

The Founding of the Japan Baptist Women's Missionary Union: Akiko Matsumura's Passion for Equal Status in God's Mission¹

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Akiko Matsumura is a forgotten Japanese Baptist leader in spite of her contributions, not only to the national Baptists, but also the global Baptist family. She was active in the Baptist World Alliance (BWA) in the late 1970's as a vice president for its Woman's Department. She was President of the Baptist Women's Union of Japan and of the Asian Baptist Women's Union as well. Upon accepting these responsibilities, she expressed her strong desire to be part of Baptist life as a woman as well as an Asian claiming an equal status in God's mission. She was also the pioneer Japanese Baptist woman who developed many fields of work for church women who received God's call as their Christian vocations. The intention of this paper is to share the story of her Christian life as she worked hard to be faithful to God's calling in the culture of Japan.

Yearning for Equality and Independence: Akiko's Life-Long Struggle

Akiko Endo, who was later Akiko Matsumura, was born on March 14th, 1917 in Tokyo, Japan as the youngest in a traditional Buddhist family that had a higher social

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status at that time. When she reached school age, her father sent her to a private elementary school rather than a public one. This is a rather unusual custom of the older generation of her parents. The school she attended was founded by a successful international trading merchant whose major business was producing porcelain tableware for export. His business eventually brought him great success and enormous wealth. As a successful international businessman, the founder of this school was painfully aware of the importance of language skills for promising Japanese youth. At the opening of the new school, he insisted on offering English language as one of the major subjects, even to the elementary schoolers.

The language education of this school brought Akiko her unexpected life in her later years. It was a solid base for her being sent to the Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union Training School in the United States as a preparation for future leadership for the Japanese Baptists as well as the global Baptist community.

Akiko was a brilliant little girl, no less brilliant than her two older brothers. She loved to study and made good grades. Naturally, this achievement made her wish for higher education. Unfortunately, this was the beginning of her lifelong struggle to be her own person by challenging the given status and role of traditional Japanese womanhood. If boys wished to pursue higher education, they had no trouble in getting the greatest support from the whole family, but this was not true in her case. Most of the women of her time were placed next to their male family members in the strict parental discipline that perpetuated Japanese patriarchal social structure. This was the culture in which she was born and grew up.

The parent-daughter relationship became rough and full of tension. Her parents couldn't handle well Akiko's rebellious attitude. Then they finally gave up and gave her permission to go to high school. This school was famous for training young girls to be independent and smart in the assigned areas for women such as housekeeping and raising children. She did well in that school too — not in the class of home economics but in that of foreign language. Even in school, she still kept her strong desire for a college education.

However, such an ambition was squelched because of her gender and the social status of her family. Her parents said to her:

You are the youngest girl, you do not need college education, just be sweet and obedient and wait until we find you a good husband.²

Akiko later interpreted his words in this way:

My parents thought that higher education would make me too independent and stubborn to be a sweet and obedient wife. Instead of buying textbooks and providing tuition fees for me, they bought me pretty clothes. But I refuse to dress as a doll, a doll with a sign hanging out in front, "For sale to the highest bidder."³

Akiko's Independent Will and Natural "Stubbornness" for Her New Life

Akiko thoroughly resented her parents' attitude and became rebellious as noted earlier. She later described herself: "It seems I had an independent will with stubborn streaks."⁴ This stubbornness knew no way to give up on her dream. This was the same stubbornness, however, that eventually won her parents' reluctant permission to take a six-month English conversation course at the nearby Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA). There Akiko met a Southern Baptist female missionary from the United States named Dorothy Carver, and they became good friends even through the World War II.

Dorothy Carver was a daughter of William Owen Carver, a Southern Baptist missiologist legend and longtime professor at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. She later married William Maxfield Garrott, who also served in Japan for years as a Southern Baptist missionary. It was this missionary couple who gave Akiko

2 Akiko Matsumura, unpublished manuscript, "Global Discipleship", Foreign Mission Conference, Ridgecrest, NC, 1980 June 22, p.1

3 Matsumura, "Global Discipleship", p.1

4 Matsumura, *The Book I Treasure*, unpublished monograph, 1982, p. 2.

undeniable influence in assisting her spiritual growth. Akiko and Dorothy started getting together regularly for study — Dorothy teaching Akiko English, and Akiko helping Dorothy with Japanese. Dorothy chose the English New Testament as a textbook to teach Akiko.

