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Kramer | Racialized Recreation and Missionary Science

## “He Rests from His Labors”: Racialized Recreation and Missionary Science in Colonial Korea

Derek J. Kramer

### **Abstract**

This article examines how Anglo-American evangelicals in colonial Korea employed racialized understandings of the environment to justify a culture of recreation and health. In the metropole and periphery, missionary researchers studying climate, geography, and public health asserted a science-based injunction to rest that was intended to maintain a population of evangelical workers. The production of this scientific research, external to the Japanese colonial state, allowed the missionary community to establish a rationale for collective segregation from the local populations they sought to save. In Korea, this dynamic is profiled through the history of a missionary resort at Sorai beach. Initially believed to have contributed to the suicide of an evangelical worker in 1895, within a few years the Sorai area rapidly transformed. In step with the broader culture of summer recreation that emerged in Korea during the 1910s and 1920s, the missionaries recast Sorai from a deleterious space into a site of strategic and devotional rest.

**Keywords** missiology, scientific racism, tropical medicine, colonial science, history of recreation

In the winter of 1895, William McKenzie, a Canadian evangelist living in the seaside village of Sorai, Korea, sent a letter to a friend in Seoul. In it the missionary commented on the passing of a colleague, Dr. William Hall, who had died of typhus weeks earlier. “He rests from his labors,” McKenzie wrote. “I never thought he would stand the wear and tear of Korean weather and mission work” (McCully 1904: 182). This passing comment on the strain of life in the periphery points to a broader set of views on health common in the Protestant missionary movement of the period. Evangelicals consistently linked their physical and mental conditions to the environments in which they worked and by doing so delineated their relationships with local populations.

McKenzie’s final months highlight this spatialized view of health. Throughout the spring of

1895, the missionary repeatedly returned to the physical and social environment as he discussed his declining condition. These themes were carried through to the final lines of his journal where, in the swollen script that makes up McKenzie's last entry, he writes: "Hope it is not death, for the sake of Korea and the many who will say it was my manner of living like Koreans" (McKenzie 1895). Shortly after writing these lines, as his congregants worshiped in a church nearby, the missionary shot himself.

Initially viewed as culpable for McKenzie's death, within a few years the village of Sorai and the picturesque beach nearby assumed a radically different role for the missionary community in Korea. Starting in 1905, Sorai beach became the site of one of the most popular expatriate health resorts in the region. Such vacation communities were endorsed by experts within the evangelical movement who explicitly linked the preservation of a white missionary's health with their mandate to spread the gospel. With evangelists in short supply and millions in need of conversion, missionary physicians turned to racially exclusive summer resorts as a means to maintain their ranks. This utilitarian logic effectively sustained an array of race- and climate-based theories on health that normalized unevenness between the members of the missionary community and the Korean population that they lived among and sought to save. There is wistful irony in the missionaries' turn to this discourse on climate and health. Driven to the far corners of the world by a gospel of radical fraternity, white evangelicals consistently turned to scientific racism in the "mission field" to maintain segregated and authoritative relationships with locals.

This article draws broadly from the field of postcolonial studies and profits from a sharpened analytical focus on how knowledge production in the field of medical science

operated as a formative element in regimes of colonial power that could circulate external to the state.<sup>1</sup> Formally, both in 1895, when McKenzie died, and in 1905, when the Sorai beach resort was established, the Korean peninsula was still years away from colonial rule. However, this article suspends a reading of colonialism as simply a question of national sovereignty. By doing so, the case of the missionaries can bring into focus how modern modes of knowledge production, here in the fields of medical and climatic science, provided a basis by which a community of elites could isolate themselves from a colonized population. This culture of segregation helps clarify the plurality of roles played by the missionaries in Korea. Occasionally critical of Japanese rule, although rarely of empire itself, and credited as an incubator for domestic nationalists, accounts of the missionary community are frequently ambiguous about its role in the colonization of the peninsula (Park 2003: 4, 31–32; Schmid 2004; 157–86). A sharper image comes to light when Anglo-American evangelicals are placed alongside other elites on the peninsula. Scholarship on the Japanese settler community as well as earlier work on Korean entrepreneurs has amply demonstrated the tactical maneuvering that accompanied the maintenance of social and economic privilege (Eckert 1991; Oh 2002; Uchida 2011). These elites all encountered fractious phases in their community's relations with the colonial state, but never to the point of an explicit break. While severely tested, both by Japan's intensifying militarism and by the missionary's own sympathies for Korean nationalists, the expulsion of the evangelicals at the start of the Pacific War was an expression of an international, not local, rupture.<sup>2</sup>

