

TOGETHER: RE-IMAGINING, RE-READING HER STORY IN THE CHURCH

Baptist Women and Spiritual Formation Across Generations

Incarnation of Faith:

Akiko Matsumura as a Model of Japanese Baptist Women's Spirituality

The theme of this conference is "TOGETHER: RE-IMAGINING, RE-READING HER STORY IN THE CHURCH." My task tonight is to talk about "Baptist Women and Spiritual formation Across Generations." I have some hesitations to do so because I am not a spirituality specialist and have no experiences to draw from neither as a teacher nor a speaker on this topic. Further, reading a paper in a foreign language is not a small matter for me. These personal reasons made me think that I should have been more thoughtful before I agreed to come this place.

But I am here only because of Akiko Matsumura and her legacy as a model of spirituality for Japanese Baptist women. Akiko Matsumura was not a stranger to active in the BWA family in the late 1970's. She served as a vice president for the BWA's Woman's Department from 1975 to 1980. 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, especially the BWA vice-president, she expressed her strong desire to make contributions to the BWA family as a woman and as Asian. With her pushing me from behind, I am here to share her story with you. Telling a story is a historian's task and that is who I am.

In spite of her contribution both in the national and international Baptist circles, her story has been little told and her contributions have seldom been valued by our peer Japanese Baptists. In this sense, she is a forgotten individual even though she left undeniable influences on later generations of Japanese Baptist women. If we can point to a model of spirituality to Japanese

Baptist women, that would be Akiko Matsumura.

Japanese Baptist Acceptance of Spirituality

It might sound strange to you if I say that Japanese Baptists as a whole hardly talk about spirituality. That does not mean, however, that we have no interest in spirituality, spiritual matters, or spiritual formation. The reality is that most Japanese Baptists have little idea what spirituality exactly means to them. Of course, we want to know how our Christian faith can be strong and mature. In order to achieve this, we have tried such things as organizing good Sunday School classes, publishing Sunday School lessons, planning workshops and retreats, and giving sufficient theological education to train future church leadership. Even though we work hard at it, we do not use the terms "spirituality" or "spiritual formation." Instead, we simply call it "training of faith" or "spiritual discipline". Akiko Matsumura explains it this way: "(to) train our spiritual eyes and ears to discern the truth revealed in the Bible."¹

The general response of Japanese Baptists to the term "spiritual" tends to be less positive. Though the definite reason is unclear, one speculation might be that "spiritual" sounds suspiciously like something that pleases certain individuals who love to exhibit their own piety and deep faith. Therefore, the louder the importance of spirituality is claimed, the more it causes the audience to step back.

Sometimes "being spiritual" is synonym for the shallow quietism which does nothing but protect one's own inner peace even when crying voices are raised nearby caused by various kinds of evils. Yearning for spiritual enrichment means to feed one's spiritual self-centeredness that would eventually take him or her to a sort of "Inward Journey" as the goal. Therefore, very unfortunately, such criticism makes some Japanese Baptists cautious, doubtful, and even negative about

spirituality itself. This is the same in the church as in culture. In the church, we hardly hear “spiritual formation” as a term nor is it taken as the crucially important matter, even in theological education.

In such an environment, the best way to become familiar with spirituality or spiritual formation is to look directly at the incarnation of Christian faith in the life of believers as a living textbook. Akiko Matsumura is a powerful model of this sort. Her life shows us how to discipline our Christian faith and apply it within the cultural frame without twisting socially accepted womanhood. Akiko Matsumura was the pioneer Japanese Baptist woman who developed many fields of work for church women who received God’s call as their vocations. On this achievement, the spiritual discipline was her top priority.

Being Her Own and 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 certain social status at that time. When she reached school age, her father sent her to a private elementary school rather than a public one as most other and ordinary Japanese parents did.

This school was founded by successful international trading merchant Mr. Ichizaemon Morimura, whose major business was to produce porcelain tableware for export. This business eventually brought him great success and enormous wealth. As a successful international businessman, Morimura was painfully aware of the importance of language skills for promising Japanese youth. At the opening of his school, he insisted on offering English language as one of the major subjects, even to the younger elementary schoolers. For this reason, it seems quite unusual to me that traditional Japanese parents like Akiko's sent their girls to such a school

committed to modern education.

However, going to such a school brought Akiko her irreplaceable fortune. It is evident that the language education of this school provided Akiko sufficient preparation for being a good student of the English language. This education also gave her a solid base to be a future Baptist leader for women when she graduated from the Southern Baptist Women's Missionary Union Training School in the United States and later returned to Japan to work.