Growing up in a traditional Buddhist family, Akiko had only a vague idea of what the New Testament would be and was at first a little not so excited with the choice of her textbook. In addition, one of her older brothers who openly confessed himself to be a communist preached to her that religion is opium to the people and Christianity is its worst sort. However, her burning interest in the language study and great excitement for free English lessons won over her caution and suspicion toward the Bible. Her parents' disdain for Christianity was no problem until she became interested more in Dorothy's teaching of the Bible.

Two years later, Akiko accepted Jesus as her savior. She later recalled her conversion experience as a thrilling revelation and the beginning of her new life. Her conversion made her father furious and he confronted her with his alternative, "You have become a believer of a foreign religion. This is a disgrace to the family tradition and to my social standing. You give up your faith and enjoy my love and protection, or you must leave home."⁵

Her choice was to leave home and go to Dorothy who lived nearly 700 miles away from where Akiko was. Dorothy welcomed her and offered her a place to stay. Of this specific moment, Akiko clearly remembered what Dorothy told her, "You are gifted in language study. It is our responsibility to develop your talent for the cause of the Kingdom."⁶ As she wrote in another article⁷, Akiko heard Dorothy say that she saw Akiko's language ability as God's investment in her.

5 Matsumura, *The Book I Treasure*, p.4

6 Matsumura, *The Book I Treasure*, p.5

7 "Japanese Women Discovering Self-worth, Says BWA Officer" interviewed by Nancy Carter for FEATURE, Foreign Mission Board, Southern Baptist Convention, Richmond VA, July 30, 1975, p.1

It was such a surprising discovery to Akiko that she was someone in whom God had invested something. It was also a surprise that someone like Dorothy saw value and talent in her. Looking back on her early family life, she was always placed at a lower status and looked down on because of her gender and age. The culture and environment in which Akiko grew up set her on a long and winding road to fight against those negative circumstances and to win independence and equality from them. Dorothy Carver also believed that her missionary responsibility was to help Akiko be a good Christian worker. Taking Dorothy's recommendation, Akiko went to a Methodist women's college in Nagasaki to study English.

After finishing school, Akiko was offered a three-year contract to teach English at her alma mater. At this time anti-American feelings were beginning to grow throughout the country, and the US bombers began to destroy Japanese cities. Akiko later moved back to her hometown in Tokyo. This relocation eventually helped her to escape the dropping of the second atomic bomb on the city of Nagasaki.

World War II was over in August 1945 with Japan's unconditional surrender to the Allied forces. Seven months later, Akiko received a letter from W. O. Carver expressing his desire to provide all possible help with regard to her wish to study in the States. Carver had heard of Akiko from his missionary daughter and her husband as well. Carver seemed determined to bring this Japanese young Christian woman to the Woman's Missionary Union Training School in Louisville, KY as part of his post-war missionary commitment. In 1947, Akiko was given permission from General McArthur's headquarters to go to the United States as one of the first four students permitted to leave occupied Japan.

In the United States, she fully enjoyed breathing the air of liberty and fell in love with the Greek language and Biblical study. Women students attended classes with male professors from the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Akiko's academic performance in Greek especially impressed New Testament professor Edward McDowell. He encouraged her to extend her stay to study a higher level of Greek because Greek was essential for a deep study of the Bible. He even promised to

provide a special tutor for her.

However, unexpected discouragement came from the woman principal at the Training School. One day, she called Akiko to her office and reprimanded her. Akiko later wrote about this disheartening experience:

With much dignity, she said “My dear, I thought that a Japanese girl is obedient. I have protected you from overwork and outside engagements because you get sick rather often. It was a surprise to me that I heard you are studying Greek with a private teacher.”⁸

These comments were a double blow to her — first because her gender was called into question and then her nationality. What made it even more severe was that it came from someone of her own gender. During the second half of Akiko’s professional life, these two aspects — being female and being Asian — were paired in the assignments that constantly forced her to deal with these challenges in national and international settings.

