New Religions and Social Change in Modern Korea History

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Over the last century and a half, many new religions have appeared in Korea in response to the challenge the capitalist world order has posed to traditional Korean values and the traditional Korean social order. The earliest of those new religions arose as protests against the elitist Confucianism of the Chosŏn dynasty and were an outgrowth of counter-hegemonic tendencies within popular religion. They also represented an indictment of Confucianism for failing to protect the Korean nation against foreign incursions and for failing to protect the common people from exploitation. These older new religions, such as Tonghak, Taejong-kyo, and the Chŭngsan family of religions, were concerned with constructing a more just social order and resisting imperialism. They were both religious movements and social movements. Newer new religions, however, have been more concerned with promoting individual material and mental well-being. The appearance of Dahnhak and other 'non-religious' religions in recent years is an indication that Korean religious culture is changing once again.

Keywords: class conflict, millenarianism, nationalism, new religions, popular religion.

One of the more noteworthy features of modern religious history is the birth and rapid growth of a multitude of new religions. This phenomenon is particularly noticeable in non-Western societies, where the shock of their encounter with Western capitalism starting in the second half of the nineteenth century resulted in the generation of many new religions. Korea is no exception. Since the birth of the Tonghak religion in 1860, many new religions have appeared on the Korean peninsula,

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one right after another, so many in fact that it is difficult to know exactly how many there have been. One study found that, just since liberation in 1945, over 500 new religions have appeared on the Korean peninsula.[1]

Religions arise from the religious experiences of founders and their disciples. However, such religious experiences, as with all human experiences, are greatly influenced by the social environment in which they occur. Moreover, religions, as many scholars define them, are value systems which impart meaning to the world around the believer. They are also cognitive systems which generate explanations for the believer's experiences. If we accept those definitions, we can not separate religion from the concrete situations in which human beings find themselves.

New religions typically arise as a reaction against an existing social order and existing religions. In other words, most new religions appear as indictments of problems within an existing social order which frustrate the full realization of human potential. As such, they represent a rejection of existing religions for failing to aggressively address those problems. This critical stance is reflected in the doctrines and ideas of new religions.[2] New religions are more than just a manifestation of the religious beliefs or activities of individual believers. They represent a form of collective behavior which can be justifiably classified as a social movement.

1. Kim Hong-ch'ŏl, "Sinjonggyohak yŏn'gu ŏdiggaji wattna?" [How far have we come in our research on new religions?]. In *Haebanghu 50 nyŏn Han'guk chonggyo yŏn'gusa* [Research on religions over the fifty years since Liberation], ed. Han'guk chonggyo hakhoe (Seoul: Tosŏ chulp'an chang, 1997), 149-50. The most recent comprehensive survey of Korea's new religions is Kim Hong-ch'ŏl, Ryu Byŏng-dŏk, and Yang Ŭn-yong, *Han'guk sinjonggyo silt'ae chosa pogosŏ* [An investigation of the current state of new religions in Korea] (Iksan: Won'gwang University Center for the Study of Religions, 1997), 22-24.
2. Ro Kil-myung, "Sinhŭng chonggyo undong ŭi kyori wa sasang" [Doctrines and ideas of new religious movements]. In *Onŭl ŭi han'guk sahoe* [Korean Society Today], eds. Im Hŭi-sŏp and Pak Kil-myŏng (Seoul: Sasam, 1993), 457-472.

Popular Religious Movements in the latter half of the Chosøn dynasty.

In a pre-modern society, established religions often provide legitimation for the existing social order. In a traditional society, religious values normally are not confined to the religious sphere but instead provide rationalizations for all social institutions, including the social hierarchy.[3] During the Chosŏn dynasty, the ruling religion was Confucianism. Not only did the Chosŏn dynasty from the very beginning adopt Confucian values as ideological tools for ruling society, all the various institutional and behavioral components of Chosŏn society were Confucianized.

The Confucianism which was adopted as the national ideology of the Chosŏn dynasty was Neo-Confucianism, particularly the Neo-Confucianism of Chu Hsi and Song China. Neo-Confucianism was a philosophy of moral principles derived from the Confucian tradition of China. As such, it rejected non-Chinese practices, beliefs, and values. In China, Neo-Confucianism served as the philosophy of the literati class, composed of middle and small land owners, which condemned Buddhism. The reason why Chosŏn Korea adhered so closely to Neo-Confucian orthodoxy was that the literati in Korea were also small and middle landowners who were opposed to Buddhism.

Originally, Neo-Confucians grounded the basic principles of human nature in the human mind-and-heart and rejected all attempts at interjecting supernatural or transcendental elements into the human realm. For this reason, Neo-Confucianism had a very strong rationalistic orientation. However, since it was not an empirical philosophy open to modification by experimental or factual data, it also can be described as overly abstract, self-contained, and narrow-minded. That is the reason that, over time, Neo-Confucianism became increasingly rigid, irrelevant and distant from reality.

Such a fossilized philosophy failed to reflect the every-day experiences of the general population. Nevertheless, the ruling elite was able to force the people of Korea to concede hegemonic status to Neo-

3. Peter Berger, in *The Sacred Canopy* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, 1969) calls this expanded reach of religion a "sacred canopy."

Confucianism, because that elite controlled the state and the state' s tools of coercion, which were wielded to enforce even the state' s prescriptions for family rituals. In addition, the Neo-Confucian disdain for anything other than Neo-Confucianism led some elements of the ruling elite to demand punishment for all non-Confucian behavior. As a result, Buddhism, Taoism, and the folk religion, all which had become an integral part of the daily life of the general population, were subjected to severe oppression. It was therefore difficult, in the early years of the Chosŏn dynasty, for a new religion to appear and offer an alternative to Confucianism.

Despite the plans of the founders of the Chosŏn dynasty for the total Confucianization of Korea, there were still some areas of society left untouched by their reforming zeal. Even though Korean society appears on the surface to have been totally transformed in the formative years of the Chosŏn dynasty, it still contained some anti-Confucian elements. It is especially important to keep in mind that there was a large gap between the fundamental principles of Neo-Confucianism, on the one hand, and the customs and habits governing everyday life for commoners, on the other. In particular, Neo-Confucian rationalism which denied the existence of supernatural beings could not fully satisfy the religious needs of the general population. Accordingly, the new ruling elite of the Chosŏn dynasty was unable to implant Neo-Confucianism in Korea as deeply as it intended to. Even though the average person was not able to openly display his or her lack of interest in Confucianism, there remained a large gap between what the elite believed and what the general population believed.[4]

This gap between the ruling class and the rest of the population grew sharper after the Japanese invasions of the 1590s and the Manchu invasions in the early part of the seventeenth century. Changes in both productivity and in how the products of that increased productivity were distributed were responsible for growing friction within Korean society. As the *yangban* elite began monopolizing more and more of the agricultural land, as slavery as an institution began to disintegrate because so many slaves were escaping their servitude, as

4. Ro Kil-myung, *Kat'ollik kwa Chosŏn hugi sahoe pyŏndong* [Catholicism and social change in the latter half of the Chosŏn dynasty] (Seoul: Korea University Press, 1988), 50.

new agricultural techniques such as transplanting and wet-rice agriculture began to spread, as folk handicrafts developed, and as metallic currency began to circulate more widely, stimulating the rise of a more commercialized economy, the old social system began to crumble. Long buried conflicts of interest in society came to the surface and old points of friction began to rub against each other more vigorously. This created a crisis for Neo-Confucian values, which had provided so much ideological support for the old social system they had become identified with it.