The sections below highlight how the economic and social privilege enjoyed by this subset of colonial elites was justified through the circulation and production of scientific

knowledge on rest and recreation. By the time the missionaries in Korea began to enjoy the luxury of these summer communities, hill stations, colonial spas, and expatriate resorts were already common throughout the global colonial system (Jennings 2006: 9–13; Kennedy 1996). Functioning as sites of rejuvenation, seats of administration, and models of domestic space, colonial resorts were an integral part of strategies developed by their Euro-American residents to deal with the perceived threats of the colonial environment. Amendable even to radical shifts in medical science like the rise of the germ theory of disease that de-emphasized the role of climate in health, and thought to be appropriate for locations that, like Korea, were hardly tropical, the summer resort accommodated the view of the expatriate as an occupant of an otherwise forbidding environment in need of rest. These retreats were further framed by the emergence of a recreational culture in the colony at this time. Enabled by the same logistical infrastructure that rooted the colonial project, first Japanese and later Korean urbanites retreated to a lively network of beach resorts. This summer exodus to the resorts of the peninsula was spurred on by strikingly similar concerns about health and the environment channeled through discourse on a form of mental exhaustion known as neurasthenia, 神經衰弱 (*sin-gyeongsoeyak*, *shinkei suijaku*). Guarding against this environmentally triggered malady became one of the core functions for vacation sites like Sorai.<sup>3</sup>

It is important to stress that the two depictions of Sorai discussed in this article—that of the pathological interior and of the restorative resort—are not the constituent poles of a progressive shift in scientific understanding. Rather, both capture a different face of the same set of assumptions about colonial environments and racialized health. Relating more to the particular challenges that confronted the evangelical community, presentations of Sorai both as miasmatic

and healthful helped missionaries manage, first, with the highly deviant death of a colleague and, later, with an increasingly constrained economy of evangelical labor. The confluence of these two articulations of the colonial environment in one village effectively highlights the mutability of the process of spatial othering famously referred to by David Arnold as the “invention of tropicity” (Arnold 1996: 141–42).

The following sections will first discuss two distinct reactions to McKenzie’s suicide that converged on an understanding of colonial space as degenerative. In keeping with Arnold’s approach, this section deals with the environment as a broad, at times ambiguous basket for climate, weather, topography, culture and disease. The subsequent section will outline the transformation of Sorai into a summer resort, a process framed by the early twentieth-century development of a beach and vacation culture among the elite of the colony. This culture, like the missionary resorts, pivoted on a range of social and economic transformations that developed in tandem with the colonization of the peninsula. The last section will discuss how renderings of the Korean environment as miasmatic guided the reinvention of Sorai as a missionary health resort. This last section will highlight how the utilitarianism of evangelical logistics and strategy enabled missionaries to mobilize a range of race-based theories on weather and health to develop a culture of rest and racial isolation.<sup>4</sup>

### **The Perils of the Periphery**

McKenzie’s former colleagues drew from a combination of authoritative theories on climate and health to explain his suicide. These accounts rendered the Korean environment as a pathological actor, capable of eroding the health of white evangelicals. Based on this understanding, narratives of McKenzie’s work at Sorai tied together geography, environment, and the practices

of everyday life to propose an explanation for his death. To some missionary writers, McKenzie's case was one of tragic sacrifice. To others, it was taken to be the height of recklessness. However, all of his contemporaries converged on a view of the colonial environment as degenerative.

McKenzie arrived in Korea in December 1892. Lacking financial support, he planned to establish a self-sustaining ministry somewhere in the countryside. Following the advice of missionaries in Seoul, McKenzie set out for Sorai in the fall of 1893. Home to one of the oldest communities of Korean Protestants, Sorai had already hosted two other Canadian missionaries and was a hospitable starting point for McKenzie. The village of Songchung, commonly known among the missionaries as Sorai, was a farming community of about thirty houses located in the far western part of Hwanghai Province, near what is today Kumi, North Korea. A short distance from the village is the beach of Sorai, a long stretch of sand protected by dunes. The beach itself was dominated by a feature known to the missionaries as the "Point," a rocky finger of land between forty and sixty feet high that jutted out three-quarters of a mile into the Yellow Sea.

In letters home, McKenzie (McCully 1904: 104–8, 185) frequently stressed material conditions, singling out the local food, housing, and dress adopted as part of his new life. These comments were later referenced in accounts of his suicide that stressed the colonial environment's miasmatic impact. This interpretation was further facilitated by the notes McKenzie penned in the days before his death. In one missive, written a day before he shot himself and addressed to a physician in Seoul, the missionary asserts that he was suffering from the effects of fever and of exposure after spending too much time in the sun. "Please try and save a friend's life if you can," the letter ends (246). Earlier entries in McKenzie's diary also point to his concern

about fever and solar exposure. His departure after a visit to Seoul in the autumn of 1894 was marked by a self-diagnosed case of sunstroke. Then, again in the spring of 1895, McKenzie notes that he is suffering from malaria and exposure (McKenzie 1895: 13-26). At the beginning of June, he writes, "I had a touch of sunstroke from going three steps without an umbrella, and vomited severely" (McCully 1904: 214). On June 18, McKenzie notes a persistent fever. On the 19th, he writes, "Have spent a distressing day; vomited; cannot eat any food; move about with difficulty." On the 20th, he writes, "Resolved not to give in to disease but keep on the move." Then, on the 23rd, after finishing another account of his struggle with fever, McKenzie concludes his diary: "It was imprudent, on part of myself, traveling under the hot sun and sitting out at night till cold" (221).

