimaldi 2014; Kim and Ko 2018). Korean Protestant Christianity marks its beginning in the 1880s in connection with the arrival of Western missionaries and their establishment of churches, hospitals, and schools. Korean Christians worked alongside missionaries in planting new churches and experienced sweeping revivals in the early 1900s, especially around Pyongyang in 1907, accelerating the depth and breadth of churches throughout the Korean Peninsula. Zealous, early morning prayer became a hallmark of Korean Christianity to this day. The 1910 Japanese Occupation ushered in a mixture of struggle, complicity, and displacement for many Koreans, including Christians, over the next half century. Transport of many Koreans to Japan contributed to the large presence today of *Zainichi*, or Koreans living in Japan.

All sorts of churches have taken root in Korea, including many with charismatic characteristics. Several churches experienced explosive growth alongside the rapid growth of the South Korean economy in the 1970s and 1980s. Megachurches mushroomed and became known worldwide, most famously Yoido Full Gospel Church and Pastor Cho Yonggi (David). Mission zeal propelled Korean missionaries over the twenty thousand threshold, serving in Japan, the rest of Asia, and indeed worldwide.

Korea-Japan Relations

Historically, relations between Korea and Japan have been mixed. Positively, there has been robust economic trade, given the two nations' proximity. Cultural exchanges have ranged from religion to Chinese script to food to entertainment and sports. Even species of cherry blossoms have been exchanged. Negatively, Japan has on occasion militarily invaded Korea as part of its wider ambitions, for example under Hideyoshi Toyotomi's grandiose ambitions in the 1590s. Japan's 1910–1945 occupation of Korea left a particularly bitter sentiment among most Koreans, accompanied by unresolved disputes such as over islands (Dokdo or Takeshima), Japanese treatment of Korean laborers and “comfort women,” and whether or not Japan has ever genuinely apologized. The author's recent and extensive encounters with younger Koreans, none of whom directly experienced the Japanese Occupation, suggests that unresolved trauma persists almost without exception with respect to Japan and Japanese people.

Increased travel and reporting back and forth during the 1980s, which included the “극일” (“beat Japan”) campaign of South Korean President Chun Doo-Hwan (1980–1988), had succeeded the more restricted period of information flow during the authoritarian presidency of Park Chung-Hee (1963–1979). South Koreans' freedom to explore and express unresolved historical disputes with Japan, changing relations in all of East Asia introduced by the end of the Cold War, and heightened lambasting by some Koreans and Japanese of each other on the new Internet offset greater understanding and appreciation of each other that developed further through greater cultural and interpersonal exchanges (Isozaki, 2017).

A 2010 opinion poll of Japan-Korea relations, jointly conducted by the Korean Broadcasting System (KBS) and the Japan Broadcasting Corporation (NHK), revealed a wide range of feelings and beliefs among Japanese and Koreans, both about themselves and about each other. As to their feelings about each other, more Japanese liked Koreans than vice versa. Comparison with

two previous surveys indicated that both Japanese people's like of Koreans, as well as Koreans' dislike of Japanese, had increased over the previous twenty years. Concerning Korea-Japan relations, more Japanese than Koreans felt relations were "good," while far more Koreans than Japanese considered themselves knowledgeable about the Japanese Occupation of Korea (Kono and Hara 2011, 6-7, 9-10, 23-24, 32-33). These results revealed the conflicted mixture of positive and negative feelings and images that Japanese and Koreans hold about each other.

The 2010 poll also asked, "Whose name come [sic] to mind first when you think of Koreans/Japanese?" Korean respondents overwhelmingly noted Ito Hirobumi, the first Japanese colonial resident-general of Korea. Of particular relevance to this study is how the Japanese responded—by an even greater margin over the next person mentioned than with the Koreans' list—with the name of Bae Yong-Joon, Korean actor and lead male star of "Fuyu Sonata." Moreover, when looking at the names overall that respondents listed, poll interpreters have noted,

The genres of important names chosen by Japanese ("entertainers" and "politicians and businessmen") are completely different from those chosen by Koreans ("historical figures" and "athletes"). . . . These results suggest the strong influence of Korean popular culture ("Hanryu") in Japan today while Korea still feels the strong influence of certain historical figures. (Kono and Hara 2011, 27-28)

The results also suggest the particular importance in Japan, at least as of 2010, of the Korean TV drama "Fuyu no Sonata."