As Neo-Confucianism began to weaken, the traditional folk religion began to regain its old relevance. No longer forced to pretend that they accepted Neo-Confucianism, the common people began preparing to construct a new social order on a foundation of alternative, non-Confucian values and beliefs. Such a change in a hegemonic value system can occur when there are rapid changes in the material base of a society, threatening the old order with dissolution. Such attempts to erect a new social order are often accompanied by changes in popular religious culture, and by the appearance of new religions.

We can identify three significant changes in popular religious culture during the later half of the Chosŏn dynasty.

First, there were Maitreyan millenarian movements. Maitreyan millenarianism holds that when the human realm has fallen into a disorderly state, Maitreya, a Buddhist Messiah, will appear and create a new, utopian world. Maitreyan millenarianism tends to appear and spread among the masses at times of great political and social upheaval. It can be interpreted as an expression of the desperation of the common people, yearning for relief from the troubles of the world in which they found themselves. In the second half of the Chosŏn dynasty, we begin to see signs of the spread of Maitreyan millenarianism, which had survived until then as a minor thread in the folk culture. This burning desire for a Buddha to descend to the earth and save mankind went beyond a mere religious movement to become a demand for radical changes in the social order in order to save the common people from starvation, epidemics, and oppression and exploitation by the ruling elite. For example, in 1688 the monk Yŏhwan along with other believers in Maitreya armed the peasants in the Yangju area in Kyŏnggi province and plotted to attack the capital. In

1691, someone in Hwanghae province claimed to be an incarnation of the Buddha and gathered followers around him. And in 1697 there was the famous Chang Kilsan band of robbers. These are all representative examples of movements for social change in which peasants were organized on a foundation of Maitreyan millenarianism which had spread among the general population.[5]

Second, there was a growing interest in the esoteric and mysterious. We see this in the increasing use of fortune-telling and geomancy to predict the future state of the country. In particular, from the eighteenth century on, a book called the *Chŏnggamnok*, which talked about a Taoist savior, a new national capital, auspicious places, and the shift of terrestrial energy southwards, began to be circulated among the general population. The implicit message of that book was a curse on the ruling elite and a call for the collapse of the Chosŏn dynasty. Therefore the *Chŏnggamnok* went beyond being simply an expression of hope that a better world was near and began to serve as an ideological basis for a movement to overhaul the social order by bringing together in one volume the hopes of the common people for the destruction of the old order and the construction of a new society. We see the *Chŏnggamnok* functioning in this manner in instances such as the 1755 plot to build a new kingdom centered around the Hadong district of Mt. Chiri.[6] Furthermore, just as the deterioration in the living standards of the common people inspired a growing number of popular uprisings in the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth, belief in prophecies of a better world to come served as an ideological glue bringing the general population together and making those uprisings possible.

Third, Catholicism appeared on the Korean peninsula. Korean Catholicism was born when members of the literati elite were attracted to the new culture of the West, but, after the 1801 persecution eliminat-

5. Chŏng Sŏk-chong, *Chosŏn hugi sahoe pyŏndong* [Social change in the latter half of the Chosŏn dynasty] (Seoul: Iljogak, 1983), 44-60.
6. Ko Sŏng-hun, "Chŏngjojo Chŏnggamnok kwallyŏn yŏngmo sakkŏn-e taehay —Yi Kyŏngnae, Mun In-bang sakkŏnŭl chungsimŭro" [Plots based on the Chŏnggamnok during the reign of King Chŏngjo, especially the plots of Yi Kyŏng-nae and Mun In-bang]. In Has k Kim Changsu Kyosu hwagap kiny m sahak nonch' ong—yŏksa hakŏi che munje [Several Issues in History: a collection of historical essays honoring professor Kim Chang-su on his 60th birthday], Hasŏk Kim Changsu Kyosu hwagap kinyŏm sahak nonch' ong kanhaeng wiwonhoe, ed. (Seoul: Pŏmusa, 1992).

ed much of its literati leadership, Korean Catholicism became more of a popular religious movement. Most of the Confucian literati who had adopted Catholicism to complement Confucianism abandoned that faith under government persecution. They were replaced by members of the lower classes which suffered oppression and exploitation under the feudal social structure. Those lower classes had never been fully convinced by the Neo-Confucian criticism of belief in a transcendental deity. Moreover, the Catholic assertion that there was a Supreme Being called the "Lord of Heaven" offered them hope that they could find relief from the sufferings of this world. They also found the Catholic doctrine that all men are both free and equal very attractive.[7]

All three trends spread quite rapidly in the latter half of the Chosŏn dynasty because they offered the common people, who were oppressed by the existing feudal system, religious assurances that a better world was possible. As these ideas spread and interacted during the final centuries of the Chosŏn dynasty, popular religious culture was transformed, becoming much more diverse than it had been under the Neo-Confucian domination of the first half of the dynasty.

For a specific new religion to emerge from within such a changing religious culture, a charismatic leader who can attract followers must appear. Such a leader would be someone who points out the contradictions in the existing society, explains their causes, and offers a way to resolve them. Such a religious leader would raise the consciousness of the masses and bring them together around a common cause. In addition, such a religious leader would need to make the common people aware of the common elements in their various hopes and dreams and, by indicating what the future should look like, would determine both the direction this new religious community should take and what methods it should adopt to achieve its goals.

Most of those who came to the fore in this way were people who were literate but had no settled residence or occupation. They tended to be from the less privileged and less stable classes: sons of concubines, sons of chungin, former *yangban* who had lost that lofty social

7. Cho Kwang, *Chosŏn hugi Ch'ŏnjugyo-sa yŏn'gu* [A study of the history of the Catholic Church in the latter half of the Chosŏn dynasty] (Seoul: Korea University Center for Korean Studies, 1988), 102-113; Ro Kil-myung, *Kat'ollik kwa Chosŏn hugi sahoe pyŏndong*, 111-126.

status, recluses, criminals or descendants of criminals, people who become involved in heterodox schools of learning, or even educated commoners or slaves: in other words, those who had reasons for being strongly opposed to the Chosŏn dynasty and who were strongly opposed to Neo-Confucian values.[8] Such people tended to mingle more with the ruled than the ruling. In both their educational and their religious activities, they woke the masses to contradictions in society and offered them hope of a better world. Starting in the second half of the nineteenth century, we see such wandering intellectuals combining Maitreyan millenarianism, *Chŏnggamnok* prophecies and belief in God above into new comprehensive religious systems. As the Chosŏn dynasty drew to a close, the activities of these wandering intellectuals not only undermined the feudal social order, they also played a major role in giving birth to the modern new religions.