For some, this slow decline was proof of the missionary's sacrifice. McKenzie's biographer, Elizabeth McCully, wrote that when congregants attempted to aid the weeping missionary shortly before his death, he claimed to have had visions of Christ and uttered the line, "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone" (248). The recitation is from the Gospel of John, where Jesus foreshadows his own crucifixion. The reference allowed McCully, who based the title of her biography on the verse, to liken McKenzie's death to that of Christ. The author could then verify the fruition of this act by pointing to the subsequent expansion of the Korean church. However, McCully is careful to stipulate that McKenzie's suicide was drawn out of the missionary by the environmental conditions of the colony. As she explains in the closing line of her account, "Climate and fever, exposure and privation, had done their work" (222).



Many missionaries propagated the view that McKenzie's passing was an act of subjective disorientation, evoked by the peninsula's environment. "The strain was too great," wrote James Gale. "The debilitating effect of bad food and severity of exposure told. The weight of heathenism is terrible. It depresses the spirit. Poor McKenzie, giant though he was, broke under it, like many another brave and noble soul" (McCully 1904: 214). Others maintained a more critical tone. Dr. Lillias Underwood (1918: 128) stressed the vanity of McKenzie's death: "His course was a short one, owing to preventable mistakes in his mode of living." In an earlier account the physician is even more direct. Individuals like McKenzie, Underwood (1904: 125) wrote, "Forget that a solitary life gradually unseats the intellect, and that a body which has reached maturity, fed on plenty of nutritious food, cannot suddenly be shifted to a meager, unaccustomed and distasteful diet of foreign concoction, and retain its power to resist disease." Underwood's views approximate those expressed by the missionary physician who initially investigated the suicide: "About the first duty of a doctor I was called upon to perform was to investigate the suicide of Mr. McKenzie who was possessed with the erroneous idea of the appropriateness of isolation, exile, Korean food and so forth. He was living alone up in Sorai. Notwithstanding that when he shot himself he was out of his head from fever, the evidence will show that he was a victim to the isolation exile theory" (Wells 1896: 238).

Ultimately, McKenzie's final prediction proved to be correct. In the same way that he had turned to the "Korean weather" to explain Hall's passing, McKenzie's missionary colleagues made sense of his death by pointing to the environmental dangers of life in colonial space. As European debates about acclimatization and immunity illustrate, views on health at the time of McKenzie's death were still heavily influenced by analytical approaches that emphasized the

environment, weather, and climate (Livingston 1999; Harrison 1996; Jennings 2006). Warwick Anderson's work on colonial medicine in the Philippines notes how, even after the advent of the germ theory of disease, medical personnel retained a focus on the environment by asserting that the insalubrious climate of the colonies wore nonnative patients down, making them more vulnerable to pathogens (Anderson 2006: 38–39).<sup>5</sup> Such understandings elevated everyday practice into the ambiguous task of preserving one's own health as well as the racialized boundaries of the colonizer community (Anderson 1996; Livingston 1999). Incidentally, an environmental focus also provided an avenue for those writing on McKenzie's life to sidestep the violation of his death. The missionaries in Korea were well aware of the seriousness of suicide within Christian ethics. Conveniently, through references to colonial space, McKenzie could be said to be void of agency when he died. It is worth noting that both the cautionary and the laudatory accounts of the missionary's end reached this conclusion. The narratives of McKenzie as the fallen martyr and as the strategically misguided evangelical both account for his suicide through reference to the environmental conditions of the colony. Korean food, Korean weather, and isolation from non-Korean society were charted in all the accounts as the causal factors of McKenzie's suicide.

### **Colonial Beach Culture**

A decade after McKenzie's death, the Sorai area took on a radically new role in the missionary community of Korea. In the summer of 1905, leading missionaries, impressed by the natural beauty of the location, initiated plans to establish a summer resort at the beach near the village. While at first slow to take root, within ten years a large seasonal community for expatriates took shape. The Sorai resort was the first of three dedicated missionary vacation sites on the

peninsula. Each was plotted to offer a respite from the environmental strain that was said to accompany life in the colony. In the case of Sorai, the rise of resort culture affected a rapid transformation in which formerly deleterious space was recast as healthful.<sup>6</sup>

These resorts were contemporaneous with the rapid development of a culture of summer recreation among the urbanites of the colony. Beach resorts in the 1920s and 1930s grew in tandem with the expansion of the colony's transportation and print-media networks (Hwan 2005; Kim 2015). Railroad and newspaper companies established and operated their own resorts and subsidized transportation during the summer months. Meanwhile the press major newspapers like the *Tonga ilbo* and *Chōsen Shinbun* published hundreds of articles profiling summer vacation culture. An outline of this discourse can be seen in a eleven-part series in the *Tonga ilbo* on the peninsula's major summer resorts published in the summer of 1927, or, two years later, in a ten-part series profiling the summer vacations of urban women printed in the same paper.<sup>7</sup> The craze that developed around this heterotopic space also found expression in the literature of the period. Colonial era works by authors like Yi Kwangsu, Yi T'aejun and Kim Malbong all took up the beach as a site for bourgeois consumption, erotic desire, and personal health (Kim 2010).