In spite of this discouraging incident, she kept pushing herself to study Greek, fed with the encouragement and spiritual support of Carver. Her personal encounter with Carver enormously helped her spiritual maturity grow as she wrote:

When he talked about the plan of God, he let me see a glimpse of the eternal plan of God. He accepted me as I was, treated me as a fellow worker in the Kingdom. He saw in me potentialities and expected me to live true to the ‘high calling of God of my own.’⁹

Reflecting upon the course of her life, Akiko occasionally mentioned that she was disgusted with the criticism of her stubbornness which her family said was her bad luck. . It was “bad luck” in the sense that she was doomed to be an “old maid,” never be someone’s preferable sweet and loving wife. But her Christian faith shed a different light on it. She learned that God could change such a disfavored nature into an indispensable divine tool for God’s work.

⁸ Matsumura, *The Book I Treasure*, p. 16

⁹ Matsumura, *The Book I Treasure*, P. 16

In 1950, Akiko graduated from the WMU Training School with a Bachelor's degree in Religious Education. As she continued private Greek study with a tutor for the next academic degree, she came to stand at a crossroads. The longer she stayed in the United States, the more she felt isolated from her peers in Japan. It was not because of her homesickness but because of her concern with the danger of alienating herself from her fellow workers in Japan with whom she should identify in the first place.¹⁰

Then she went to seek Carver's advice. Instead of comforting her, he said, "Whatever you decide should be your decision. If my opinion prevails, you would not assume full responsibility for the result of your decision. You must find the Lord's will for yourself."¹¹ He even showed her step by step how to do it. She faithfully followed each step of that direction that finally brought her to reach a decision — the decision to go back home.

Struggle in Her Own Land

After returning to Japan, she was offered the full secretary position of the Japan Baptist Convention's youth ministry in 1952. This hiring was the first case in the newly organized JBC. Her boss was Rev. Shuichi Matsumura, who later proposed to her to become his second wife after he lost his first wife due to illness. Together with a Southern Baptist missionary, she organized the youth movement on a national scale. Then she moved to the Sunday School Department as a writer and editor to publish teaching materials for the local church Sunday Schools. For this project, she translated the Southern Baptist Sunday School materials that were recommended by the missionary specialist of that field. Through this experience, she came to realize that the local church had to train its members through education in order to carry out the

10 Matsumura, *The Book I Treasure*, P. 16

11 Matsumura, *The Book I Treasure*, PP.21-22

missions and evangelism task of the church. Indeed, she was very successful in this project. Because of her achievement as a project leader, the Baptist World Alliance Youth Department authorized her to supervise the organization of the first Asian youth conference.

It was such a high time when Rev. Matsumura asked her to marry him. At that time, he was struggling to raise three little children after his first wife had passed away the previous year. He was a senior pastor of a local Baptist church and was working as Chair of the Convention's Youth Division of the JBC as well. Akiko found herself at the crossroads again — giving up her promising career or becoming a stepmother of three little children and a busy pastor's wife. This was another difficult decision to make after that of her giving up study for her dedication to her fellow Japanese. However, by this time, she had mastered how to seek God's will for her with what Carver taught her years before.

Her decision for this time was to leave the full-time position which would promise her respectable titles in the future. She chose the local church as her place to serve God rather than the Convention office or other related official institutions. On this decision, Carver's book on Ephesians was the inspiration to her, as she confessed:

The church is an incarnation of the Risen Lord. The Holy Spirit who dwells in the church continues to carry out Christ's redemptive plan for the whole world. To participate in the ministry of a local church is a great privilege and honor to me. To find a place of service in the plan of God as a pastor's wife would fulfill my destiny as woman called by grace of God.¹²

Even after she married, however, she never quit her old custom of studying the New Testament intensively and an hour-long morning meditation and prayer. This custom was her lifelong daily routine — waking up at 4 a.m. every morning, hours before she was swamped with her busy schedule as a wife, mother, and student of the Scriptures. She studied the New Testament both in both Greek and English followed

12 Matsumura, *The Book I Treasure*, p. 26.

by meditation and prayer. At the same time, this routine was the time of her spiritual discipline as she prepared to manage the various engagements including church evangelism, Bible teaching, and the work for the national Convention and the similar international offices.