New religious movements during the Enlightenment period

When ideas and practices contributed by Maitreyan millenarianism, geomantic prophecies, and Catholicism intermingled with various more traditional religious beliefs and practices, new threads in Korea' s popular religious culture began to form. Full-fledged new religions, with clearly defined doctrines and modern organizational frameworks, emerged. The first new religion was Tonghak, founded by Ch' oe Che-u (Suun, 1824-1864). Founded in 1860 with such battle cries as "Help our country and put the people at ease," "Preach virtue throughout the world," and "Offer aid to all the people," Tonghak wove together the various threads in Korea' s popular religion at that time to inaugurate a modern indigenous religion on the peninsula. Tonghak was different from popular religious movements in the past in that it attracted followers from throughout the country rather than being confined to a specific region. It could do that because Tonghak brought to the foreground the religious concerns of the masses which had been in the

8. Yun Pyŏng-ch' ŏl, "Chosŏn hugi yurang chisik ŭi sahoesajŏk ŭimi" [the historical significance of wandering intellectuals in the latter half of the Chosŏn dynasty], *Chŏngsin munhwa yŏn' gu* 20.4 (1997): 59-65.

background in the Maitreyan, *Chŏnggamnok*, and Catholic religious movements. Moreover, Tonghak was a native-born religion which was rooted in the lives of the common people. For example, incantations made up an important part of Tonghak doctrine and rituals.[9] Moreover, Tonghak offered belief in "Hanullim" (God) to the masses, who were longing for help from a supernatural source.[10] On top of that, Tonghak had a strong revolutionary component, preaching that the old order was coming to an end and a new order was about to be born, quenching the thirst of the masses for a new world.

Tonghak, which was a religious manifestation of popular sentiment, spread quickly among the general population despite the martyrdom of its founder in 1864. Though most of the early adherents of Tonghak were from the oppressed classes which had suffered under the feudal system, there were also quite a few representatives of the itinerant scholar class who were alienated from mainstream society.[11] Although there were many who joined the Tonghak movement for purely religious reasons, there were many others among those itinerant scholars with more worldly motives. This latter group wanted to use Tonghak ideology and organization to raise the consciousness of the masses and promote change in society.

The Revised *Book of Changes* movement, also known as "Namhak" and as the "Singing and Dancing Religion," was another new religious movement which emerged from the demand for changes in society at about the same time as the Tonghak movement was spreading across the peninsula. The leader of Revised *Book of Changes* movement was Kim Hang (Ilbu, 1826-1898). He argued, based on his new interpretation of the *Book of Changes*, that cosmic forces were shifting from the era of the Prior Heaven into the era of the Latter Heaven in which the old social order, with all its contradictions and irrational elements, would come to an end and a new, much improved, age would dawn. His insistence that the *Book of Changes* prophesied the dawning of the new age of the Latter Heaven greatly influenced the doctrines and

9. Hwang Sŏn-myŏng, *Minjung chonggyo undongsa* [A history of popular religious movements] (Seoul: Chongno sŏjŏk, 1980), 217-220.
10. Ro Kil-myung, *Han'guk sinhŭng chonggyo yŏn'gu*, [A study of new religions in Korea] (Seoul: Kyŏngsewon, 1996), 111-134.
11. Yun Pyŏng-ch'ŏl, op. cit, 74.

teachings of many new religions which came afterwards, such as the Chŭngsan religions.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, when the Tonghak movement and the Revision of the *Book of Changes* movement were gaining more and more adherents among the general population, we can identify new fault lines in society, new points of tension and strain in addition to the conflicts of class interest which had been growing worse since the beginning of the second half of the dynasty. Those new areas of tension and conflict include those generated by the intrusions of foreign powers into the internal affairs of the Chosŏn dynasty and its subjects. For example, in 1876 Japan, which itself had been forced by superior Western military might to sign unequal treaties with foreign powers, forced just such an unequal treaty on Korea. By the early part of the 1890s, trade between Japan and Korea had grown unbalanced in Japan' s favor. Korea imported mostly factory-manufactured cloth as well as luxury goods for the elite but exported mostly agricultural products such as rice and beans and other such raw materials. Rather than trade, it might be better to call this plunder. In addition, since Korea was prevented by the unequal treaty from imposing appropriate duties on foreign goods and also was forced to accept an unfair exchange rate, both the agricultural sector and the markets of the domestic economy were adversely affected. For example, so much rice was exported to Japan that the price of rice in domestic markets skyrocketed, making it more and more difficult for poor peasants and poor urban residents to survive. On the other hand, landlords found their profits growing. Moreover, as the landlord class began to need more cash in order to purchase the new luxury goods imported from Japan, they began to squeeze their tenants even more than before. Peasants found their living standards dropping while those of the landlords rose.

The Tonghak rebellion of 1894 was a mass movement which arose as a response to just these sorts of contradictions in society. Though Tonghak began in southeastern Korea, it became a revolutionary movement in the southwest. That is because the class conflicts of interest as well as resentment at foreign intrusions were much stronger in the Kokch' ang area in the southwest.

The Tonghak rebellion had as its foundation the Tonghak insistence that the world was about to undergo a major transformation. It also

depended on the Tonghak organizational framework to bring people throughout the country together for unified action. Furthermore, this revolutionary movement, with its anti-Japanese, anti-Western and anti-Chinese rhetoric and its attacks on social inequality which was endangering the livelihood of the peasantry, was a powerful indictment of the fault lines in society at that time. The anti-feudal and anti-imperialist slogans of this revolutionary movement tell us that the Tonghak rebellion was a manifestation of the growing anger among the general population at both social inequality and threats to the nation. This is a fundamental characteristic not only of Tonghak but of the Korea' s new religions in general. That is why new religions in Korea are often called "religions of the masses" or "religions of the Korean nation."[12]

However, Tonghak itself was primarily a religion which borrowed the use of incantations, a traditional religious practice of the oppressed masses, as a solution to the anger of the oppressed masses and to relieve the stress they felt because of the unsettling changes Korean society was undergoing. Therefore the enthusiastic support the masses showed for Tonghak was bound to wane once social stability was restored, tension in society eased, and the suffering of the masses was somewhat relieved.[13]

Moreover, Tonghak promised the suffering masses, who felt they were unable to overcome the difficulties they were facing through their own efforts, that "Hanullim" would save them. This made it easy for Tonghak at first to elicit a favorable response from the masses. However, if the masses became determined to change society through their own efforts without relying on any assistance from "Hanullim," or if there was a fundamental change in the way the masses thought of spiritual beings, then that support Tonghak had quickly acquired could be just as quickly lost. That is why the second patriarch of Tonghak,

12. Ro Kil-myung, "Kwangbok ihu Han' guk sinjonggyo undong ŭi chŏn' gae wa yŏn' gu tonghyang [Developments in the new religion movement in Korea after 1945, and trends in research on that phenomenon], *Chonggyo wa Munhwa* 3 (1997): 60-61.
13. Pak Sŭng-gil, "Hanmal sinhŭng chonggyo ŭi hyŏkse chŏngsin kwa minjung ŭi chagi insik panghyang kwa yuhyŏng" [The reformist spirit of the new religions at the end of the Chos n dynasty and the contours of self-awareness among the masses]. In *Han' guk ŭi chonggyo wa sahoe pyŏndong* [Religion in Korea and Social Change], Han' guk sahoesa yŏn' guhoe, ed. (Seoul: Munhak kwa chisŏngsa, 1987), 38.

Ch' oe Si-hyŏng (1827-1898) changed the first patriarch Ch' oe Che-u' s explanation that to "Serve Hanullim" meant to serve the Lord Above to "serving Hanullim means cultivating the God within each and every one of us." (Yang Ch' ŏn-ju) The Third Patriarch, Son P' yŏng-hŭi (1861-1922) further modified the call to "cultivate the God within us" to "Recognize that God dwells within each and every human being, and act accordingly." (In nae ch' ŏn, 人乃天) This is a dramatic retreat to an immanent god from an original belief in a transcendent deity.[14]

A movement similar to the Tonghak movement to change society for the better through religious beliefs and a religious organization can also be found among believers in the Revised *Book of Changes*. The popular uprising on Cheju Island in 1898 was a peasant movement which broke out when an organization called the "Namhak Party" mobilized and organized the masses.[15] The leaders of the Namhak movement, who played the principle role in this uprising, gained the support of the masses by echoing calls for reform in the tax collection system and calling for the establishment of an independent utopia on Cheju Island. When we consider that this uprising resembled the attempt by Tonghak to create an ideal society through a revolution, we have to say that it, too, belongs in any account of new religious movements in Korea.