This new culture of recreation, buttressed by the colonies' expanded transport and communication networks, framed the rapid expansion of the missionary resorts. Plans for a beach community at Sorai were first publicized in the *Korean Mission Field* in 1906.<sup>8</sup> A year earlier board members of the Sorai Beach Resort Company, led by Horace G. Underwood, conducted an exploratory trip to the site in the summer. An article on the proposed resort introduced the geography of the Sorai area, described its picturesque views, listed the missionary families that had already purchased plots, and stressed Sorai's midpoint location between large

missionary stations in Pyongyang and Seoul (Hirst 1906). Four years later, a similar discussion of the proposed resort was printed in the “Personals and Notes” section of the same publication. “There is plenty of room at the beach for hundreds, and to make it possible for sick, suffering and weary missionaries to find refuge like this, free from malaria, swept by healthy sea breezes would indeed be a blessing” (*Korean Mission Field* 1910: 100).

Within a few years, the resort at Sorai came into being. In 1912, more than forty missionaries summered at the beach. By 1921, the number had increased to one hundred and seventy. To accommodate this growing population of expatriate guests, buildings were rapidly constructed. The first three cottages at the beach were introduced with the 1906 announcement. By 1918, there were more than thirty summer homes at the resort. By 1934, there were sixty.<sup>9</sup> Aside from domiciles, an array of additional facilities were constructed at this time including servants’ quarters, a visitors’ lodge, dispensary, bakery, icehouse, athletic field, tennis courts, golf greens, a library, a children’s playground, an auditorium, and a series of water markers for swimmers. Vacationers filled leisurely weeks with Korean-language practice, reading, writing, and Bible study. Swimming lessons and races punctuated the summer months, as did clam chowders, afternoon teas, card games, picnics, hikes, and the compilation of wildflower and seashell collections. Days were frequently concluded with dinner parties, evening singsongs, performances at the auditorium, and sunset services on the rocky point overlooking the beach. McKenzie, too, was brought into the life of the community, his grave becoming a popular sightseeing destination during strolls in the countryside (Clark 2003; Fletcher 2016; Peterson 2000; “The Summer at Sorai Beach” *Korean Mission Field* 1921).

Explicitly constructed along racial lines, descriptions of the curative and restorative potential of the Sorai resort frequently commented on the communities' distance from large populations of Koreans. The editor of the *Korean Mission Field* advocated for the Sorai resort by stating that, in addition to the area's geography and climate, "the absence too of native villages anywhere in sight, making this place unique in Korea as a sanitarium site" ("Personals and Notes" *Korean Mission Field* 1912: 322). Horace G. Underwood (1918: 473–74) further stressed Sorai's isolation from Koreans in an introduction to the resort: "A small cluster of native houses, hidden behind a hill at the landing place is the only native village within a couple of miles and to the tired worker the absence of these for the time of summer rest is a great blessing." Similarly, an introduction to the other major missionary beach resort, established near Wonsan in 1914, also stressed the theme of isolation: "One needs quiet and rest from the noises of the outside world and to be removed as far as possible from the nationals amongst whom he or she labours during the year" ("Wonsan" *Korean Mission Field* 1914: 228–29).<sup>10</sup> Control over the property by the beach associations in both Wonsan and Sorai precluded the purchasing of plots by Koreans. While, in the case of the Wonsan resort, colonial authorities not only aided in the purchasing of land but also policed the area .

Similar forms of segregation could be seen at other beaches in the colony. Many of the first ocean resorts that catered to Japanese settlers and beach companies frequently implemented policies to exclude or bracket off Korean visitors. Japanese-only resorts in Pusan and Wonsan maintained segregated beaches, while in Inchon Korean swimmers were excluded until 1928 (Kim 2015: 16).<sup>11</sup> This discrimination did not go unnoticed in the Korean press. Articles like "A Variety of Treasures on the Western Coast in the Hands of Another," pointed to the fact that

missionaries had monopolized some of the most prime real-estate in the peninsula (*Tonga ilbo* 1924). In a 1933 piece published in *New Women*, the contributor, pointed to the use of an extended lease by the missionaries to maintain an exclusive hold on Sorai: “Even though there is no prohibition against Koreans, there is no appropriate accommodation facilities or convenient food services for them either” (Kim 2010: 167).

While the missionaries were eager to imagine a community set apart, there is ample reason to be skeptical of their renditions of racial isolation. As pointed out in work by Donald N. Clark, summer sanctuaries like Sorai depended on a large cohort of Korean workers. Closeted in servants’ quarters, basements, and nearby villages, Korean labor was indispensable to Sorai’s operation. Yet, the emphasis on their absence in evangelical records is telling. Encounters with Koreans outside of mission resorts were frequently referred to as enervating, while within these spaces of recreation the white expatriate population was viewed as a healthful break from the everyday. Such a logic of isolation and restoration denotes a political dimension to health and hygiene inextricably entangled with the logic of empire (Bourdagh 1998; Park 2005). This theme is even more emphatic when one considers how resort culture was linked to the expansionist logic of the evangelical project. Pressed to overcome financial constraints, Protestant missionaries both in Korea and in the metropole, hoped that the vacation culture of places like Sorai could shore up the logistical difficulties and labor shortages that confounded the missionary movement.