Fuyu No Sonata

As mentioned earlier Pastor Ha Yong-Jo, according to his own testimony, was led by the Holy Spirit to instigate "God's love song for Japan." As just described, it was from within Korean Christianity and thorny relations between Japan and Korea that Ha launched this new venture. The megahit, twenty-episode TV melodrama

“Winter Sonata” provided the cultural catalyst that helped to trigger Ha’s decision to pursue the cultural evangelism gathering “Love Sonata,” beginning in 2007.

When “겨울연가” (“Winter Sonata”) first aired in 2002, “The sob-fest love story [was] regarded as just another popular TV series in Korea” (Lee 2011). In Japan, however, the series’ 2003–2004 four airings on NHK (Hayashi and Lee 2007, 198) captivated record-setting audiences. Top-selling books, videos, and DVDs, popular websites, and travel packages to the filming site in Korea soon followed (Ito 2006, 60–61; Kamiya 2004), as did a twenty-six-episode 2009 *anime* version shown in both Korea and Japan (Kyodo News, 2009). 「冬のソナタ」 (“Fuyu no Sonata,” “Winter Sonata”), or 「冬ソナ」 (“Fuyusona”), as it popularly came to be called, was unquestionably a social and cultic phenomenon of major proportions in Japan (Lee 2011). While the 2002 World Cup co-hosted by Korea and Japan would be more widely considered to have been a bridge-building event for the two countries, in actual fact it was “Winter Sonata” that more successfully broke down the invisible dividing wall (Kubo and Katase 2016).

As noted earlier, the lead male actor Bae Yong-Joon was catapulted into “heartthrob” status in Japan, particularly among middle-aged women, who endearingly called him “Yon-Sama” (Lee 2011). Bae was mobbed by thousands of female fans at Haneda Airport when he visited Japan in 2004 (Yasuko 2004), prompting Japan’s Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro famously to quip that Bae was more popular in Japan than he was (Lee 2011). Bae and lead female co-star Choi Ji-Woo, who had also risen to stardom in Japan, appeared together before an overflow crowd packed into Tokyo Dome in 2009, coinciding with the *anime* release.

There have been numerous studies as to why “Winter Sonata,” and the actor Bae Yong-Joon, became such a megahit in unprecedented fashion for a Korean drama in Japan. Many point to the numerous subplots involving attractive actors enmeshed in various types of slowly revealed, complicated relationships (including pseudo incestuous). Some credit the excellent acting, experienced directing, melancholic music, and breathtaking

scenery. Undoubtedly it is the deep, heartfelt, and ever-evolving but undying central storyline of the love between Kang Joon-Sang/Lee Min-Hyung (spoiler alert: the same character, played by Bae Yong-Joon) and Jeong Yoo-Jin (played by Choi Ji-Woo). This made watching “Fuyu no Sonata” essentially a “spiritual or religious experience” for many Japanese (Ito 2006, 65).

Particularly strategic for casting light on both why and how “Winter Sonata” made the cultural connection that it did for Pastor Ha’s and Onnuri Church’s “Love Sonata” venture is comparing Japanese and Korean perceptions of what the melodrama’s popularity actually entailed. Given the substantial volume of analyses of “Fuyusona” mania, naturally there are numerous explanations, both Japanese and Korean. As representatives of both a certain level of cultural expertise and popular thinking, each country’s media presentations exhibit identifiable characteristics that enable meaningful comparisons. In general, Japanese media have pointed to Japanese middle-aged women falling for the melodrama and its handsome and romantic “Yon-Sama,” Bae Yong-Joon. Korean media, by contrast, have tended to describe the Fuyu no Sonata phenomenon as part of *Hallyu*, or the “Korean Wave” of cultural impact throughout China and Southeast Asia that Japan had finally joined (Hayashi and Lee 2007, 199).

Capitalizing on the expansion of the “Korean Wave” into Japan, and sensing the deep resonance that many Japanese had experienced through the love story in “Winter Sonata,” Rev. Ha Yong-Jo launched Onnuri Church’s “Love Sonata” venture of “cultural evangelism” into Christianity-resistant Japan (Moon 2017, 238). Ha envisioned riding the crest of *hallyu* to cause a “wave of love” and of “reconciliation and forgiveness” to sweep over Japan, then the rest of Asia and the entire world (Ha 2017, 328–29, 332, 337). While Ha’s vision is open to criticism as having been much too grandiose, his expectation for revival to envelop Japan as it had Korea a century earlier, spearheaded by “Love Sonata,” cannot be exaggerated.