All of these attempts to change society for the better through revolutions based on religious beliefs failed. However, those movements nevertheless had significant impact on both religion and society on the peninsula at the end of the Chosŏn dynasty. For example, the failure of the Tonghak rebellion not only had repercussions for modern Korean history as well as for relations among states in Northeast Asia, it also stimulated the rise of the Chŭngsan religion. The failure of the Chejudo uprising also had wider ramifications, leading to armed conflict between the indigenous people of Cheju and those Catholics on Cheju who had come to depend heavily on French missionaries.

14. Ro Kil-myung, *Han' guk sinhŭng chonggyo yŏn' gu*, 134
15. Cho Sŏng-yun, "1898 nyŏn Chejudo minnan ŭi kujo wa sŏnggyŏk—Namhakdang ŭi hwaldong kwa kwallyŏn hayŏ" [The structure and character of the 1989 Cheju Island uprising—the activities of the Namhakdang]. In *Han' guk chŏnt' ong sahoe ŭi kujo wa pyŏndong* [The Structure of traditional Korean society and the changes it underwent], Han' gukŏsahoesa yŏn' guhoe, ed. (Seoul: Munhak kwa chis ngsa, 1986), 209-236.

The rise of the Chŭngsan religion, which constitutes one major current in the river that constitutes the history of Korea' s new religions, is closely linked to the failure of the Tonghak rebellion. Most of the early members of this religious movement had participated in the Tonghak rebellion as believers in Tonghak. Most of the participants in the Tonghak rebellion returned to their previous occupations after that rebellion collapsed, but they brought with them a heightened sense of where the fault lines in society lay, an insight they had acquired during the course of participating in that rebellion. Moreover, many of them found their desire for a better world grew even stronger during the course of that rebellion and they began searching for a new route to that ideal society. The founder of the Chŭngsan religion, Kang Ilsun (Chŭngsan, 1871-1909), began his religion with just such people as his core followers. However, he did not try to rely on the same methods Tonghak had wielded to bring about the birth of a better world. Instead, he explained that history had reached a turning point, that, in fact, the cosmos was about to undergo a dramatic transformation. Kang preached that anyone who wanted to benefit from the imminent appearance of the utopian world of the Latter Heaven on earth should "refrain from mistreating anyone, stay away from sin, and keep a pure heart." This led his religious movement in a more mystical, transcendental direction. His promise of a better life on this planet, along with doctrinal tenets and simple incantatory rituals which closely resembled those of traditional Korean folk religion, is an important factor in the ease with which the Chŏngsan religion found a receptive audience among the masses.[16]

The anti-imperialist tendencies of the new religions movement, which first appeared among the Tonghak, grew stronger as Japanese aggression grew more blatant. The Taejong-gyo religion, which had been "revived"[17] by Na Ch' ŏl (pen name Hongam, 1863-1916) in 1909,

16. Ro Kil-myung, "Sinhŭng chonggyo ch' angsija wa ch' ujongja ŭi sahoejŏk paegyŏng gwa kŭdŭlgan ŭi kwan' gye—Chŭngsan-kyorŭl chungsimŭro" [A study of the social background of the founders of new religions and their followers, focusing on Chŭngsan-gyo], *Chŭngsan sasang yŏn 'gu* 3 (1997): 149-153.

17. Taejong-gyo doctrines state that Na Ch' ŏl did not found a new religion but instead revived the worship of Tan' gun, which, according to Taejong-gyo, had been the original religion of the Korean people.

grew out of a desire to resist Japanese aggression. Of the many methods which had been used to resist the Japanese, Taejong-gyo insisted that the best way was to revive the religion which had taken belief in Tan' gun, the ancestor of the Korean people, as its core doctrine. After Japan annexed Korea, Taejong-gyo moved its headquarters to Manchuria and launched a full-scale resistance movement from there.

To sum up, the last decades of the nineteenth century witnessed the birth of new religions with modern organizational structures and modern doctrinal systems but those new religions were built on foundations laid by the experience the masses had had with such popular religious movements as the Maitreyan millenarian movement and by the growing interest in the esoteric and the mysterious. The new religions which appeared at this time built on the anti-feudal tendencies of previous popular religious movements but in these new religions those tendencies were stronger, and were reinforced by anti-imperialist sentiment. Such movements for revolutionary social change as the Tonghak rebellion and the Cheju uprising were a direct response to the internal as well as external challenges Korea faced near the end of the Chosŏn dynasty.

This spread of new religions during the enlightenment period signals the beginning of the unraveling of what had appeared superficially at least to be a unitary religious culture under the Chosŏn dynasty. This also means that Chosŏn dynasty society, which appeared to have successfully assimilated all of Korea' s divergent religious trends into the Neo-Confucian value system, had suddenly begun to fragment into competing value and belief systems. Furthermore, the people began at this time to struggle for religious freedom, causing the distinction between orthodoxy and heterodoxy, which had been so clearly drawn at the beginning of the dynasty, to blur. Amidst these sorts of changes, Korea' s new religions began to secure for themselves a place in Korea' s religious history and in Korea' s religious culture.

New Religions Under Japanese Colonial Rule

Under Japanese rule, the tensions and conflicts of interest in society which had already begun to grow worse in the latter half of the Chosŏn

dynasty began to grow even more intense. The colonial economic policies of the Japanese, in particular the implementation of a land registration system which in effect turned land which had been peasant land into government land in order to make Korea a provider of grain for Japan, transformed the majority of Korea' s cultivators into workers. It was a policy designed to secure cheap labor for the Japanese. It also led to the rise of a new landlord class in the villages of the peninsula, which included a new class of collaborator landlords who gained wealth and power by supporting Japanese policies as well as remnants of the old feudal land-owning class. The rise of this new exploiting class pushed the living standards of the peasantry even further down. Moreover, this growing tension between peasants and landlords also caused strains between nationalists and non-nationalists, since the landlords were collaborators with the Japanese.

These worsening fault lines in society were one reason for the birth and spread of new religions during Japanese colonial rule. The spirit of resistance which rose up against this Japanese oppression and exploitation manifested itself not only in secular social movements but in a search for religious salvation as well. When the new religions promised that a new age would open up on the Korean peninsula, one that would bestow rewards on everyone who helped bring it about, this was received as though it were a promise of liberation. New religions gained followers both because they promised that the poor could escape from their poverty and because they promised that the honor of the Korean nation would be restored.

So many people flocked to new religions during the Japanese colonial period that we can call this time the heyday of the new religions. New religions which had already sprouted in the last decades of the Chosŏn dynasty, such as Tonghak, the Revised *Book of Changes*, Chŭngsan-gyo, and those centered on the belief that Tan' gun is God, began to split into many different denominations after 1910, gaining followers across an ever widening spectrum of society. A number of additional new religions appeared as well. The categories we use for classifying new religions today are drawn from the varieties of religions which appeared near the end of the Chosŏn dynasty and during the early stages of Japanese colonial rule.