### **The Science and Strategies of Mission Health**

Racialized resorts and the culture of health were viewed as potential solutions to the problem of missionary labor. Denominational boards sought to mitigate the logistical and financial burden

imposed by sick evangelicals. Missionaries were costly investments and deaths or medical leaves were viewed as a loss of church funds and a failed return on a potential dividend of converts. A common solution to this problem was the encouragement of periods of rest and vacation. Scheduled during the hottest months of the year, missionary vacations were to provide an opportunity to recuperate from what were held to be the degenerative effects of the colonial environment. Directives to rest often conflicted with the sense of urgency and emphasis on sacrifice that informed the evangelical project. To overcome this contradiction, the managerial logic that informed the new discipline of missiology merged with research in the fields of medical and climate science to mandate rest and racial isolation for the sake of the mission. This logic helped drive a culture of health in missionary communities that materialized in the form of the summer resort. In this way, while Sorai was remade into a place of recuperation, it was still governed by the same conflation of illness with the climatic, cultural, and physical conditions of the Korean environment that defined descriptions of the area following McKenzie's death.

Among the most effective illustrations of this attentiveness to health within the missionary movement was the 1933 work *The Health and Turnover of Missionaries*. Published by the Institute of Social and Religious Research, the book reflected the Rockefeller-funded organization's aims to integrate the utilitarianism of modern management with the evangelical missions project (Zurlo 2015). This type of scholarship was indicative of an analytical approach to evangelism known as missiology. Departmentally based in universities and seminaries across Euro-America, the field of missiology sought to integrate the social sciences into a systematic approach to evangelism. Along these lines, *The Health and Turnover of Missionaries* aggregated and analyzed the experiences of 12,000 missionaries for instances and causes of death, sickness,

furloughs and leaves of absence. Pressed by the economic conditions of the early 1930s, the authors took missionary health as a means to manage finances, labor and evangelical aims (Lennox 1933).

Similar studies were being conducted globally at this time (Lennox 1933: 206–7). For instance, a 1922 edition of the *Korean Mission Field* was dedicated in its entirety to the question of missionary health. The keynote article, by medical missionary Dr. James Van Buskirk, was titled “The Health of Missionaries in Korea.” This detailed report lays out information derived from a survey group of 267 respondents. The resulting data were arrayed in more than two dozen charts, graphs, and maps that presented the health of the foreign evangelical community. The project was justified through references to the aforementioned economy of missions: “The missionary is the most expensive item in the budget of the missionary boards and the boards are taking steps to find out the real health conditions and how to care best for their missionaries” (Van Buskirk 1922: 163). The need to maximize logistical efficiency within missionary networks was compounded by the ever-present tone of crisis that accompanied the evangelical project. The missionaries never had sufficient time, resources, or personnel to effectively communicate their message to the world. “Our Master’s command was urgent,” exclaimed Dr. Thomas Mansfield, another medical missionary in Korea. “Already whole nations have passed into eternity without hearing His Gospel” (Mansfield 1920: 79–80). While this urgency informed the kinds of immersive evangelical tactics embraced by McKenzie and others, it also took form through an institutionalized culture of rest. “For the missionary,” Mansfield continued, “the question of recreation resolves itself into the question of preparation” (79). With such an important commission, it was said to be essential that missionaries be attentive to their health and everyday



habits. An illustration of this can be seen in a list of directives written by missionary physician Dr. Stanley Martin. Evangelists were to refrain from excessive worry, manage their time, find a hobby, play tennis or volleyball, visit a doctor and dentist annually, take a daily stroll, consume plenty of fruit and water, and maintain their vaccinations. Of particular concern were the effects of the weather. Emphasizing climatic and seasonal difference, Martin urged readers to protect themselves from the heat and sun (Martin 1921: 107–8).

Martin's attention to climate and everyday practice was hardly arbitrary. The missionary community referenced some of the most recent climatic research to inform their portrayal of Korea as environmentally deleterious. The paramount example of this approach is another study by James Van Buskirk. Produced three years prior to the publication of his research on missionary health, "The Climate of Korean and Its Probable Effect on Human Efficiency" combined meteorological data produced by the American and Japanese colonial states with recent scholarship on race and climatic geography, primarily Ellsworth Huntington's *Civilization and Climate* (Van Buskirk 1919).<sup>12</sup> Borrowing from Huntington's methodology and statistics, Van Buskirk integrated localized observations about Korean climate and weather into an interpretive model that related these features of the environment to the racial and social hierarchies of the global system of empire.

The novelty of Van Buskirk's work is how it locates difference through empirical similarity. Sections on humidity, rainfall, wind, sunshine, and atmosphere all emphasize the likeness between Korea and much of the continental United States. In fact, the study suggested that the Korean climate was far more stable. However, for Van Buskirk, this invariability was itself a source of concern: "There is a stimulus in a storm, it produces a good reaction. The

regions where the people show greatest vigor and efficiency are all regions of storms. Central and Eastern United States and Northwest Europe are the most stormy regions of the world where other conditions are favorable to man. Japan has more storms than the rest of the Orient where other conditions are favorable, and her people have shown more vigor” (Van Buskirk 1922: 47).