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. Needless to say, her parents adamantly opposed this. If boys wished to pursue higher education, they had no trouble in getting the greatest support from the whole family. This was the situation in which she was born and grew up.

Akiko later went to a high school of which education was famous for training young girls to be independent and smart in the assigned areas for women such as housekeeping and raising children. She also did well in that school—not in these home economics classes but in foreign language classes. She still kept her strong desire for higher education, for college education this time. However, such an ambition was squelched because of her gender and the social status of her family. Her parents, particularly her father, insisted:

I will look for a nice husband for you, for that you can count on me. Just wait- You, as a girl, have no need for higher education. Because education is a grave obstacle for girls to be a sweet house wife. Education makes girls argumentative which most men dislike as their future wife, you know that.²

Akiko later interpreted these words in this way, “My parents thought that higher education would make me too independent and stubborn to be a sweet and obedient wife as its result. 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

Her Independent Will and Stubbornness for New Life

Akiko thoroughly resented her parents' attitude and became rebellious. She later described herself: "It seems I had an independent will with stubborn streaks."⁴ This stubbornness knew no ways to give up on her dream. This was the same stubbornness, however, that eventually won her parents' unwilling permission to take a six-month English conversation course at the nearby YMCA. There Akiko met a Southern Baptist female missionary named Dorothy Carver, and they became good and life-long friends even through the war time.

Dorothy Carver was a daughter of William Owen Carver who was a Southern Baptist missiologist legend and longtime professor at Southern Baptist Seminary. She later married William Maxfield Garrott, who also served in Japan for years as a Southern Baptist missionary. He was a brilliant New Testament scholar who earned his Ph.D. degree at age 24. It was this missionary couple who gave Akiko greatest influence in assisting her spiritual growth. Especially, in his later years, Max loved to call Akiko "our daughter" even their age difference was only 7 years. 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 little excited with this choice. In addition, one of her older brothers who openly confessed himself to be a communist, used to preach to her that religion is opium to the people and Christianity is its worst sort. But, her burning interest in the language study and great temptation to free English lessons won over her caution and suspicion toward the Bible. Her parents' detest

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 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 article, Akiko heard Dorothy saying that she saw Akiko's language ability as God's investment in her.

God's Investment and William Owen Carver: The Divine Source for Her Spiritual Strength

It was such a surprise discovery to her 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. It was this spiritual experience that she remembered as "a thrilling revelation and the beginning of new life" on her conversion. Looking back on her early family life, she was always placed at a lower status and looked down on just 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 matters 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 as Akiko's vocation. Dorothy first recommended Akiko to study at the Methodist women's college in Nagasaki and later at the WMU Training School in Louisville.

After finishing college in Nagasaki, Akiko was offered a three-year contract to teach English at the school. At this time anti-American feeling was began to grow throughout the country, and the US bombers began to destroy Japanese cities. Akiko later moved back to Tokyo, allowing her to escape the dropping of the second atomic bomb on the city of Nagasaki.

World War II ended in August of 1945 with Japan's unconditional surrender to the Allied forces. Seven months later, Akiko received a letter from W. O. Carver of Southern Baptist Seminary expressing his willingness to provide all possible help with regard to her wish to study in the States. Carver had heard of Akiko from the reports of his missionary daughter and her husband Garrott as well. In 1945 they were residing in Hawaii like other former missionaries waiting on the door to Japan to re-open. Carver seemed determined to bring this Japanese young Christian woman to the WMU Training School as part of his post-war mission policy. In 1947, Akiko was given permission from General McArthur's headquarters to go to the States as one of the first four students permitted to leave occupied Japan.

Her life at the WMU School started smoothly under the great care of W. O. Carver and his family. Even though her language skill was far beyond of the average Japanese of that time, she faced frustrations and sense of misery as every international student had to face. In those difficult days, she drew patience and hope from her trust in God, Dorothy and her father. In her unpublished monograph, Akiko especially mentioned Carver's encouragement, "If Dr. Carver thinks I can do it, I'd better stick to it."⁷

In America, she fully enjoyed breathing the air of liberty and fell in love with the Greek

language and Biblical studies. Her academic performance in Greek especially impressed Southern Seminary 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. McDowell even promised to provide a special tutor for her.

However, unexpected discouragement came from the female head of the 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 that I learned 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 official life, these two aspects—being female and being Asian were paired in the assignments that constantly forced her to work it out both in national and international settings.