For example, one family of new religions derives from Kaksedo,

founded by Yi Sŏn-p' yŏng (1882-1956) in 1915. Another type of new religion is Won Buddhism, founded in 1916 by Pak Chung-bin (1891-1943) in order to modernize, popularize, and render more relevant the teachings of Buddhism under the slogan "Since there has been a great transformation in material civilization, it is time for a great transformation in spiritual civilization." A third category is Reformed Confucianism, founded by Kang Tae-sŏng (1889-1954) in 1928. A final example is the group of religions which revere Kim Yŏng-gŭn (1898-1950), who focused his teachings on the alleged healing powers of cold water. Most of the religions which occupy an important place in the history of new religions in Korea first appeared during this tumultuous time.

The masses, who were looking for a way to cast off the yoke Japanese colonial rule had placed on their shoulders, were not drawn to religions with sophisticated doctrines or elaborate ethical principles as much as they were drawn to religions with simple teachings and rituals which promised concrete rewards in this world and displayed a strong anti-Japanese orientation.

A good example of this is Ch' a Kyŏng-sŏk' s P' och' ŏn-gyo, which had more followers than any other religious organization during the colonial period. P' och' ŏn-gyo attracted followers by emphasizing healing and the mystical feeling practitioners gained from chanting their incantation. It did not preach lofty metaphysical doctrines of great transcendental import. Instead, it promised a great transformation of Heaven and Earth which would create a paradise on earth. In addition, there was an anti-Japanese undercurrent to P' och' ŏn-gyo teachings which attracted many Koreans who were suffering under Japanese rule. For example, in 1921, right after the failure of the March 1st movement, Ch' a proclaimed that Korea had a new dynastic name, "the nation whose time has come." This proclamation, made during an elaborate ceremony, attracted the attention of a lot of people who were hoping that Japanese colonial rule would end soon. Within ten years after he established his religious organization, P' och' ŏn-gyo had 557,600 staff members and over 6 million believers. Since Ch' a went

18. Kim Hong-ch' ŏl, *Han' guk sinchonggyo sasangŭi yŏn' gu* [Research into the beliefs of Korea' s new religions] (Seoul: chimmundang, 1989), 297-322.

beyond performing a mere religious ritual to actually proclaim the birth of a new dynasty, of which he would be the emperor, word of what he had done spread across the entire peninsula.[18] At about the same time, Cho Ch'ŏl-je (1895-1958), who was the head of the Mugŭk Taedo-gyo (which, like P'och'ŏn-gyo, was one of the religions which worshipped Kang Chŭng-san as God), began calling himself "Cho, the Son of Heaven." He, just as Ch'a had done, attracted a large number of followers. It is clear that many of those who were drawn to those men and their religious organizations did so out of a burning desire to see Japanese colonial rule replaced by a new Korean dynasty.

Support for the assertion that much of the mass appeal of these new religions came from their anti-Japanese stance can be found in what happened to them after they stopped being so nationalistic. When P'och'ŏn-gyo formed the "Association for Unity in this Time of Crisis" which supported the Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere, it very quickly fragmented and disintegrated, losing most of the influence it once had. The same thing happened to some Tonghak-related organizations once they lost their nationalist image. This indicates that one factor behind the rise of new religions was their appeal to nationalistic sentiments. These new religions represent one branch of the movement to liberate the Korean people from the suffering they endured under Japanese rule, restore ethnic pride, and regain autonomy for the Korean nation.

As has been noted already, most of Korea's new religions, such as Tonghak, were religions of the common people which had reshaped the beliefs and assumptions of the folk tradition into a more coherent, and therefore new, form. However, there were also some new religious movements which arose from the elite tradition. The founders of these Confucian religious movements believed that the Chosŏn dynasty had fallen not because it was Confucian but because its Confucianism had deteriorated. They believed that the best way to regain Korean autonomy and expel the Japanese was to restore vigor to Confucianism.

One of those Confucian new religions was the Religion of Great Unity (Taedong-gyo) of Pak Ŭn-sik (1859-1925), who believed that the weaknesses of Chosŏn dynasty Confucianism could be remedied with the ideas of Wang Yang-ming. Another was the Society for a Confucian Education (Konggyohoe) of Yi Sŭng-hŭi (1847-1916), who argued that

a modern education should be a Confucian education and established a Confucian "church" in Manchuria to promote such a curriculum. A third was the Religion of Confucius Movement of Yi Pyŏng-hyŏn (1870-1940), who promoted the establishment of a religion which would accord Confucius absolute authority as its sole founding father. A fourth was the Original Religion (Wonjong) movement of Kim Chung-gŏn (1889-1933) who was active in the independence movement in Manchuria.[19] All these Confucian religious movements share the strong nationalism of the new religions which have their roots in folk tradition. However, they had difficulty attracting much support from the common people, who had suffered from an oppressive Confucian social system for generations. Consequently, the Confucian new religions in general were much smaller and weaker than the other new religions.

Most of the new religions put most of their efforts during the colonial period into attracting large numbers of followers by promoting their easy-to-understand doctrines and easy-to-perform rituals which they promised would bring not only immediate material benefits but would also hasten the appearance of a utopia on this earth. However, there were some exceptions. A few of these new religions were concerned with issues of social justice and launched projects designed to improve the living standards and the cultural level of the Korean people.

For example, Ch'ŏndo-gyo, building on its experience with the Tonghak rebellion of 1894, played a leadership role in the March 1 independence movement. It also launched patriotic enlightenment movements aimed at young people and women as well as the Korean population in general. Taejong-gyo, operating primarily in Manchuria, issued its own 1918 declaration of independence and then organized a "Restoration Corps" to carry out armed struggle against the Japanese. The battle at Ch'ŏngsan-ri, which is one of the more important events in the history of the Korean independence movement, was primarily the work of Taejong-gyo. Won Buddhism, under the name "The Society for the Study of Buddhism," launched several projects intended to raise

19. Kang Ton-gu, *Han'guk kŭndae chonggyo wa minjok chuŭi* [Nationalism and Religion in modern Korea] (Seoul: chimmundang, 1992), 76-86.

the cultural level and living standards of poor peasants. Those projects included the establishing of savings associations, bringing wasteland under cultivation, enhancing village cultural life, and providing educational opportunities.[20]

Such activities represent efforts to actively address social problems, and at the same time, contributed substantially to the institutionalization of those new religious organizations. As a result, those new religions which engaged in such secular projects benefited in terms of both religious vitality and social influence, gaining many more members in the long run than did those new religions which focused instead on mystical experiences and promises of immediate material benefits.

The thirst for new religious answers to the problems Korea confronted during the colonial period was so strong that we see new religions appearing even within the Protestant community. Some Korean Christians began reacting against the ethnocentrism and cultural imperialism they saw in the proselytizing approaches adopted by American missionaries. These nationalist Korean Christians were especially bothered by the missionaries' call for a separation of church and state, which implied that religious activists should not be involved in nationalistic activities. A few of them went beyond individual discomfort to join with other like-minded Christians. For example, during this period we see the development of indigenous heterodox Christian theologies as well as the birth of Christian groups founded in opposition to the missionaries or in opposition to the power wielded by mainstream denominations. The "no-church movement" appeared at this time, as did new groups focusing on the mystical power of the Holy Spirit and new groups inspired by nationalistic fantasies. Directly or indirectly, all of these represent a reaction against the role foreign missionaries were playing in Korean Christianity. They provided the seeds out of which sprouted the new Christian religions which grew rapidly after liberation.[21]

20. Kim Hong-ch'ŏl, *Han'gukŏsinchonggyo sasangŭi yŏn'gu*, 323-348.
21. Min Kyŏng-bae, *Han'guk minjok kyohoe hyŏngsŏng saron* [The history of the formation of indigenous religions in Korea] (Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 1974), 118-154; Ro Kil-myung, "Kidokgyogye sinjonggyo kyegwan" [A survey of new Christian religions], In *Han'guk minjok chonggyo ch'ongnam* [A Handbook of Korea's Indigenous Religions], Han'guk minjok chonggyo hyŏbŭihoe, ed (Seoul: Han'guk minjok chonggyo hyŏbŭihoe, 1992), 205-211.

