

The Unification Movement's Complexity within the United States

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JWST/RELG 258: Religious Outsiders and the American State

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May 15, 2025

I have adhered to the Honor Code for this assignment. - Satoru Uchida

On March 15th, President Trump shared a news article on his social media account, and it caused controversy among Jewish and sexual minority communities in the US.¹ The article, published by the Washington Times, has an illustration of a crossed-out pink triangle. It was the symbol used under Nazi Germany to distinguish sexual minorities in the concentration camps, today widely used as a symbol for the LGBT community.² The Washington Times is known for being conservative and advocating patriotism, as their slogan states, “America’s Newspaper.” The name of the newspaper suggests it is based in Washington, D.C. Nevertheless, they stated, “The Washington Times LLC, publisher of The Times, ... is a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity.”³ The Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity, or widely known as the Unification Church, is the religious group that Reverend Sun Myung Moon (문선명/文鮮明) established in Seoul, South Korea. Born in the northern part of Korea under Japanese rule, he established the Unification Church in 1954, four years after the US army liberated him from communist forces.⁴ The characteristics of his church are the diversity of the groups associated with the Church, incorporating the Unification Movement. The Unification Movement in the US attracted public interest when the media revealed the Koreagate scandal and when the United States indicted Rev. Moon for conspiracy and false tax returns. However, as President Trump posted the article, the Unification Movement in the US today is active as politically and culturally conservative.⁵ Yet, the whole movement was a South Korean new Christian group pushing conservative ideas

¹ Trump, D. J. (2025, March 9). *Posted Truth from Donald. J. Trump*.

² Jeremy Hunt, "Army Recruitment Ads Look quite Different Under Trump," February 19, 2025. <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2025/feb/19/army-recruitment-ads-look-quite-different-trump/>.

³ “The Washington Times LLC, publisher of The Times, is owned by TWT Holdings, LLC, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Operations Holdings, Inc. The holding company is a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity.” "About - Washington Times," accessed May 3, 2025, <https://www.washingtontimes.com/about/>.

⁴ "Moon Found the Unification Church | EBSCO," accessed May 8, 2025, <https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/history/moon-found-unification-church>.

⁵ "About - Washington Times".

everywhere on the globe, sometimes working with the South Korean government.⁶ The range of its activities added resiliency and contingency to withstand the movement under governmental scrutiny and effectively expand its influence. In the recently published paper, Dr. Minyoung Moon suggested that understanding the Unification Church and Movement as a social movement will allow us a more holistic approach. Unification Movement is not just a business under the name of the Church. Fully tracing the movement requires multidimensional perspectives for one case, Koreagate, and the following case is in this paper. Koreagate entailed the international and domestic policy of the American state, influence from the foreign state, crime against the state, and civil rights. It represents the complexity of the Unification Movement, more than what the CIA and the American state dealt with. This paper argues that the CIA's initial framing of the Unification Movement and the scrutiny in regard to Koreagate promoted a perception of the Movement as a political and financial group, a perception that shaped the context. When the US government initiated the *United States v. Sun Myung Moon* case, the biased view was underlined. The two continuous events highlight the State's difficulty in addressing the multifaceted nature of the Movement.

The CIA had surveilled Rev. Moon and his church before the Koreagate scandal. The first record about Rev. Moon appeared in 1972. It introduced Rev. Moon as “a spiritual leader from Korea” and recommended a background check.⁷ Based on the record, the background check was recommended after Rev. Moon placed an advertisement for D.C. papers. It suggested that the CIA framed the Unification Movement as a suspicious religious group for the first time. Another report noted that the Unification Church and its followers worked on lobbying and business deals

⁶ Committee on International Relations, *Fraser Publishes Korean Scandal Hearings*, 1978. <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/home>.

⁷ *Journal, Office of Legislative Counsel*, 1972. <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/home>.

with politicians, and the acquisition of the Diplomat National Bank, D.C.⁸ The CIA at that time usually pictured religions as “engaging in recognizably ‘religious’ behavior,” and a potential ally to fight against communism.⁹ The Unification Movement was engaging in religious behavior through the Unification Church, but its active engagement might be confusing to the CIA. The structure of the Unification Movement, where the Church backs their conglomerate doing all kinds of businesses and a non-profit foundation that provides money to the Church, deeply integrates the Church and businesses.¹⁰ It did not fit into the definition of religion within the CIA. In addition, the Unification Movement was also involved in political maneuvering for the profit of South Korea, where the CIA nurtured suspicion.