Even after this discouraging incident, she continued to study Greek, fed with the encouragement of McDowell and spiritual support of Carver. Dedicating her deep gratitude to these professors on producing a translation of the Greek New Testament in contemporary Japanese, she wrote: "If these professors had not given me constant encouragement and timely assistance, I should never have been able to have the joy and privilege of serving as a Bible teacher."⁹ Her personal encounter with Carver especially helped her spirituality to grow deeper. 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.'¹⁰

As she occasionally mentioned, she was disgusted with the criticism of her stubbornness which was

said to be her bad luck. It was "bad luck" in the sense that she doomed to be an old maid never be someone's sweet and loving wife. But her Christian faith shed a different light. Her faith taught her that good God could change her disfavored nature into an indispensable divine tool for God's work.

In 1950, Akiko graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Religious Education. As she continued private Greek study with a tutor for the next academic degree, she faced a crossroad. The longer she stayed in the United States, the more she felt being pulled back home. It was not from her homesickness but from her concern with the danger of alienating herself from fellow workers in Japan with whom she should identify in the first place.¹¹

At this crossroad, she went to seek Carver's advice. He told her, "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." He even showed her step by step how to do it. She faithfully followed each step it that finally brought her to reach a decision—the decision to go back home.

More Struggle in Her Own Land

Her work after returning to Japan was impressive and remarkable. She was assigned to the Convention's youth work in 1952 as its first full-time secretary. Her boss was Rev. Shuichi Matsumura, who later proposed to her to become his second wife. Together with one Southern Baptist missionary, she organized the youth movement on a national scale. She was very successful in this project. Because of this achievement as a project leader, the BWA Youth Department authorized her to supervise the organization of the first Asian youth conference. Then she moved to the Convention's Sunday School Division as a writer and editor to publish the

teaching materials for the local churches. What she mainly did was to translate 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 missions and evangelism task of the church given by God.

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

Her decision was to leave the Convention's official position for marriage. She chose the local church as her place to serve God rather than the Convention office or other related institutions. On this decision, Carver's book on Ephesians was the inspiration to her. She wrote:

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 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

In 1954, she chose the harder path and married Rev. Matsumura in her full conviction.

Even after she married, however, she never quit her old custom: of studying the Greek New Testament and an hour-long morning meditation and prayer. This custom remained as her lifelong habit—waking up at 4 a.m. every morning to study the New Testament both in both Greek and English followed by meditation and prayer. She kept engaging in evangelism and teaching the Bible as an active worker in the church. She also retained a number of responsibilities as part

timer including of the Convention's Sunday School Division, BWA officer, and other international responsibilities.

Among them spiritual discipline was always her top priority in things in which she was involved. She wrote, "If we want to meet with God, we must go to him before our mind is invaded by masses of information and before our soul is burdened with cares and toils of the world."¹³ She added:

If we want to grow spiritually, we must set apart a definite time and even 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 we taking time and pains to know people at a deeper level? Are not we so busy with housework, church work, meetings, and entertainment that we neglect the most important thing? Do not we sometimes justify our neglect it by saying, "After all, we are busy in the Lord's work?"¹⁴

To serve well for others, Akiko acknowledged the value of seeking to be alone as Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes, "A man who cannot be alone cannot enter into real fellowship with others."

Marriage neither blocked her way to serve God nor pulled her away from it as an obstacle. To her, 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 God had given her and play the part in the divine work for which God had created her. Therefore, she tried to take care of housekeeping matters as perfectly as possible with little laziness as if working for God and for the family as a mother and wife were not different things. Making excuses and compromise because mother and wife were not her things in her way to serve God. In this way, she challenged the traditional image of a Japanese housewife and that of Christian woman who was called by God.

If it is correct, the reason why Akiko favored of 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 areas for which they were responsible to manage.

In the Bible study she did in New Orleans in 1982, the lesson on Lydia was where Akiko fully disclosed her view on ideal leadership of Christian woman. The following is a part of her study:

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 taste 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 confronted by the gospel. Or rather, the Lord used these characteristics of hers to advance His cause¹⁵.

In the late 1960s, her devotion to God as a vocation faced to the real test. It was the national Convention's drastic policy change that aimed at eliminating the women's division from the organization due to the lack of the Convention's funds.

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

The Baptist women's work in Japan has a long history. In 1915, five missionary wives first got together to organize a group for local church women. But this attempt was too early to be realized and failed as premature. Five years later, in 1920, the first Baptist Women's group was officially organized under the purpose of encouraging female members of the 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 missions. 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 Women's Missionary Union.

These missionary wives and native Baptist church women worked hard in good relationships as one missionary wife described as follows: "A spirit of cooperation between the Japanese and missionaries such as this would never be seen in any areas throughout the Orient." They also

invented a systematic method for stabilizing income for the work. Such an independent spirit among those women was full throughout the organization and this spirit pushed them to expand more effective mission activities.