These new religions which appeared when Korea was under Japanese colonial rule could not avoid being influenced, either directly or indirectly, by the laws and policies the imperial colonial government adopted to deal with religious organizations and religious activities. For example, Article 2, section 11, of the Japanese constitution of 1889 stated that "Japanese subjects enjoy freedom of religion, with the provision that no one is allowed to disturb public peace or public order or to evade the duties incumbent on all subjects of the Emperor." This clause means that religious freedom was only allowed for activities which were in harmony with the imperialistic policies of the Japanese state at that time. In accordance with this policy, only Shinto, Buddhism, and Christianity were granted official recognition as legitimate religions by the Japanese government. The new religions were labeled "pseudo-religions" and, as such, faced restrictions on their activities imposed by the Governor-General. In addition, any religion other than Shinto or Buddhism was subject to regulations imposed by the Home Ministry and the police. The reason the Home Ministry was given oversight of all religious organizations was not that religious organizations were seen as cultural and educational organizations, but that they were seen as potential threats to public order and national security.

Accordingly, the Japanese imperial government adopted a policy of tacitly permitting the activities of new religions which distracted Koreans from their suffering under colonial rule while at the same time it forbade any activities by those same new religions which violated colonial policies. That is why new religions which had a particularly strong nationalistic orientation faced restrictions on both their religious and their social activities. Some, such as Taejong-gyo and Kongja-gyo, were so frustrated that they left Korea for Manchuria in order to operate more freely.

When new religions in Korea were reaching their peak strength in the 1930s, the Japanese government responded by intensifying its attempts to suppress them. In 1936 Japanese authorities used an incident involving a small new religion, Baekbaek-gyo, as an excuse for a

22. For more information on this incident, see the novel *Paekbaek-gyo* by Yi Mun-hyŏn. (Seoul: Chayu sidaesa, 1989).

major crackdown on new religions in general.[22] As soon as the authorities learned that this religious organization, which had its roots in Tonghak, had engaged in robbery, violence, and even murder, they issued a decree dissolving all "pseudo-religious" organizations. They also arrested the leaders of many new religious movements. However, the Baekbaek-gyo incident merely provided a pretext for them to attack those religious organizations which were directly or indirectly involved with the independence movement and were fostering nationalistic sentiments among the masses.[23] Over a hundred new religious organizations were either dissolved or driven underground at that time.

The two major faults lines in Korean society we discussed earlier, conflicts of class interests and tension between collaborators and nationalists, intensified over the course of the colonial period as the gap between the rich and the collaborators, on the one hand, and the poor and the nationalists on the other, grew wider. Colonial rule also led to extremely harsh living conditions for the Korean people. As a result, under Japanese rule, the Korean people were especially receptive to new religions. However, since Korea was under the colonial rule of the Imperial Japanese state which promoted Shinto and restricted the activities of all other religions and religious organizations, it was also a time when new religions could not proselytize or operate freely. In such an environment, it is only natural that new religions would quickly appear on the scene and just as quickly disappear.

New Religions After Liberation

The end of colonial rule in 1945 was a turning point not just for new religions but for all religions in Korea. The General Headquarters of the American Army in the Pacific, which occupied Korea below the 38th parallel after the collapse of the Japanese empire, announced on September 7, 1945, that American forces would respect the religious freedom and honor the human rights of those living in territories which had been under Japanese rule. Not only did this decree establish

23. Yun I-hŭm, *Ilje ŭi han'guk minjok chonggyo malsalch'aek* [The attempt by Japanese imperialism to destroy Korea's indigenous religions] (Seoul: Koryŏ Hallimwon, 1997).

a separation of church and state which freed religious organizations from state control, it also meant that religious organizations could now engage in free competition with one another for the allegiance of the Korean people.

This transformed environment energized Korea' s new religions. New religions which had either been dissolved under the law ordering the dissolution of "pseudo-religions," or had been driven underground were able to resurface and begin rebuilding their organizations. Religions such as Taejong-gyo, which had been able to survive outside the peninsula, were able to return to Korea and begin planning for full-scale operations once again.

However, the situation after liberation was not as favorable for the reconstruction and growth of new religions as it could have been. In South Korea, the American occupation forces sought to impose a Pax Americana which would incorporate South Korea into the world capitalist system centered on the United States. The American military occupation government wanted to turn the division of the peninsula from a temporary expedient into an established fact and in the process make the Korean peninsula the spearhead of a struggle against Communism. That is why the US authorities favored a pro-American and anti-Communist clique rather than the nationalist camp which would have resisted the establishment of a separate government for the southern half of the peninsula only. Syngman Rhee, who had led resistance to the Japanese from the safe haven of the United States, became the first president of the Republic of Korea, but the nationalists who had been active in the provisional government based in China failed to win legal recognition from the US occupation.

This Pax Americana policy of the US occupation influenced more than just the composition of the Korean government. It affected religious organizations as well. On the one hand, a pro-American and anti-Communist orientation became the norm in South Korea and those religious organizations which shared and helped promote that ideology gained influence in society. Conversely, religious organizations which represented a different point of view found themselves losing influence and respectability. Accordingly, Catholic and Protestant organizations, which had for quite some time identified capitalism with belief in God, and socialism with atheism, gained in both numbers and influence. On

the other hand, new religions such as Ch'ŏndo-gyo and Taejong-gyo, which favored re-unification carried out by Koreans themselves or were otherwise strongly nationalistic, found themselves marginalized. In addition, traditional religions such as Confucianism and Buddhism found that this new political and cultural environment made it difficult for them to compete effectively with Christian organizations. The rise of the Syngman Rhee government, followed by the Korean War and then the massive amount of aid the US provided after the war, solidified pro-Americanism and anti-Communism as the ruling ideologies, creating an even more unfavorable environment for new religions. Consequently, the religious marketplace came to be monopolized by Christianity.

We should also note, however, that internal disputes which broke out in established religions in the immediate aftermath of the war also had significant influence on how much and how fast new religious organizations grew. In Buddhist circles, there was conflict between celibate monks and married monks which was manipulated for political gain by the Syngman Rhee government. There was also a dispute within the Protestant community over whether those who had given in to Japanese pressure and participated in Shinto rituals should bear responsibility for their actions. In addition, there were differences of opinion over what was an appropriate relationship between church and state. Both within the Buddhist community and within the Protestant community, these disputes led to splits in those communities which accelerated the formation of new Buddhist and Protestant religious organizations.

It is also during this period that we begin to see a growing chasm between those with strong nationalist feelings or who treasured traditional beliefs and values and those within existing Christian churches who pushed for the adoption of Western culture and promoted the spread and strengthening of the pro-American anti-Communist ideology. This gap led, on the one hand, to the spread of movements within the Protestant community to develop Koreanized spirituality and, on the other hand, to the more frequent appearance of the theologically heretical, mystical, nationalistic, and anti-missionary and anti-clerical new religious movements which had already begun to appear during the period of Japanese colonial rule. For example, during the 1950s, we

see such emerging new religious movements as the Unification Church, the Olive Tree Church, and the Mt. Yongmun Retreat Center.