THE LOVE SONATA PROGRAM

By the end of 2019, Onnuri Church had put on thirty Love Sonata events across Japan (Love Sonata n.d.). (Four additional Love Sonata events were held in four different Southeast Asian countries between 2008 and 2011, before Pastor Ha's death in August 2011.) The first two were in March 2007, on consecutive nights in Okinawa and Fukuoka. Two-day events became the continuing pattern in Osaka in May. The Tokyo Love Sonata in July was particularly noteworthy for its sheer size: five thousand came from Onnuri Church in Korea, and the main event drew a crowd of twenty thousand at the Saitama Super Arena (Ha 2017, 346–47). Love Sonata's were also held in Sapporo and Sendai in 2007. Hence from an Onnuri Church point of view the Love Sonata wave had swept across all of Japan, from south to north. There were another four events in 2008 (plus one in Taiwan), then a pattern of semi-annual events that began in 2009 (Moon 2017, 248).

As noted earlier, Rev. Ha and Onnuri Church describe Love Sonata as a “cultural evangelism gathering” (“문화전도집회”; “文化伝道集会”). As Ha put it, “I thought that if we invited Korean celebrities who are popular and influential in Japan, many Japanese would show interest. Many Japanese who do not know Jesus may very well be interested in the Korean Wave, and many Korean celebrities are Christians” (Ha 2017, 334). Onnuri Church had already been using “customized evangelism” and “seeker-friendly” approaches since the mid-1990s (Ha 2017, 250–62; Moon 2017, 238–39), so instigating the Love Sonata approach was effectively taking the same, familiar tack. The newly established CGNTV-Japan enabled wider networking of churches in Japan and broadcasting of Love Sonata, further creating a cutting-edge feel.

The Climactic Meeting

An evangelistic meeting on the second evening culminates every Love Sonata event. A major civic venue is rented, which in itself is almost always unprecedented and unimaginable for the small,

under resourced Japanese local churches taking part. Admission tickets are offered free through churches, as organized by the local planning committee.

After varied openings with videos, choral welcomes, and exquisite sand animations, the gala performance features several individual Korean Christian musicians giving vocal or instrumental performances and sharing their Christian testimonies. Many of these musicians have performed in multiple Love Sonatas. The first Japanese ever to perform at a Love Sonata was classical guitarist Antonio Koga. Having recently confessed his faith in Christ and received baptism, Koga appeared at the 2017 Tokyo Love Sonata. Also noteworthy at that same 2017 Tokyo Love Sonata was Winter Sonata co-star Choi Ji-Woo walking on stage to give her Christian testimony. Choi also narrates a nearly one-hour Love Sonata ten-year retrospect, available on YouTube (CGNTV 2018). Other Christian Korean celebrities widely popular in Japan have made appearances, including several from 2009 to 2011 by Han Hye-Jin, who had recently become known in Japan for her starring role in the eighty-one-episode TV series and Korean historical drama “주몽” (“朱蒙,” “チュモン,” “Jumong”).

Amidst the celebrities' appearances and musician's performances, Pastor Ha always gave an evangelistic message and invitation. Ha's successor, Onnuri Church Senior Pastor Lee Jae-Hoon, has continued to give those messages since Ha's death in August 2011. Attendees are asked to complete a response card indicating a confession of faith or new commitment to Christian service. After the cards are collected by several Korean volunteers from Onnuri Church walking the aisles with baskets, guests open a box of gifts specially prepared by the Onnuri Church volunteers.

Other Meetings

Starting with the 2007 Osaka Love Sonata, church revival seminars are held on the first day (Moon 2017, 240). The current pattern is to have three seminars, two in the morning and one in the early afternoon after lunch. All are led by Korean, Onnuri

Church-related experts. The first seminar presents Pastor Ha's (and Onnuri Church's) ecclesiology and philosophy of ministry, while the second and third address concerns like education and church-society relations. As with the other events held during the two days, ample CGNTV cameras and personnel are present to record the proceedings. Duranno Publishing, also associated with Onnuri Church, has numerous books and related items on display for sale.

In keeping with the first day's focus on Christians, a "Gospel Night" of praise and a message is offered by and for area churches. While planning and results of Love Sonata events will be examined below, this "Gospel Night" gathering brings different churches together for planning, joint choirs, and strengthened relationships. While Onnuri Church musicians lend support, for the most part the evening is Japanese-led.