Educating boys, girls, and young adults, including women, for mission work was another important task. Specifically, they raised scholarships for young women who felt God's calling to evangelism. For the 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 areas in the region. of northern Kyushu. With these activities, the women became quite successful and went far ahead of the male Convention leadership of that time.

In the meantime, the Convention leadership frequently asked the women to provide 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 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.¹⁶

At the same time, however, it can be said that this was the beginning of the Convention's attempt to absorb the women's group and its work under the organization's umbrella and the political control. Though it was not a smooth transition, the women finally accepted the Convention's decision and moved into the Convention's political structure.

In return, the women were allowed to send their president to the Convention's trustee meeting

as a voting member. They were also promised two whole pages of their own in the Convention's monthly newsletter. The first President of the Women's Department wrote on this organizational absorption as follows:

We should never forget our independent spirit even after this reorganization is done. However, now we are the one of the 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.¹⁷

The Convention leadership never stopped asking for the money which was raised by the women. Beside the mission program, they even requested financial assistance for local church pastors, which was the Convention's initial task. The Convention leadership They even suggested that the women how to collect money for such a purpose. The idea was that the Woman's Department could raise money as a special offering for the Convention. Women disfavored this idea and finally declined it. Instead, they chose to do it "the more womanly way." The Women's Department encouraged local church 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 1930s, the Woman's Department was no longer able to spend its own Christmas Offering for themselves. The whole amount of this money automatically went to the Convention's activity expenses. The Convention's control over the women in this way continued before, during, and even after World War II until the Convention decided to cut the women's work from the organization from the late 1960s and to the middle of 1970s in order to achieve their financial independence from the Southern Baptist Convention.

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

The Southern Baptist mission in Japan began in 1889 with two missionary couples. After being forced to suspend the missionary work for some years until the end of 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. In this way, the Japan Baptist Convention was privileged to receive abundant support of both economic and human resources from the Southern Baptist Convention. Since this time, this relationship between them became almost a customized system that resulted in the national Baptists' heavy financial dependence in many ways. This custom was one of the major contributing factors to the Japanese Baptists' delay in their independence. Financial independence of the Japanese Baptists would not be realized until the end of 1979.

Throughout the entire period of 1970s, the momentum toward independence from the foreign support gradually grew among the native Baptists. In 1969, on 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" with At the same time, they were aiming at drastic organizational change, consolidating the numbers of the existing departments for achieving this goal. Those sections included the departments of men, youth, and women under the Convention's expectation to make them independent bodies as they operate their work by themselves.

Among them, 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 first called in the end of 1970 with Convention's vice president, Chair of the Organizational Reconstruction Committee, and the fifteen female representatives of the local Baptist associations. The last group was led by Akiko. In spite of many hour long discussions, they failed to reach an agreement.

The Convention leadership well 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 balked at supporting the Convention's running expenses. This position resulted in a shortage in the Convention's budget. Responding to this crisis, the Convention chose a policy to minimize mission programs and reduce the existing departments through a drastic budget cut. Since the Women's department was the largest one among them as mentioned, the Convention leadership told the women that sufficient financial resources for the women's work was no longer available. Therefore, the best possible option for the women to resolve the problem was to get out of the Convention's organization. Their reasoning can be seen in Akiko's comments:

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 it.

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 office including the Women's department, had to leave and separate from the Convention structure. This decision was done without substantial consent of the women who expressed their strong request to have their voices reflected in the process.

Hearing the report of the resolution, in deep disappointment and frustrations, 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 new and exciting adventure.

At first Akiko refused 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 in the 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 of good points in this "new setup" based on her practicality and objectivity. She thought if the organizational separation of the women could be a necessary step for the native Convention to have the 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 feel¹⁸.

As stated earlier, equality and independence of women were her lifetime goals. In that case, it was the issue between male and female. But, this time, it was 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 matter of gender but a universal matter for the fellow human being created by God regardless of gender and nationality.

Akiko Matsumura 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 seem to be a rather slow bloomer for top leadership, her career was colorful as I introduced earlier., including vice president of the BWA Women's Department, president of the Asian Baptist Women's Union, and the founding president of the current 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 nearly wrote every month the Bible study lessons for the readers. Since the major task of the WMUJ was world missions, 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 busy responsibilities in the church and family. It is through this publication that the Baptist women got opportunities to nurture their faith and inspiration for their mission activities. It can be said that all this could not have been done without Akiko's courage and dedication to missions, backed by her faithful daily Bible study followed by meditation prayer. The realism and practicality in her leadership style and its strength were actually nurtured by this her-spiritual discipline.