The beginning of all-out economic development in the 1960s also had an impact on new religions. Rapid industrialization and urbanization made traditional associations based on regional or kinship ties increasingly irrelevant. The values, norms, and authorities which had been so strong in the past grew weaker. At the same time, instances of collusion between influential government figures and powerful businessmen became more frequent, and corruption became institutionalized. Society become afflicted with anomie as rising expectations clashed with inequality of opportunities. As economic growth rates surged, materialism, growth at any price, and social stability became the ideals Korea was governed by. This naturally brought major changes to the religious marketplace.

Such disconcerting changes in the prevailing atmosphere inspired large numbers of people to become interested in Pentecostal religious organizations. Moreover, a growing trend among Christians to identify a rise in material prosperity with divine providence led to Christian organizations becoming increasingly middle-class organizations, dominated by those who had the material resources to contribute to the wealth and stability of those religious organizations.[24] We also see a growing bureaucratization of those church organizations, with a concomitant rise in the control those bureaucrats wielded over the operation of those organizations.

However, at the same time, rapid industrialization and urbanization led to a sharp increase in the size of alienated groups such as workers, peasants, and the urban poor. This created a new problem for religious organizations: how to deal with these new marginalized communities. It is at this time that we begin to see the appearance of new religious movements focusing on this lower strata of the population and indicting the contradictions within, and the irrationality of, a society which fostered the growth of such a lower class. Criticizing traditional reli-

24. Kang Won-don, "Han'guk kyohoe'esŏ ŭi chibae ideollogi ŭi chaeseangsan" [The reproduction of the ruling ideology in Korean Churches]. In *Han'guk sahoe wa chibae ideollogi* [Korean society and its ruling ideology], ed. *Han'guk sanŏp sahoe yŏn'guhoe* (Seoul: Nokdu, 1991), 359-381.

gious organizations for failing to address social problems and therefore having too narrow a focus, they proposed that religions expand the scope of their concerns.[25]

In the 1970s and the 1980s, the rise of a more critical attitude toward Western civilization as well as a new pride in Korea's indigenous culture brought more major changes in the new religions movement. Scholars began to criticize the modernization theory so popular in the 1960s for confusing modernization with Westernization. In Christian circles, there was growing recognition that, for indigenization and evangelization to be successful, Korea's cultural traditions and historical experience had to be taken into account. Moreover, Christians began to reflect on, and regret, their earlier role as promoters of pro-American and anti-Communist ideology as well as the part Christians had played in glorifying Western civilization. Stepping back from the previous pro-Western orientation opened up space for a reevaluation of Korea's traditional thought and folk beliefs.

On top of that, we begin to see new new religions which represented religious movements for the oppressed, signaling a significant change in the class background of those who joined new religions. In the 1970s students who had been demonstrating for "liberation of the oppressed" and "liberation of the Korean people" began flocking to new religions which condemned, and offered solutions for, the class conflict and weak nationalistic sentiment which had been a significant feature of both modern and contemporary Korean history. The rise of interest on college campuses in such new religious movements as Jeungsan-do, the Church of Love of Heaven, the Nine Gates to the Next Level and the Unification Church's Collegiate Association for Research into Principles is part of the trend toward increasing student activism in the 1970s and the 1980s. Moreover, the new tendency toward engagement with social problems brought many new religions out of their isolation from society and even stimulated cooperation by various religious organizations across denominational lines. For example, several new religious organizations came together in 1985 to form an "Associa-

25. Ro Kil-myung, "Kwangbok ihu Han'guk sinchonggyo undong ŭi chŏn'gae wa yŏn'gu tonghyang" [The Spread of new religion in Korea after liberation and trends in studying this phenomenon], *Chonggyo wa munhwa* (1997): 50-62.

tion of Korean Indigenous Religions" so that they would have an institutional channel for addressing common concerns and engaging in joint projects. Such new developments energized the religious marketplace and raised Korean religious culture to a higher level.

This survey of the birth and development of new religions in Korea reveals that those new religions arose and grew as religions for the marginalized and oppressed at a time when conflicts of class interest were growing sharper. Criticizing the established religions and the unjust social structure in which those established religions were embedded, these new religions worked to establish new value systems and new social orders advocated by their charismatic founders. A common element in these new religions was an ethical orientation emphasizing such universal human values as human rights, peace, and social justice as well as diligence, self-discipline, humanitarianism, concern for the common good, and mutual assistance which resolves the grievances left over the unjust practices of the past.

In the 1980s, however, we begin to see some significant differences appearing within the new religion community. Whereas their membership had once all been of a similar class background, important differences of class and ideology began to surface within and between the new religions. Accordingly, the new religion movement grew much more diverse. This can be explained as a natural result of the fundamental transformation Korean society and culture had undergone, creating a Korea in the last quarter of the twentieth century which was very different from what Korea had been a few decades earlier.

One force behind such a fundamental transformation is globalization. Because of globalization, various regional cultures are being merged into one universal culture, making it more difficult for any one religion to claim that it, and it alone, is the True Religion. Moreover, the traditional universal religious values of human rights, peace, and social justice, and the traditional religious ethical values of self-discipline and restraint, are losing their special appeal as distinctively religious approaches to salvation. As poverty, which had been the greatest barrier to men and women realizing their dreams, disappears from South Korea, and as men and women grow more satisfied with their places in society, they become less insecure and therefore less in need of religious promises of salvation. However, new problems, and new

approaches to solving those problems, are appearing. Those values of justice, peace, and equality which were so important in the older new religions which wanted to transform society are fading into the background and are being replaced by concern for more practical issues such as health and wealth. Rather than making society a better place for everyone, the new new religions are more concerned with giving individuals peace of mind.[26]

In modern industrial society in which there is an abundance of material goods, a this-worldly orientation and concern with the present makes the individual's daily life the primary arena in which salvation is sought. We see people beginning to look to religion to help them achieve or maintain peace of mind as they go about their daily affairs. This is an approach to "salvation" which differs from the concern of traditional religions for the good of the community as a whole. It encourages the growth of religions which promise inner peace and personal mental and physical health. There is a growing tendency in new new religions to make incantations a core component of their doctrines, rituals, or training regimes. These same new new religions offer to teach us how to strengthen our ability to foresee and control events which will occur in our daily life, and they promise to teach us secret techniques which will make us healthier and able to activate and utilize previously latent abilities.

For example, there are groups such as Kouk Sun-do and Dahnhak Centers for Prolonging Life which teach all sorts of esoteric techniques for maintaining health and curing disease, as well as psychological and psychic practices, similar to meditation, which are supposed to eliminate stress and give the practitioner peace of mind. They also teach incantations and mystical arts which they claim will ward off bad luck and guarantee you an abundance of material goods. One of their competitors in the new religious marketplace is the Celestial Majesty Society, which teaches what it calls "The Celestial Way to Prolong Life." If we were to label the older new religions as "new religious movements in a time of change," then we should call these new new

26. Ro Kil-myung, *Han'guk sinhŭng chonggyo yŏn'gu*, 68-73.
27. Japanese scholars also divide their new religions into old new religions and new new religions, using much the same criteria.

religions "new religious movements in a time of stability" since they have appeared when society has settled down after decades of unsettling changes.[27]

These latest new religions are characterized by, first of all, no distinction between clergy and laity, since all who participate in these organizations are said to wield spiritual or supernatural powers. Moreover, their membership tends to be white-collar and middle class. These new new religions also focus their attention on this world, emphasizing individual spiritual and physical health and peace of mind in the here-and-now as well as guaranteeing that practitioners will find even more satisfaction in the future. They do not devote much attention to traditional religious values or moral principles. Even though such organizations should be classified as religions, we also need to recognize that often they do not overtly show their religious nature, since they do not have temples, churches or congregations, do not have commandments and regulations which their members must follow, and do not engage in communal religious rituals.