For such an active individual, spiritual discipline was always her top priority. She wrote:

If we want to grow spiritually, we must set apart a definite time and a place for our devotional period. This is a matter of spiritual discipline. Take time to know God through intensive study of his word. Are not we so busy with housework, church work, meetings, and entertainment that we neglect the most important things? Do not we sometimes justify our neglect by saying, "After all, we are busy in the Lord's work?"¹³

To serve others well, Akiko acknowledged the value of seeking to be alone as Dietrich Bonhoeffer suggested the importance to maintain the state of separatedness even in the fellowship.

It seems that marriage did not block Akiko's way to serve God; . In her point of view, being a pastor's wife was the work for which God had prepared for her. In this place, she thought she could use the gifts from God and take part in the divine work that God had planned for her. This interpretation made Akiko work hard to do housekeeping matters as perfectly as possible with little laziness as if working for God and for the family were essentially the same thing. . In this way, she challenged the stereotypical image of a Japanese housewife and that of a Christian woman in the church.

If this view is correct, the reason Akiko favored Martha instead of Mary in the Gospel of Luke is understandable. She also highly praised Lydia, a dealer of purple cloth in Philippi in the Book of Acts, for a similar reason. To Akiko, the commonality of these two women was their swiftness to respond to Jesus with their practicality in the

13 Matsumura, *The Book I Treasure*, p. 8.

areas for which they had responsibility. In a Bible study in New Orleans in 1982, as Akiko taught a lesson on Lydia, she fully disclosed her view on ideal Christian womanhood:

She was a saleswoman. To be successful, a saleswoman must have certain qualities: thorough knowledge about the goods with which she deals; an ability to distinguish good and genuine ones from cheap imitations; an attractive personality to make new customers and hold old ones; sensitivity to see the needs and tastes of her customers; good judgement and speedy actions to meet the specific needs and make profit out of them. Lydia certainly had these qualities, which became apparent when she was touched by the gospel. Or rather, the Lord used these characteristics of hers to advance His cause¹⁴.

Surpassing Male Leadership: The Birth of the Baptist Women's Work

In the late 1960s, Akiko's devotion to serving God as a vocation faced the real test: the JBC's drastic policy change that aimed at eliminating the women's division from the organization due to the lack of Convention funds. This massive structural reorganization was mainly discussed by the male leadership. Women were extremely uncomfortable with this plan and strongly opposed to the Convention's resolution. Women fought to keep their women's division in the JBC Convention, but they failed. As a consequence, the women decided to leave the Convention structure and form their own missionary society, Japan Baptist Missionary Union of Women, as the convention auxiliary. With this establishment, Akiko was the engine and spirit of opening the new era of Japanese Baptist women.

Historically, the Baptist women's work started in 1915 with five missionary wives. They first got together to organize a group of local church women for missions. But this attempt failed as premature. Five years later, in 1920, the first Baptist Women's

14 Matsumura, 'Lydia,' in unpublished monograph of the Bible study session, 1982.

group was officially organized with the purpose of encouraging female members of all local churches for foreign missions. They promoted activities such as prayer meetings for foreign missions, Bible study, training for evangelism and soul-winning, and raising money for missionary activities. The slogan of this new body was “the whole world for Christ” based on 1 Corinthians 3:9 which was also the watchword of the Southern Baptist Woman’s Missionary Union.

The working relationship between the missionary wives and native Baptist women was desirable for both. They also invented a systematic method for stabilizing income for the work. As they controlled their own funding, their independent spirit pushed them to expand more effective mission activities mainly for women.

Educating boys, girls, and young adults, including women, for mission work was another important task. Specifically, the women raised scholarships for young women who felt God’s calling to evangelism. For those women, this was an act of investing in the future generation of churches. They were also interested in social betterment and organized a welfare center called “Lighthouse for the Neighbors” in one of the most neglected parts of the designated area. The women did Christian missions in their own way and became quite successful, even surpassing the male Convention leadership in their activities.