In 1970, President Nixon proposed the removal of US forces from South Korea. Park Chung Hee (박정희/朴正熙), South Korean President, reacted quickly due to the existential threat of the re-invasion by communists. He utilized the newly established Korean Central Intelligence Agency (KCIA) to flip Nixon’s mind. The documents from the CIA archive suggest that the maneuver includes a KCIA officer¹¹, a Korean Army General¹², and a top advisor of Rev. Moon¹³. The US government reacted quickly. The Journal of the Office of Legislative Counsel from 1972 noted that someone working in the office recommended the background check of Rev. Moon, introducing him as “a spiritual leader,” despite the fact that Moon himself did not have any traces. Their skepticism turned out to be true when Koreagate went public around 1977-1978. At the end of September 1978, the committee on international relations of the House

⁸ Committee on International Relations, 1978.

⁹ Graziano, Michael. *Errand into the Wilderness of Mirrors: Religion and the History of the CIA*. 1st ed. 2021. doi:10.7208/chicago/9780226767543.003.0001. <https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226767543.003.0001>.

¹⁰ Graziano, 6.

¹¹ Lee Sang-ho (이상호)

¹² Kang Young-hoon (강영훈)

¹³ Pak Bo Hi (박보희)

of Representatives released the result of a hearing from Representative Fraser from Minnesota and Pak Bo Hi, a top aide of Rev. Moon, combined with details unveiled through investigations. They concluded that several Korean personnel, including Park Bo Hi, worked to attain the South Korean government's goals by influencing the US officials and policymakers. When the House committee summoned Park for a hearing, he criticized the Chairman of the committee as a communist while answering the fact that he received money from KCIA "as a reimbursement to a Unification Church member for services performed on behalf of the Korean government." Park was also involved in the acquisition of the Diplomatic National Bank in D.C. Funding was from Japanese members of Unification Church, and he lent the names of the Church members when purchasing the bank's stock. The committee also noted Rev. Moon's personal relationship with Park Chung Hee.¹⁴ The American state recognized Rev. Moon and his Church as a subsidiary of the South Korean dictatorship. Despite South Korea being one of the most important allies to the US after the Korean War, the Unification Church and the greater Unification Movement are not religious but a political scandal under the influence of foreign intelligence.

Several years later, when the United States indicted Rev. Moon for conspiracy and false tax returns, it was obvious that the court also perceived the Unification Movement as a business rather than a religious group.¹⁵ Juridical Opinion of the *United States v. Sun Myung Moon* reported Rev. Moon as "a tax-evading man" rather than a spiritual leader. As a result, Rev. Moon was imprisoned for 13 months. When they were fighting against the United States, Rev. Moon and his movement advocated their rights through speeches on newspaper ads. In the New York Times, he said, "I would not be standing here today if my skin were white or my religion were

¹⁴ Committee on International Relations, 1978.

¹⁵ *United States of America, Appellee, V. SUN MYUNG MOON and Takeru Kamiyama, Defendants-Appellants*. 718 F.2d 1210, 1215 (United States Court of Appeals, Second Circuit 1983).
https://scholar.google.com/scholar_case?case=12224048458076525145.

Presbyterian. ... The Ugliest things in this beautiful country of America are religious bigotry and racism.” He effectively utilized the widely available media to turn controversies and biases about him into social problems, making themselves a part of a greater social movement for justice. Rev. Moon also established the Washington Times at about the same time, to “expand its ability to exert influence.”¹⁶ 6 years before, he had established News World Communication, Inc., NY, which owns The Washington Times and United Press International today.¹⁷ The state jurisdiction paid great attention to the political and financial facets that they thought were intentionally hidden under the name of the Church, but it was not enough to understand the Unification Movement as a whole. On the other hand, Rev. Moon strengthened his media strategies. The complexity of the movement increased amid the challenges.