After liberation in 1945 brought an end to Japanese control over the religious marketplace in Korea, many foreign new religions have been able to establish a presence in Korea. In the 1950s, American religions such as Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, Middle Eastern religions such as Bahai, and denominations of the Chinese religion I-gwan Dao such as the Ethical Society, the International Ethical Society, and the Sacred Spirit Ethical Society have become part of the Korean religious landscape. After the normalization of diplomatic relations with Japan in 1962, Tenri-kyo and other Japanese new religions which had been in Korea during the colonial period but had disappeared from the peninsula at the end of Japanese rule were able to quickly re-establish themselves. Recently, Japanese new religions such as Soka Gakkai International (which has changed its name to the SGI Korean Buddhist Association), Komeikai (which used to be known as Seicho No Ie), Sekai Kyuseikyo, and Zenrinkai have become more visible in Korea. This trend of more foreign new religions entering Korea, and for those which are already here to grow, is being fueled by the waves of globalization which are washing over the peninsula.

Conclusion

Many new religions appeared while Korean society was undergoing modernization. Even though there are a lot of differences in history, size, and theological lineage which distinguish one new religion from another, when we look at the historical circumstances in which they were born and the fundamental ideas they hold, we see that they actually have a lot in common.

The first distinguishing characteristic of the new religion movement is that it is a religious movement of the common people. Neo-Confucianism, which ruled over Korea from the beginning of the Chosŏn dynasty, was never able to function as a religion of the common people. However, the masses, who had been prevented by the oppressive policies of the ruling elite from rising up against Neo-Confucianism, in the second half of the Chosŏn dynasty were finally able to begin mounting resistance when Neo-Confucianism proved incapable of responding appropriately to the rapid changes in society at that time. Even though they were still being oppressed by the ruling elite, the common people were able to creatively combine elements of their folk traditions to create new religious systems which met their needs and also, of course, challenged the Confucian value system.

That's not all. The emergence of these new religious orientations was a warning that tension between social classes was being exacerbated as Korean society began to modernize. Religious change represented a demand that the old social order be swept away and replaced with a new social system. This is reflected in the high expectations many of these new religious movements had for the coming Great Transformation. Since tension between the social classes continued to rise, demands for social change continued to fuel the birth and growth of new religions and new religious organizations. Viewed from this angle, we can see that the new religion movement is a product of the common people, suffering from the oppression and exploitation of the ruling elite and from the difficulties they encountered trying to adjust to the rapid changes in society, searching for a way to cope with the irrationality and contradictions of society while trying to establish their identity as authentic Koreans.

The new religion movement in Korea can also be characterized as a

nationalist movement. A distinctive characteristic of modern and contemporary Korean history is that the self-interests of powerful states determined Korea' s fate more often than the autonomous decisions of the Korean people did. Korea, which had been isolated from the rest of the world for a long time, entered onto the world stage because of foreign pressure, not because that was what it had freely decided to do. Moreover, after Korea was forced to open its doors to the outside world, the ensuing intrusion of capitalism and the violence which broke out in and around Korea because of rivalry among the major world powers and their battles to construct a new world order caused a lot of suffering among the people of Korea. The new religious movements condemned these threats to the survival of the Korean nation and appeared partially as a response to them. Two common traits we see across the spectrum of new religions are, first, a strong feeling that Koreans have a special global mission at this time in history, and, second, a strong feeling that Koreans should determine their own destiny. Therefore these new religions represent a nationalist religious movement to restore Korean pride and Korean subjectivity.

Looked at from these two angles, we can see that new religions appeared as a response to the shocks Korea suffered in its recent history. In other words, Korea' s new religions were born and grew as social movements which condemned the contradictions and irrationality of society in recent times and suggested ways for dealing with those problems. Reflecting the structure of Korean society as well as the changes it was undergoing, the new religions played an active role in the drive to transform the existing social order. We see this in the leading role new religions played in movements to reform society as well as in revolutions such as the Tonghak revolution. We also see this in their advocacy of such universal human values as human rights, social justice, and equality for all human beings as well as in their emphasis on such ethical principles as diligence, frugality, humanitarianism, concern for the common good, and mutual aid to resolve injustice. Viewed from this point of view, we can see that the new religions were simultaneously a response to the challenge posed by modernity as well as a force promoting modernity.

Since these new religions appeared and grew as responses to the social tensions and threats to the nation which are important distin-

guishing features of Korea's recent history, the new religion movement should be seen as both a religious movement of the common people and as a nationalist movement. To say it is only one or the other would be inaccurate. However, one of the most hotly debated issues by those studying the new religions is whether to emphasize the nationalistic characteristics of the new religions or to emphasize their role in representing the needs and desires of the common people.[28] However, as many scholars have pointed out, in recent Korean history the conflicts of class interest which sharpened with the dissolution of the feudal social system cannot be separated from the threats to national survival brought on by the aggression of foreign powers at that same time. In fact, the social problems Korea faced made the threat posed by foreign aggression more dangerous, and foreign aggression exacerbated conflicts of interest within Korean society. When we consider that new religions were formed in order to address and overcome the social problems resulting from rapid social change and foreign aggression, which were causing so much suffering for the common people, it seems appropriate to call those new religions both religions of the common people and nationalist religions.

Korea's new religions represent the beginning of major changes in both the character and the structure of Korean society and culture in order to bring Korea in step with recent changes in the flow of world history. Recent changes such as globalization and the coming of the Information Age are bringing significant changes to politics, economics, education, family life, and religion in Korean society. In contrast with the earlier new religions which can be called religious manifestations of the needs and desires of the common people as well as religious manifestations of nationalist sentiment, recently we have witnessed the rapid spread of esoteric and mystical movements which promise physi-

28. For example, Yun I-hŭm insists that the new religions are expressions of nationalism since they seek to revive the original spirit of the Korean people and restore the Korean nation to its past glories. See his *Han'guk chonggyo yŏn'gu* [Research on Korean religion], vol. I, (Seoul: Chimmundang, 1986), 285-288. Yu Pyŏng-dŏk, on the other hand, argues that the new religions arose from among the common people and demanded respect for ordinary men and women. Therefore they should be called religions of the common people. See his *Han'guk Minjung Chonggyo sasangnon* [A discussion of the philosophies of Korea's new religions] (Seoul: Siinsa, 1985).

cal and mental health as well as peace of mind through Ki-enhancing physical exercises, cinnabar-field breathing, and transcendental meditation. These new religious movements are spreading particularly fast among the well educated and those of relatively high social status. Moreover, they differ from earlier new religions in that they do not have worship halls, do not have commandments and regulations for their members to follow, and do not hold communal worship services. The spread of these esoteric and mystical new religious movements indicates that the new religion movement in Korea is growing more diverse, and will undergo significant changes in character in the years ahead.

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