In the meantime, the JBC’s Convention’s male leadership had no hesitation in asking the women to give money for the Convention’s own activities, including both home and foreign missions. In 1933, the Convention’s annual meeting unanimously adopted a motion that the independent women’s group should be merged with the Convention organization under the new name Women’s Department of the Baptist Convention. Some female leaders innocently viewed this decision as the beginning of male-female equality in mission work. They were even pleased with this result as the answer to their diligent prayer for years requesting God to make women humbler to men.¹⁵

15 Japan Baptist Missionary Union, ed., *Baptist Women: Forty-year History of Japan Baptist Missionary Union* (Tokyo: Japan, 1962), p. 58.

At the same time, however, this was the beginning of the JBC's Convention's attempt to absorb the women's group and its work under the organization's umbrella and to control politically. Though it was not a smooth transition, the women finally accepted the JBC's Convention's decision and moved into the Convention's structure. The President of the newly established Women's Department wrote on this organizational relocation as follows:

We should never forget our independent spirit even after this reorganization is done. However, now we are the one of the JBC's Convention's organizational branches. We ought to devote ourselves to work for the Convention and throw behind our self-centered spirit just like the female members of the Philippian church who willingly helped St. Paul and his missions.¹⁶

The Convention leadership never stopped asking for the money women raised. Besides the Convention's own activities, it even requested financial assistance for local church pastors, which should be the Convention's initial responsibility. When the Convention suggested that the Woman's Department could request that local church women raise a special offering, the women declined the idea. Instead, they chose to do it in "the womanly way" by encouraging women to make their family dish simpler than usual at least once a week and save the extra money for the Convention.

By the end of the 1930s, the Woman's Department was no longer able to spend its own Christmas Offering for itself. The whole amount of the money automatically went to the Convention's budget. The Convention's control over the women in this way continued before, during, and even after World War II. The Convention decided to cut the women's work from the organization from the late 1960s to the mid-1970s in order to achieve financial independence from the Southern Baptist Convention.

16 Japan Baptist Missionary Union, ed., *Baptist Women: Forty-year History of Japan Baptist Missionary Union* (Tokyo: Japan, 1962), p. 58.

The Independent Spirit of the Women: Leaving the Establishment and Making Their Own

Though the Southern Baptist mission in Japan began in 1889 with two missionary couples and enjoyed its growth, the missionary work was suspended for some years during World War II. The current Japanese Baptist Convention was organized in 1947 along the lines of the Southern Baptist Post-War Policy on foreign missions. Under the circumstances, the Japan Baptist Convention was privileged to receive abundant support of both economic and human resources from the Southern Baptist Convention. Since this time, the relationship between the two became almost a customized system that resulted in the National Baptists' heavy financial dependence in many ways for quite a long time. This custom was one of the major contributing factors to the Japanese Baptists' delay in their independence. Their financial independence would not be realized until the mid -1970s.

Throughout the entire decade of the 1970s, the momentum toward independence from foreign support gradually grew among the native Baptists. In 1969, while celebrating the 80th anniversary of the Southern Baptist missions in Japan, the JBC decided to accomplish its financial independence as soon as possible under the watchword "Independence and Cooperation." At the same time, they were aiming at drastic organizational change, consolidating the numbers of existing departments to achieve this goal. Those sections included the departments of youth men, and women under the Convention's expectation to make them independent bodies of operation.

Among the three departments the women's department was the most impregnable fortress and refused absolutely to accept the policy change. In order to settle the clash between the two, a special conference was called by the Convention leadership at the end of 1970 with the Convention's vice president, Chair of the Organizational Reconstruction Committee along with fifteen female representatives of the local Baptist associations. The last group was led by Akiko Matsumura. In spite of many discussions, the group failed to reach an agreement.

The Convention leadership recognized that Japanese Baptists would never be able to stand on their own feet as long as they kept receiving foreign money, as was the custom. Though the SBC showed its willingness to give them money for direct evangelism and mission, they were unwilling to pay the Convention's running expenses. This position resulted in a shortage in the budget of the National Convention. Responding to this difficult situation, the Convention chose a policy to minimize mission programs and reduce the existing departments through a drastic budget cut. This policy change was reasonable and a practical way to deal with the issue

Since the Women's department was the largest one among them, the Convention leadership told the women that sufficient financial resources for the women's work were no longer available. Therefore, the best possible option for the women to resolve the problem was to get out of the Convention's organization and to become their own organization. Akiko Matsumura who occupied the important role as one of the leaders of the Woman's Department at the time felt less satisfaction with this reasoning:

They gave us oh, nice talks, all kinds of talk, and when the men have their own way, having their will really so they talked to us: The real way you can develop the lay movement, the women's movement. And as long as you are depending on men's leadership and the Convention money, you cannot really develop as a lay movement. But the Convention voted on that new organization. But I did not really like it¹⁷.