An additional feature that emerged at the 2007 Tokyo Love Sonata has been a "Korea-Japan Leadership Forum" (Moon 2017, 241). Onnuri Church's newly constituted "Christian CEO Forum (CCF)" sought to bring together Korean and Japanese leaders in business and society in order to strengthen ties and opportunities for collaboration (Moon 2017, 293-96). Currently a luncheon is held on the second day of the Love Sonata event, with Japanese and Korean leaders sitting together in groups of ten at round tables, facilitated by multilingual participants. Various dignitaries offer greetings, along with a special speaker or two.

Love Sonata focuses on children and younger adults as well. Along with spiritual study sessions, children learn song and dance numbers that they perform for the adults (CGNTV 2018, 27:07-31:07). A "Passion" rally focuses on middle and high school students, while an "Ezra" rally brings Korean and Japanese college students together for interaction. While Onnuri Church staff and organize these gatherings, Japanese speakers are invited to participate as speakers (Do 2010, 93-94; Takamizawa 2008, 152).

These four adult and youth gatherings comprise each two-day Love Sonata event. Other activities take place behind the scenes, including gift and venue preparation, a joint breakfast for Japanese

and Onnuri Church leaders, and an intense prayer gathering specially focused on the culminating evangelistic gala affair. Thirty Love Sonata events have been offered, some returning to the same city where a previous Love Sonata was held. The ten-year mark, especially the second Tokyo Love Sonata held in 2017, would have been a convenient stopping point. However, those responsible for such a decision have made a renewed commitment to continue this “Love Song for Japan” for the foreseeable future.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

An ongoing, international event of the magnitude and complexity of Love Sonata clearly needs a great deal of advanced coordination and planning. Indeed, before Love Sonata debuted in 2007 there was Japanese input (Moon 2017, 239), stage-event research by Pastor Ha, and initiatives by multiple organizations affiliated with Onnuri Church, including the aforementioned Vision churches in Japan, CGNTV, Duranno Publishing, and CCF. The entire project was bathed in fervent prayer by Onnuri Church who, like many other churches in Korea, held special year-end prayer meetings at the end of 2006 and at the beginning of 2007, particularly in one-hundred-year commemoration of the 1907 Pyongyang Revival. A special forty days of prayer for Japan highlighted the importance of 2007 for Onnuri Church (Ha 2017, 328–30).

Onnuri Church

러브소나타 (“Love Sonata”) is one of several Onnuri Church ministries that has its own structure and website (lovesonata.org) while functioning under the Onnuri umbrella. All of these ministries are major enterprises in their own right and have Onnuri Church’s Senior Pastor, currently Lee Jae-Hoon, as the official executive director. For Love Sonata, a semi-annual pattern of spring and fall events developed in 2009 after the flurry of the first two years.

Prayer, publicity, and other preparation now fit comfortably into Onnuri Church's annual rhythm.

A small Seoul-based staff coordinate record-keeping, calendars, recruitment, publicity, travel arrangements, and countless other particulars. CGNTV's central role of creating promotional videos, broadcasting and recording the actual Love Sonata events, and expanding antennae receptivity in upcoming Love Sonata event areas requires ongoing planning. The prominent place of the second-day leadership forum requires CCF's participation. Planning includes the arrangements for the several hundred Onnuri Church volunteers, who travel at their own expense for gift-making, sign-holding, prayer, and other often unsung roles.

Japanese Churches

Each site has a local steering committee, composed largely of area Japanese pastors. The committee takes shape at least one year in advance and attends at least two Love Sonata events prior to the one that they plan and manage in their own location. This committee bears much responsibility for local publicity, the logistics of event planning, and follow-up. Each event's committee coordinates with the ongoing committee of previous event chairpeople, the lone Japanese staff member, and Onnuri Church-related people in Seoul to provide continuity and expertise.

The important place of sharing finances merits particular attention. As a megachurch, Onnuri Church and its associated ministries far outstrip the Japanese churches that are involved in terms of people and financial resources. Even so, the Japanese churches underwrite certain portions of each Love Sonata event, as part of a conscious effort to bear their share of the financial responsibility.