I need to add objectivity to Akiko's one of these two spiritual characteristics as her strength. In 1975, she was elected as one of twelve BWA vice-presidents. Even in this big honor, she stayed cool and was quite objective with less shallow excitement. She saw this election was not

based on an evaluation of her capacity as a leader but a recognition of her husband's success for the 1970 Tokyo BWA congress. Rev. Matsumura did not speak English at all, 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 vice-presidency as a tribute to her husband.

Even if this might be true, she seemed 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 BWA as she said, "Not as the wife of Shuichi Matsumura, but as Akiko Matsumura." She wanted neither to content herself with the given title of vice-president nor to make it just an honor.

Closing Remarks

I am convinced that Akiko Matsumura left a great legacy to Japanese Baptists. I hope that we as Japanese Baptists, especially female Japanese Baptists, pay more attention to her life and let posterity know of her contribution. It is true that compared to our current point of view Akiko Matsumura 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 church structure, including women in ministry. This can be seen in her criticism of the 60s women's lib movement both in the society and the church. 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 this sort. 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.

However, it did not mean that she completely lost her liberty as a woman who was determined

to serve the Lord as her own vocation. However, she did not lose herself as a person. To her, the assignment was how to be creative in being her own person as she served God under such limitations. I am not positively affirming the position Akiko Matsumura tried to maintain. However, in spite of such circumstances, Akiko Matsumura was the first Japanese Baptist female who worked hard to prepare herself for being an important and irreplaceable fellow worker for God's mission without losing her uniqueness in gender and nationality. She personally experienced the number of critical moments through her official life. On such moments, she drew courage to raise her voice to the organizational leadership by placing her anchor in God's grace. This is her spirituality. Because of her straightforwardness such as like this, some Convention's male leadership hated her and reflected little her ideas and suggestions on the Convention's mission policy. She could not bring a remarkable change to the culture of the church and of the theological education. Leaving such her unfinished work, she returned to God in 2006 due to illness.

However, two of her students from her local church study group became my colleague as theological educators. The later Baptist female generation patiently persuaded the current JBC Board of Trustees to draft the historic document titled "The Declaration of Repentance for Sexual Discrimination Through the 70-year History of the Japan Baptist Convention" which was proudly published in 2017. The sprout of her vision is coming out now.

Her way of life reminds me of the Japanese fringed pink flower named *Nadeshiko*, used when we Japanese express the ideal Japanese womanhood. To us, this little flower gives the image of women who wear simplicity and dignity and who are not easily beaten down even in a harsh environment but bloom beautifully as its own.

Akiko Matsumura lived her entire official life in the place of limitation. probably might have been imagining something more radical and more surprisingly unexpected from the limitation of her place. From there, she might have been looking at the highest peak of mutual and cooperative relationship between men and woman, Japanese and non-Japanese as God's co-workers while she kept making tireless efforts to punch a number of small holes on the culturally accepted wall of female role in the church. As the Apostle Paul says in the nineteenth verse of the third chapter of First Corinthians—"For we are God's fellow workers."

On founding the WMUJ, Baptist women such as Akiko and others might have been convinced that they were fellow workers with all others, with the equal status in the eyes of God regardless of their many differences. Let me close my telling Akiko's story with her words expressed this view at one 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."¹⁹

This is the all story I came to share with you, encouraged by Akio Matsumura whose most ardent desire was to make contributions as a woman and Asian for the sake of the Mission of God.

1. Akiko Matsumura, "Spiritual Development through Bible Study," Presentation to the BWA Women's Meeting, Stockholm, July 1975.

2. Akiko Matsumura, Unpublished manuscript on Global Discipleship for Foreign Mission Conference, Ridgecrest, NC, 1980 June 22.

3. *Ibid.*

4. Akiko Matsumura, *The Book I Treasure*, Unpublished monograph, 1982, 3.

5. Akiko Matsumura, Unpublished monograph, 4.

6. *Ibid.*, 5.

7. Matsumura, *The Book I Treasure*, 15.

8. *Ibid.*, 16

9. *Ibid.*

10. *Ibid.*

11. *Ibid.*

12. *Ibid.*, 26.

13. Matsumura, 'Spiritual Development through Bible Study', Presentation to the BWA

Women's

Meeting, Stockholm, July 1975, 7.

14. *Ibid.*, 8

15. 'Lydia,' in Unpublished monograph of the Bible Study session, 1982.

16. *Forty-years History of Baptist Women*, 1962.

17. *Ibid.*

18. Interview by the Department of Missionary Education of Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, 1972.

19. Akiko 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 (unknown the date and place).