Juridical Opinion, in response to the Rev. Moon’s claim that he is a part of the Church, noted that the Pope is “the spiritual leader of the Roman Catholic Church, but he also has a legal identity as a distinct, individual human being.” Rev. Moon as the leader of the Church and his legal status as a taxpayer are not the same. The generalization of religion into the Roman Catholic style is another sign that the CIA’s view influenced the judges. Graziano noted that Catholicism was a prototype for the other international religious groups when dealing with national security concerns.¹⁸ It is reasonable to assume that the perspectives shaped by Koreagate and the CIA's framework for understanding international religious groups informed the judicial approach or contributed to the stereotypical understanding within the American juridical system. In response, Rev. Moon and his defendants emphasized the political and religious bias due to

¹⁶ Mickler, Michael L. *The Unification Church Movement* 2023.

http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/SITE_ID/reader.action?docID=31852057&ppg=5, 3.

¹⁷ "News World Communications - Bio, News, Photos - Washington Times," , accessed May 11, 2025, <https://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/news-world-communications/>.

¹⁸ Graziano, 5.

Koreagate, but the Court rejected the claim due to the lack of evidence. Notably, the Court also mentioned the necessity of a religious corporation; “the lack of a formal corporation does not prevent a religious movement from being the beneficial power of property held in the name of another.” The Court dedicated a section of the Juridical Opinion to discuss the objections to the Religious Clauses. They claim, “The ‘free exercise’ of religion is not so unfettered. The First Amendment does not insulate a church or its members from judicial inquiry when a change is made that their activities violate a penal statute. Consequently, in this criminal proceeding the jury was not bound to accept the Unification Church’s definition of what constitutes a religious use or purpose.”¹⁹ The court confirmed the religious aspects of the Unification Movement, but refused to treat the movement as a purely religious group.

By using existing and owned media, he effectively turned controversies and biases about him into social problems, making themselves a part of a greater social movement for justice. Dr. Moon’s review article gave me insight into the role of media in the Unification Movement as a whole. Dr. Moon focused on the high retention rate of the Unification Movement, in spite of how demanding the movement is. The possible key to maintaining high retention rates is that each member has a rewarding or satisfying relationship with the divine or sacred.²⁰ As the sacred Constitution is in the United States, specific political ideologies, policies, or movements to tackle social problems could. Educating sacred matters not only through the words from charismatic leaders but also from the media will be much more effective and steadfast compared to using only one or both. Media strategies benefit the Unification Movement by gaining support from the public and nurturing motivation among followers. The post President Trump made proves how

¹⁹ *United States V. Sun Myung Moon* (United States Court of Appeals, Second Circuit 1983).

²⁰ Minyoung Moon, "Toward an Integrated Analysis of Social Movements and New Religious Movements Research," *Sociology Compass* 17, no. 12 (Dec, 2023), n/a. doi:10.1111/soc4.13134. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111%2Fsoc4.13134>.

capable their strategies are. The Unification Movement after Koreagate focused on getting support from social movements, such as religious and racial discrimination, while spreading the word targeting conservatives.

The Unification Movement is multidimensional. In American political maps, for instance, they are getting liberals' support, yet owned media are conservative. At one moment, they emphasized their Asian origin. On the other hand, they stand for American patriots. The extreme duality characterizes the Unification Movement. It confused the American authorities, resulting in today's Unification Movement. For the movement, it added redundancy to its structure. If one side got criticized or restricted, the other side would thrive and possibly gain a positive reputation. Koreagate and following Rev. Moon's imprisonment and today's presence of the Washington Times vividly illustrate the success of the movement. Once the state moves to regulate them, they will fight back with the First Amendment. Today, it is one of the conservative media outlets that leans conservative.²¹ Their adaptability and flexibility as the Movement are amazing. Besides the legitimacy and trustworthiness of the Unification Movement in the US, there is no question that the Unification Church and its faith faced a hardship due to the discrimination and the label as a "cult."²² Unification Church deserves the protection of Religious Clauses as other mainstream Churches do, and the Unification Movement, including the Church, owes the duty to follow American law, including paying taxes, as other religious organizations and religious-affiliated organizations do. Today, the Washington Times is getting popular as political tensions sharpen. The Unification Movement's ability to adapt to the fast-changing world is challenged again. (2017 words)

²¹ Ad Fontes Media. "Washington Times Bias and Reliability | Ad Fontes Media." Accessed May 15, 2025. <https://adfontesmedia.com/washington-times-bias-and-reliability/>.

²² Horowitz, Irving Louis. *Science, Sin, and Scholarship*. 2nd ed. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1979, 88-97.

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