By overlapping with the geography of empire, Van Buskirk’s study returns to an understanding of health in colonial space that fixates on environmental conditions. In addition to a lack of storms, Korea is identified as having an excessive amount of sunlight, thought to be particularly damaging to psychological health (47). “The climate,” Van Buskirk explained, “lacks the stimulus of storms and weather and electricity and ozone, and is depressing in its constant temperature and high humidity in summer with too much sunshine for blond-races” (57). To deal with the threat of the sun, the article presented a number of common suggestions for whites in the tropics including the use of pith hats, white clothes, and tinted glasses. “Don’t expose your Occidental brains to the direct sunshine,” Van Buskirk urged, “unless you have lots of black hair” (58).

This fixation on the sun was not specific to missionaries in Korea. By the late nineteenth century, discourse on the effects of tropical climate and sun exposure had calcified in English language medical science around the term *neurasthenia*. Initially referring to forms of urban-based mental strain and anxiety, neurasthenia became an effective category for an array of maladies thought to be rooted in life in the periphery. Almost any manifestation of ill health could be read as a symptom. For instance, Dane Kennedy notes how colonial climates were thought to lead to loss of memory, lethargy, irritability, alcoholism, sexual profligacy, depression and suicide (Kennedy 1990). As such, the condition was well suited to account for a variety of

colonial anxieties about mental, moral, and racial degeneration (Livingston, 1999: 104; Anderson 1996: 64).<sup>13</sup>

Neurasthenia proved to be a similarly effective avenue for the discussion of mental health among the reading public of East Asia (Yoo 2016: 117; Frühstück 2005; Baum 2018). In Japan, the growth of institutionalized psychiatry in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries translated into a rapid increase in diagnoses of neurasthenia, raising the specter of a national crisis (Suzuki 2003; Wu 2016; Kim 2018). There, as in Korea, the press became a capacious venue for discussions of mental exhaustion that easily spilled over into broader concerns on the social and environmental transformations that accompanied modernity (Yoo 2016). Vividly captured in the literary works of Natsume Sōseki, Bak Tae-won, and Yi Sang, the malady was at times linked to a culture of urban commodities, temporalities, and modes of sexual expression.<sup>14</sup> Additionally, the onset of mental disease was frequently considered to be driven to the annual climate, with writers pointing to the summer months as particularly dangerous (Yoo 2016: 119).

Anglo-American missionaries held analogous understandings of the connection between the environment and mental health. Van Buskirk's 1919 study was particularly focused on the effects of sun exposure and extensively cited the work of Major C. E. Woodruff. His 1905 book, *The Effects of the Tropical Light on White Men*, along with Huntington's work, has been credited with reviving environmental determinism in the years following the development of germ theory (Kennedy 1990: 124–35). Informed by Huntington's findings, Van Buskirk stated, "My present opinion is that Korea has too much sunlight for the highest human efficiency, especially causing neurasthenias, which are very common in Korea both among the Koreans and among foreign residents" (Van Buskirk 1919: 47–48). His primary concern was that the apparent similarity of

the weather in Korea to that of the missionaries' home countries would lead them to lose sight of the many threats posed by the stable weather and penetrating sun. "The result," he explained, "is that, as a whole the Occidentals in Korea look worn, newcomers and those returning from furlough notice this, but soon join the ranks of the 'weary-looking'" (57–58). Of course, weather was not the only item of concern in research on missionary health. Van Buskirk's 1922 publication covered a range of maladies that effected the evangelical community. However, even when placed alongside other maladies the danger of environmentally induced neurasthenia was said to be as considerable as dysentery and malaria (Van Buskirk 1922: 167–172).

The problem of the haggard evangelical was thought to extend well beyond Korea. Data collected in *The Health and Turnover of Missionaries* suggested that more than a third of all missionaries who retired from the ministry did so because of being "functional nervous" or "generally run down" by life outside of the metropole (Lennox 1933: 150). A 1913 study of 1,479 invalid missionaries published in the *British Medical Journal* cited "nervous conditions of a neurasthenic type" as the greatest single factor leading to missionary retirement (Price 1913). The same paper noted that in Japan this cause was cited in more than 81 percent of all medical-based departures. Similar conclusions were reached in a trans-regional discussion on climate and health mediated by the *British Medical Journal* in 1922. Citing causal factors as varied as the weather, sunlight, barometric pressure, atmospheric electricity, race, and consumption patterns, contributors were divided over the exact cause of neurasthenia. However, writers converged on the belief that the ailment was exacerbated by local custom, local environment, and the lack of proper rest (Kennedy, 1990).

A similar conflation of climate and moral hygiene can be seen in a 1919 article titled “A Summer Vacation: One of the Prophylactics Against Breakdown.” Here, the physician E. W. Anderson explained how environmental factors gradually impaired foreign mission workers: “From the standpoint of climate, contrary to the usually accepted idea, the missionary in Korea faces a condition which easily becomes one of a chain of circumstances which may force him to a premature retirement from work.” The threat of the climate was further amplified by life “among an alien people of an alien tongue” as well as “certain infections common to the Orient to which the missionary becomes too frequent prey” (Anderson 1919: 145) To remedy these environmental threats, the author offers a collection of suggestions for maintaining an active and socially engaged lifestyle; above all else, Anderson emphasized mission resorts. A break in the summer was said to be a productive activity, necessary for the sustenance and refinement of the evangelical worker. “The idea that vacation means relaxation, an unstringing and letting down of personality, is the antipodes of the truth,” echoed the editor of the *Korean Mission Field*. “It is rather such a keying up and attainment of our organism” (DeCamp 1919: 133–34).<sup>15</sup> Van Buskirk expressed a similar view: “There may be times,” he wrote, “when a set of tennis or a mountain climb is as religious and as much to the glory of God as attending a prayer meeting” (Van Buskirk 1919: 58).