CROSS-CULTURAL DYNAMICS

Love Sonata is full of cross-cultural interactions. Pastor Ha and other Onnuri leaders have been well aware of such cultural

realities, listing two of Love Sonata's four main "dreams" (along with "revival" and "mission") as Korean-Japanese "reconciliation" and use of "culture" for evangelism (Love Sonata n.d.). The several different groups of people involved experience the cultural dynamics in various ways.

Japanese

Church leaders in Japan who become involved as organizing committee members welcome the stimuli and challenges from Onnuri Church, but they also work through some difficult adjustments. Accustomed to existing as a small religious minority in Japan, the prospect of openly sponsoring a large, public, and expressly evangelistic event "helps stagnant Japanese local churches reignite a passion for evangelism" (anonymous interview with the author, November 2019).¹ This process can be stretching and uncomfortable. Japanese church leaders and members alike are not used to the free expressions of "愛します" ("I love you") that the Korean volunteers ring out verbally and on placards welcoming event attendees. Indeed, while many Japanese are favorably disposed to Korean celebrities and pop culture, confronted at the event with bright Korean colors, lines of Korean greeters, and the specially hand-made gifts of wreaths placed on attendees' heads at the main event's conclusion—a special Korean custom of honoring someone but a practice unknown and strange in Japan (and explicitly mentioned as such by a Japanese participant—amounts to a cultural shock for many Japanese attendees).

For Japanese people interacting with Koreans at Love Sonata events, hearing Korean spoken and sung, as well as hearing Japanese spoken with varying degrees of Korean accents, can have a deep effect. Through actual personal encounters, ingrained prejudices and misconceptions can bubble to the surface in numerous,

1. In November 2019, I conducted thirty-nine personal interviews with both Korean and Japanese parties variously involved with Love Sonata, instigated by the question, "What has been the most important effect of Love Sonata?"

unpredictable ways. For example, as one Japanese observer put it, “Japanese have benefitted from receiving Koreans’ love when they didn’t want to” (anonymous interview with the author, November 2019).

Korean

Many of the Korean program leaders, including staff with Love Sonata, CGNTV, CCF, and Vision church pastors, speak Japanese well and have been connected with Love Sonata since its 2007 beginning. Some of them serve as language interpreters, along with a few Korean-speaking Japanese. They become cultural bridge-builders and seek to utilize both Korean and Japanese cultural strengths. As Korean Onnuri Church-related leaders, they help to maintain the focus of Love Sonata on evangelism and worship, all the while remaining sensitive to the input of Japanese counterparts. Interestingly, while some local Japanese organizing committee members might want to soften or otherwise adjust the direct appeal of some of the meetings, one long-time Japanese participant observed that in large part it has been the Japanese leaders who wish to maintain the event’s overall character and structure, even while some of the Korean leaders have considered making substantial adjustments.

Some Korean features of the various programs are obvious: church seminar speakers, leadership forum presenters, gala performance musicians and main speaker. Many of the other Korean contributions are intentionally hidden, including gift preparation and prayer. Whether intentional or not, some Korean characteristics of the event are unmistakable, from conversations overheard to bright colors to expressive welcoming greetings.

Some of the hundreds of Korean volunteers from Onnuri Church have attended repeatedly. Others serve for their first or second time. Depending on their familiarity or experience with Japan, their experiences vary. Most Koreans carry unresolved trauma with respect to Japan, so traveling there touches deep-seated and conflicting emotions. Whatever the Korean volunteers’ individual experiences may be, their sacrificial presence is mentioned

regularly at all events, in order to stress the Korean Christians' love for Japan and the Japanese attendees.

RECEPTION AND EFFECTS

Most likely, few if any readers of this study will have ever heard of Love Sonata or Onnuri Church. Even so, there have been significant effects among various related constituencies.

Onnuri Church

Pastor Ha Yong-Jo indicated that the 2007 focus on Japan was a major shift for Onnuri Church. By no means has that meant an exclusive focus on Japan. However Love Sonata is accompanied by several missionaries, short-term mission teams, Vision churches, CGNTV, publicity, Better World (Onnuri's NGO) relief efforts, and Onnuri's Japan ministries in Korea. These ministries represent a major commitment of prayer, people, finances, and other efforts.

Conversions

According to cards returned at the end of all 30 evangelistic events in Japan, there have been nearly 3,400 professions of faith in Christ (Love Sonata n.d.). That amounts to almost 4.4 percent of the total of over 77,000 Japanese attendees. Interestingly, the highest (approximately 8–9 percent) percentages of professions of faith occurred in three of the early Love Sonatas, in 2007 (Okinawa, Fukuoka, and Sendai).