The fact was that the women were independent from the beginning, budgeting by themselves and carrying out their mission work by themselves. They were willing to decide to support the Convention financially. Such goodwill and a spirit of cooperation may have been distorted in the male point of view as the women depending on men's leadership and the Convention money.

17 Interview by the Department of Missionary Education of Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, 1972. Akiko Matsumura, interviewed by Johnni Johnson, Louis McCullough, Elen Libis, Charlie Warren, Bob Shoemake, Ken Lawson and Floyd North, July 16, 1975, Tokyo, Japan (Transcription)

A year later the Convention passed a resolution on a new agreement aiming at the Convention's independence. Based on it, all lay departments of the Convention including the Women's department, had to leave and separate from the Convention structure. This decision was done without substantial consent from the women who expressed their strong request to have their voices reflected in the process.

Hearing the report of the resolution, in disappointment and frustration, the women again got together to discuss for hours how to respond to it. The agreement they finally reached was to separate and start a new organization on their own. Akiko was the major one who led those women to this conclusion and an exciting new adventure.

Interestingly, Akiko had refused earlier to separate the women's work from the Convention. Her basic idea was to develop mutual cooperation between men and women for God's mission on the same ground and with equal status within the same working environment. However, even in the midst of irritations and frustrations caused by the Convention's resolution, she finally came to find out a few good things in this new set-up based on her practicality and objectivity. She thought if the organizational separation of the women could be a necessary step for the national Convention to have equal status with the missionaries as a team, the women had to welcome their separation:

There is a deep yearning on the part of the Japanese leaders, and the missionary leaders, for closer cooperation and we are trying to find a way for closer cooperation. That is the way I feel.¹⁸

As stated earlier, equality and independence of women were her lifetime goals. In the first case, it was the issue between men and women, but equality was also needed between the Japanese and the missionaries. Even though situations differed, the point of the matter meant the same to Akiko. She renewed her view on the theme of equality and independence, not as a matter of gender difference but a universal matter for the fellow human being created by God regardless of gender and nationality.

18 Ibid.

Akiko as the Leader for National and International Baptist Women

Based on this new recognition, Akiko started tirelessly and vigorously to travel all over Japan and visited local church WMUs to explain the value of the Convention's resolution for the Women and encouraged them to separate willingly in order to organize a new Women's body outside the Convention structure. In 1973, the Women's Missionary Union of Japan Baptist Convention was organized as an independent body supported exclusively by membership fees.

Akiko's remarkable and energetic activities, nationally and internationally, started from this time as if she finally found her real place. She was in her late fifties at that time. Though she may have seemed to be a rather slow bloomer for top leadership, her career was colorful, including vice president of the BWA Women's Department, president of the Asian Baptist Women's Union, and the founding president of the Japan Baptist Women's Missionary Union.

Nationally, she spared no time or energy in raising the issue of the quality of Japanese Baptist women in their faith and mission activities. She provided major leadership to develop mission programs, launching the publication of the WMUJ monthly journal as a writer and editor, organizing conferences and retreats for leadership training, and carrying out the popular promotion of the Christmas Offering for foreign missions which originated from the Southern Baptist Lottie Moon Christmas Offering.

The WMUJ's monthly publication was the ideal opportunity for Akiko to teach the Bible to church women. She wrote a series of excellent Bible studies. For nearly ten years after the publication started, Akiko always wrote the Bible study lessons for the readers. Since the major task of the WMUJ was world mission, this publication made a deep impact on interests by providing knowledge not only of related subjects, but also information on current world affairs and human rights issues. This publication was truly the church school for the Baptist women who had difficulties taking time for themselves because of their responsibilities in the church and family. It was through

this publication that the Baptist women received opportunities to nurture their faith and inspiration for their mission activities. All this could not have been done without Akiko's passion for and dedication to missions, backed by her faithful daily Bible study followed by meditative prayer. The realism and practicality in her leadership style and its strength were actually nurtured by her spiritual discipline through her daily custom.