Summer recreation was only part of a broader structure of missionary health. Recruitment procedures often included rigorous physicals to select the most resilient among the thousands who volunteered (*Report of Commission I–VII* 1910, 5:16). Additionally, mission boards granted scheduled furloughs and health leaves. These sabbaticals were guided by the same managerial logic that informed discussions on missionary health and recreation. In the words of one

ecumenical report on the furlough system: “It has been learned that from an economic standpoint a vacation is good business” (6:235). In a nine-point explanation of this view, the author stressed that sabbaticals could considerably extend the careers of missionaries by shielding them from environmental strain. In Korea, medical leaves through the furlough system were common. According to Van Buskirk’s 1922 study, 52 of the mission’s 198 furloughs were taken on the grounds of ill health, with neurasthenia and dysentery being the two leading causes (Van Buskirk 1922: 182) However, these absences were costly in their own right and by the early twentieth century the development of seasonal resorts suggested they could be less frequently scheduled. At the World Missionary Conference held in Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1910, it was reported that:

Many changes have taken place in the large and important mission countries during the past half-century which make the surroundings of the missionaries more tolerable, such as the provision of places of retreat to which they are expected to retire during the hot season for rest and recuperation, more sanitary and better equipped homes, better facilities for travel, access to the outside world, in more contact with people of their own race as travellers or as permanent residents in the country (*Report of Commission I–VI* 1910, 6:327).

However, furloughs did not always yield the kind of physical and mental restoration hoped for. A general primer on missionary health from 1940 noted that for many, the sabbatical constituted an enervating departure from an expatriate life padded by servants, nannies, cooks,

field pay, and large houses (Dodd 1940: 85). By contrast, missionary resorts both facilitated and justified these forms of luxury and expressions of class. In Korea during the 1920s and 1930s, a growing number of the peninsula's population were visiting the beach for a restorative break from the everyday, but only colonial elites, like the missionaries, could plausibly retreat for weeks on end to cottages in exclusive resorts and insular communities.

## **Conclusion**

In 1920, a brief history of the Sorai resort profiled the transformation of the area during the preceding two decades. "Mr. McKenzie's lonely grave," the article concluded, "and the materialization of Dr. Underwood's beautiful dream of Sorai beach have forever sanctified this corner of our Chosen land" (Smith 1920: 197). On the surface, this attempt to reconcile the narratives of Sorai suggests that missionaries conducted a purposeful intervention of spiritual and physical purification. Little in the historical record supports this claim. Accounts and advertisements for the resort stressed the site's beauty as well as the luxury and relaxation that accompanied a mandated vacation, not a deliberate reconstitution of a site previously identified as deleterious. What the 1920 history does expose is the consistent attempt by missionaries to separate themselves within the colony. Indeed, the spiritually and physically purified zone that the author conceptualized was surrounded by a vast unclean expanse.

This view of restorative space was consistent with the role assigned to resorts like Sorai within evangelical strategy. Missionary exhaustion was both a logistical issue for the global evangelical project as well as an articulation of whites' anxiety about the deterioration of racial boundaries in the colonies. Such ambivalence was not only about climate and the sun but also about food, dress, and language, all of which combined to provide a basis by which missionaries

were advised to remove themselves from the local Korean population. Environmental degradation was thought at the time to be cumulative, and with warning signs as common as poor hygiene, laziness, indolence, drunkenness, and sexual profligacy, the dissolution of the boundary between colonizer and colonized was not difficult to project (Stoler 2002). Sorai was thus prescribed as an antidote for this loss of subjective clarity, a place where one could defuse the types of environmental strain that were blamed for McKenzie's death there years earlier.

This particular form of quarantine demonstrates an unlikely intersection of medicine, environmental science and faith. Justified by the limits and logics of evangelical expansion, arguments developed to mandate missionary rest in the colony functionally maintained clear boundaries within a community predicated on universal inclusion. While the ideological formation was unique, the functional effect was unextraordinary. Like other communities of elites in the colony, missionaries maintained their status in part through homespun modes of power. In this case, scientific knowledge production and the authority that it imparted established the missionaries as a people set apart. While not directly linked to the colonial state, missionary renderings of the Korean environment did little to challenge well-worn tropes of colonial space and colonized people. Even when faced with data that clearly suggested empirical parity between the climates of the peninsula and those of the metropole, missionary researchers elected to sustain the logic of colonial difference.

By the end of the 1930s, the Protestant missionary community in Korea was slowly coming apart. Embattled by increasingly strict domestic legislation and confronted by Japan's deteriorating relations with other colonial powers in the region, Anglo-American expatriates were ushered out of the peninsula (Clark 2003: 250–72). The last evangelical workers and their



families were expelled in the spring of 1942. No missionary would vacation at Sorai again.