Discerning what has taken place in, and through, the lives of these Love Sonata attendees who indicated they had confessed faith in Jesus Christ requires further extensive and detailed research. While a significant number, the almost 3,400 conversions indicated—when set against Japan's total population of over 126 million (World Population Review 2020)—amount only to an infinitesimal 0.0027 percent. This tiny percentage is hardly a “wave”

sweeping across the country. Nor would the percentage of the cumulative number of Japanese Love Sonata attendees out of Japan's total population (0.0611 percent) fare much better, including when compared to the well over 20 percent TV ratings of "Fuyu no Sonata" in Japan by the end of only its first airing in 2003 (Yasuko 2004). The significance of the numerical results varies according to expectations and measurement standards employed.

Churches in Japan

The consensus among experienced observers (both Japanese and Korean) of Love Sonata is that the greatest beneficiaries have been Japanese churches. Along with Onnuri Church's encouragement and example to evangelize, the cooperation between area churches—which otherwise would not have occurred—in planning and executing the event has been a much cited positive effect, particularly in smaller cities in Japan. The relationships formed have continued, both personally and through ministry collaboration. The fact that 3,033 churches from many different denominations have participated in Love Sonata events—out of about 13,800 total churches in Japan (Johnson and Zurlo 2019, 436–37), or almost 22 percent—indicates the extensive reach that Love Sonata has had among Japanese churches.

The Wider Christian Landscape in Japan

A historical viewpoint helps in determining where the Love Sonata phenomenon fits in the wider picture of Christianity in Japan. Japan has experienced periods of modest Christian growth (and suffering) in association with Western influence, namely in the late sixteenth century (followed by severe persecution in the seventeenth century), late nineteenth century (followed by pressures from increased Japanese nationalism), and mid-twentieth century (preceded by government suppression). Korean Christianity has added its energy to foreign missionary efforts in Japan since the

late twentieth century, including such ambitious movements as David Yonggi Cho's "Salvation Campaign for Ten Million Japanese People" initiated in the late 1970s (Shigaki 2014). Christianity's foreign image in Japan has been both altered and reinforced by such non-Western mission initiatives. The shapes of Love Sonata's effects on new Christian converts and Japanese churches will help paint Love Sonata's place in the ever-developing picture of Japanese Christianity.

Korea-Japan Relations

The different types of interactions between Koreans and Japanese—particularly those involved with planning and leadership forum luncheons—have undoubtedly had a positive effect on interpersonal relations. Ha Yong-Jo's example of apologizing to Japanese has impacted Onnuri Church members who have examined their own attitudes towards Japan. Increased cross-cultural interactions would be needed to heighten mutual awareness of each other's historical suffering.

It is noteworthy that periods of strained political rancor have not detoured Love Sonata from continuing: only COVID-19 managed to postpone events planned for 2020. The positive views among many Love Sonata participants (Japanese and Korean) of improved Korea-Japan relations are noteworthy. The integrity and humility of members of both Onnuri Church and participating Japanese churches have been fundamentally important.

PROSPECTS

High costs, predictable fatigue, modest results, and decreased Japanese interest in the "Korean Wave" (Roehrig 2015, 90–91) have suggested to some that Love Sonata has served its purpose and should be discontinued. However, at the ten-year mark in 2017 Onnuri Church made a renewed commitment to continue Love Sonata with a particular emphasis on reaching next-generation

Japanese. Moreover, wildly popular K-pop bands and Korean dramas are currently providing a third phase of the “Korean Wave” to “almost all age groups” of Japan’s “hallyu fandom” (Park 2020). After the lifting of COVID-19 restrictions and resumption of Love Sonata events, Onnuri Church members and Japanese churches will need to respond with fresh vigor to sustain what has been a major undertaking.

Through examining its wider historical and multifaceted setting, this study has sought a deeper understanding of Love Sonata’s origins, planning, execution, reception, effects, and prospects. As noted earlier, the four stated “dreams” of Love Sonata are “revival” of Japanese churches, Korean-Japanese “reconciliation,” “mission” to Japan, and use of “culture” for evangelism. The hope is that, through contextual analyses like this one, participants and observers alike will have a more informed understanding of how those dreams were formed and of how they are being realized.

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