In 1975, she was elected as one of twelve BWA vice-presidents. Even in this great honor, she was quite calm with her presence of mind. She believed this election was not based on her actual capacity as a leader but a recognition of her husband's success in the 1970 Tokyo BWA congress. Rev. Matsumura did not speak English, and Akiko as his wife translated for him when he served as the chairman of the local arrangement committee. Since translation was difficult for both of them and for others, she felt she was chosen for the vice-presidency as a tribute to her husband¹⁹.

Even if this could be true, she was neither discouraged nor disappointed with this election. Instead, she was determined to be a part of the BWA Executive Committee and speak out as a woman and an Asian. Further, she expressed her eagerness to contribute to the global Baptist family as she said, "Not as the wife of Shuichi Matsumura, but as Akiko Matsumura."²⁰ She wanted neither to content herself with the given title of vice-president nor to make it just an honor. She wanted to be present as her own self: The one who received the call from God for building the Kingdom of God.

19 Interview by the Department of Missionary Education of Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, 1972. Akiko Matsumura, interviewed by Johnni Johnson, Louis McCullough, Elen Libis, Charlie Warren, Bob Shoemake, Ken Lawson and Floyd North, July 16, 1975, Tokyo, Japan (Transcription), pp8-9.

20 Interview by the Department of Missionary Education of Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, 1972. Akiko Matsumura, interviewed by Johnni Johnson, Louis McCullough, Elen Libis, Charlie Warren, Bob Shoemake, Ken Lawson and Floyd North, July 16, 1975, Tokyo, Japan (Transcription), p9.

Conclusions

Akiko Matsumura provides an excellent example of a woman who dedicated her life to Christian mission. Yet, she is surely not the only one. There must be some other undiscovered female leadership like her in the history of Japanese Baptists. We as Japanese Baptists, especially Japanese Baptist women, should pay more attention to her life and let posterity know of her contribution as a role model.

It is true that compared to our current point of view she remained relatively conservative and traditional in her theology and her view of womanhood. For instance, she did not seek to make a drastic change in the structure of the church. This can be seen in her criticism of the 60s women's liberation movement both in the church and in larger society. She thought marriage was the divinely prepared place for her to fulfill her Christian calling in spite of the risk of losing her privacy and time for herself. However, marriage did not mean that she completely lost her liberty as a woman who was determined to serve the Lord as her own vocation. To her, the assignment was how to be creative in being her own person as she served God under the surrounding limitations. She might have not been a submissive wife, but she was a great partner to her pastor-husband for the sake of missions.

Her way of life resembles the Japanese fringed pink flower called *Nadeshiko*, which we take to express the ideal Japanese womanhood. To us, this little flower gives the image of women who wear simplicity and dignity, and are not easily beaten down, even in a harsh environment, but bloom beautifully in their own ways.

Akiko attempted neither to shake the foundation of the church establishment nor to throw a stone to crack it, although she did not fully accept it as an ideal environment for women. Akiko, however, might have been imagining something more radical and surprisingly unexpected. From the limitation of her place, she might have been looking at the highest peak of mutual and cooperative relationship between male and female, Japanese and non-Japanese as God's co-workers. As the Apostle Paul says, "For we are God's fellow workers." (1 Cor. 3: 19; ESV).

When founding the WMUJ, Baptist women such as Akiko might have been convinced that they were fellow workers with all others, with equal status in the eyes of God regardless of their many differences. Akiko expressed this view at the international gathering: “We cannot and should not say that some parts of the world are mission fields of particular mission boards. The whole world is the mission field where all Christians, regardless of nationalities and cultural backgrounds, must work together in evangelism.”²¹

21 Matsumura, unpublished manuscript of the Keynote Address, “Called to Change: Committed to Serve Along with the Spirit from 12:11,” the Sixth Asian Christian Women’s Conference Assembly (no date and place).