Located north of the 38th parallel, the beach was gradually fortified to defend against foreign incursion. Evangelical workers began to return to the southern part of the peninsula in early 1946. By 1948, they had already set up a new summer resort.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> There is a vast body of research on these topics with considerable interventions being made in the fields of postcolonial studies, critical gender studies, and the history of science. For general theoretical interventions, this work draws on research by David Arnold and Warwick Anderson.

<sup>2</sup> A telling anecdote from the Shinto Rites Controversy of the late 1930s recounts how Korean parents, faced with the missionary-imposed closure of their children's schools, complained of being simultaneously subject to two kinds of colonialism. See Clark 2003: 214; for more on the wartime expulsion of missionaries, see 250–77.

<sup>3</sup> Recent scholarship on colonial Korea has focused on the function of human and physical geography in medical discourse. Soyoung Suh has explored how Korea emerged as an investigative category for studies on health throughout the colonial period, often functioning as an analytical counterpoint to the metropole (Suh 2017: 82–87). Tracing the overlap between medical science and the nascent field of Japanese anthropology, Hoi-eun Kim has focused on how human geography and scientific racism intermingled in justifications for the colonization of the peninsula (Kim 2014: 114–18). Elsewhere, the gendered dimensions of Japanese physical

anthropology and medical science and the ways in which they were dependent on both the institutional and the analytical structure of colonial rule is examined in the work of Jin-kyung Park (2013). More recent consideration of the politics of gender in the history of medical modernization in Korea can be found in the work of Sonja M. Kim (2019).

<sup>4</sup> This study is informed by analytical approaches to race that place the subject within a matrix of colonial, class, and gender relations (McClintock 1995). Recent histories of evangelicals in Korea have explored these dynamics, exposing how faith in the colonial setting was engaged with the themes of domesticity and gender. At times these entanglements even frayed the racialized divisions between the missionary and the convert (Choi 2009).

<sup>5</sup> Similarly syncretic views were also common in the American metropole at this time (Nash 2006). Likewise, in Meiji-era debates about the cause of beriberi, climatic, and environmental-based theories of disease enjoyed considerable staying power (Bay 2012).

<sup>6</sup> A similar transformation in the Caribbean is analyzed by Mark Carey (2011), who stresses infrastructure and transportation development in tracing the shift of deleterious space into sites of recreation. The emergence of resort culture in Korea was similarly contingent on central aspects of the Japanese colonial state. In particular, the completion of a peninsula-wide land survey, the development of active print media, and the expansion of transportation networks all produced the conditions for vacation beaches to take form.

<sup>7</sup> There was remarkable variety in publications on summer beach culture at this time, much of it a fusion of discourses on health and class. See “Haeanŭi chŏkpuwa p’isŏgaek ŭi chuŭijŏm” (“Beach Suitability and Points of Caution for Summer Vacationers”) 1927); “Ŭiryŏng suyŏng

taehoe” (“Ŭiryōng Swimming Competition”) 1927; “Natsu no eisei” (“Summer Hygiene”) 1925; “No e chohon t’aeyang kwangsŏn” (“Sunlight That Is Good for the Brain”) 1926; “Senjin yukata no ryūkō” (“Current Trends in Korean Swimsuits”) 1924; “1930 nyōnsik haesuyokpok” (“Swim Fashion the Year 1930”) 1930); “Mohou suiei” (“Model Swimming”) 1926). For examples of news papers encouraging travel, see “Kyōng-In kan hagi ch’aim harin” (“Summer Discount on Train Tickets from Seoul to Incheon”) 1920; “Wōnsanhaesuyokchang kwa kich’aharin.” (“Wōnsan Beach and Train Ticket Discounts”) 1922; “Kaisuiyoku kyaku ni kishachin no waribiki.” (“Discount of Train Fares for Travels to the Seaside”) 1924.

<sup>8</sup> A mixture of mission reports and community announcements, the *Korean Mission Field* was a shared outlet for the multidenominational evangelical community in Korea.

<sup>9</sup> For a chronology of resort construction, see “Personals and Notes” *Korean Mission Field* 1912: 322; “The Summer at Sorai Beach” *Korean Mission Field* 1921: 271–74; Horace Underwood 1918: 473–74; and Rhodes 1934: 108.

<sup>10</sup> One additional missionary resort on Jilin Mountain began to take shape in 1920 (Han 2010).

<sup>11</sup> None of the documents reviewed for this article suggest the missionary beaches were open to Japanese vacationers. In Wonsan, there were separate beaches for Koreans, Japanese, and Euro-Americans.

<sup>12</sup> Ellsworth Huntington was a Yale-based geographer known for his work on environmental determinism. His 1915 book *Civilization and Climate* was a global study of human social development as defined by geographical and climatic conditions. The study employed empirical

analysis to reassert empire's spatial arrangements, claiming that the location of global metropolises had causal links to superior climatic conditions.

<sup>13</sup> For a more detailed discussion of this theme, see Stoler 2002. For more on neurasthenia in relation to 19th century science and society, see Rabinbach 1990.

<sup>14</sup> Attention to this theme is from Yoo's (2016) discussion of Bak Tae-won's "A Day in the Life of Gubo the Novelist." A similar theme is famously present in Yi Sang's short story *Wings* (1936).

<sup>15</sup> Proscriptions of rest have long been a feature of discourses on neurasthenia; see Mitchell 1875.

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