

Tonghak and Son Pyŏng-hŭi's Early Leadership, 1899-1904

Carl Young

Son Pyŏng-hŭi (1861-1922) is perhaps best known for his role in the March 1, 1919 movement in favour of Korean independence. However, he was also a long-time leader of the Tonghak (Eastern Learning) religious movement and the creator of its successor, Ch'ŏndogyo (Religion of the Heavenly Way), in 1905.

This article focuses on the early years of Son's supreme leadership of the Tonghak movement between 1899 and 1904. At this time, Tonghak was in a period of recovery after the 1894 Tonghak Peasant Uprising, which led to severe government persecution. This subjected the movement to a trying period of transition in which much of its membership and leadership were killed or in hiding. This was also a time of great change in Korean society and in Korea's international situation, as it increasingly became caught in the rivalries between Japan and Russia. When Ch'oe Si-hyŏng, the second leader of Tonghak was killed in 1898, Son Pyŏng-hŭi quickly emerged as the dominant personality in the movement and was finally confirmed as supreme leader of Tonghak in 1900. Soon after, he fled to Japan in 1901 to escape capture and also to learn of new ideas from the West and Japan that were affecting Korean society. Through the people and ideas with whom he came into contact, Son set the foundation for a reorganisation in Tonghak thought and strategy that would help it conserve its relevance in Korean society. This would set the stage for Tonghak and Ch'ŏndogyo's later contributions to Korean nationalist movements.

Keywords: Tonghak, Son Pyŏng-hŭi, Ch'ŏndogyo, Koreans in Japan.

Tonghak (Eastern Learning) is one of the earliest “new religions” of Korea. It was founded by Ch'oe Che-u in 1860 after a religious experience which commissioned him to proclaim the “Way of Heaven” and

establish a new teaching that would deliver Korea from chaos and corruption. The new religion included elements of Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, and shamanism, and quickly had success among the peasantry in southern Korea. The popularity of this unorthodox combination aroused alarm and led to persecution from the Korean government, which had Ch'oe Che-u executed in 1864. In spite of this, growth continued under the leadership of the second patriarch of the movement, Ch'oe Si-hyŏng.

Tonghak's strength was revealed by its major role in the largest peasant revolt in Korean history in 1894. This uprising included Tonghak members in prominent leadership and organizational roles.¹ Although the rebellion was defeated, it set off a chain of events, such as the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95 and the Kabo Reforms of 1894-1896,² that would mark an important new phase in Korea's modern history. However, Tonghak itself was subjected to even worse oppression, culminating in the capture and execution of Ch'oe Si-hyŏng in 1898.

Son Pyŏng-hŭi (1861-1922) was the third leader of Tonghak. He assumed the leadership of the religion in one of its darkest hours. However, he also managed its transition to a new relevance in a changing, modernising Korean society. By renaming and reorganising Tonghak into Ch'ŏndogyo (Religion of the Heavenly Way) in 1905, Son set the movement firmly on the road of promoting the cultural revitalisation of Korean society and advocating national self-strengthening and independence in the face of Japanese colonialism. This would lead Son

1. There has been a great deal of debate as to how to name this rebellion. Although older works often term this the Tonghak Rebellion, this is an oversimplification, because many non-Tonghak peasants also participated in the uprising. This has led to new names being applied such as the Peasants' War of 1894, Kabo Peasants' War, or Tonghak Revolutionary Movement. Possibly the most balanced name for this rebellion would be "Tonghak Peasant Uprising", found recently in Yu Yŏng-ik's (also known as Young-ick Lew) 1998 book (1998). *Tonghak nongmin ponggi wa Kabo kyŏngjang* (The Tonghak Peasant Uprising and the Kabo Reform Movement) (Yu Yŏng-ik 1998). This term combines the fact that both Tonghak believers and peasants (sometimes Tonghak believers were also peasants, but not always) had prominent roles in the rebellion and the term "uprising" denotes the fact that the rebellion was ultimately unsuccessful (unlike a revolution, which is a successful overthrow of a political or social order).
2. The Kabo Reforms actually were first applied in 1894 (the year *kabo* according to the traditional lunar calendar), but the government that instituted the reforms ruled Korea until 1896, continuing to apply further reforms in the same vein until this time.

to become one of the most prominent leaders of the March 1919 independence demonstrations, for which he is possibly best known. This advocacy of reform and modernisation was the culmination of a process that started early in Son's supreme leadership of Tonghak. After becoming head of the movement in 1899, he fled to Japan between 1901 and 1906 to avoid capture by Korean authorities. During this time, he came into contact with exiled Korean reformers. These people taught Son new ideas of society, politics, economics, and organisation. As a result of this influence, Son refocused Tonghak's teachings and organisation so that it would have a greater relevance and power in a changing Korean society.

Son Pyŏng-hŭi's Background and Rise to Leadership

Son Pyŏng-hŭi was born on April 8, 1861 in the Ch' ŏngju region of Ch' ungch' ŏng province, the son of a concubine of a minor provincial official. The status resulting from his birth did not allow him to be eligible for an official position because of government discrimination against sons of concubines. He appears to have resented this fact from an early age. However, he did have the opportunity to learn how to read and write and acquire an education.

Son was first introduced to Tonghak by his nephew, Son Ch' ŏn-min, who had joined the movement previously and engaged in preaching. Son Ch' ŏn-min taught that Tonghak was the way to avoid disasters and difficulties. Son Pyŏng-hŭi initially rejected this message, but when the local Tonghak leader, Sŏ U-sun, presented Tonghak as the "Great Way of *poguk anmin* (protecting the country and securing the welfare of the people)", he finally joined between 1881 and 1882.³

3. The earlier *Ch' ŏndogyo ch' anggŏnsa* (History of the creation and development of Ch' ŏndogyo) states that Son Pyŏng-hŭi joined Tonghak in 1881. See Yi Tŏn-hwa 1933: Part III, 4. More recent sources place the date at Oct. 1882. See Ŭiam sŏnsaeng kinyŏm sŏphoe 1967: 72 and Ch' ŏn-dogyo chungang ch' ongbu 1981: 303.
4. Yi Tŏn-hwa 1933: Part III, 4-5; Ch' ŏndogyo chungang ch' ongbu 1981: 303-306; *Ch' ŏndogyo Ch' anggŏnsa* states that Son first met Ch' oe Si-hyŏng in 1884, whereas the *Ch' ŏndogyo paengnyŏn yaksa* (Brief 100 year anniversary history of Ch' ŏndogyo) states that this happened in 1883.

Son Pyŏng-hŭi dedicated himself fully to the new religion. He first met Ch'oe Si-hyŏng in either 1883 or 1884. Ch'oe was so impressed with the spiritual prowess of the young man that he invited him to a 49 day retreat the following year.⁴ Son continued to maintain contacts with the master in subsequent years, and his own spiritual reputation became widely known.

Son participated in a demonstration in 1893 when various Tonghak leaders went to Seoul to petition for Tonghak's legalisation. The standard historical accounts are not clear about Son's exact leadership position at this time. His position must have been important since Son became the military leader of Tonghak's northern forces during the Tonghak Rebellion in 1894. (Yi Tŏn-hwa 1933: Part III, 8-10; Ch'ŏndogyo chungang ch'ŏngbu 1981: 306). One problem with this assertion is that it is only found in Ch'ŏndogyo histories, while other outside sources make no mention of Son holding such a major position. However, all the major sources place Son Pyŏng-hŭi in Ch'oe Si-hyŏng's immediate entourage after the rebellion and playing the role of an important figure.⁵ Son thus probably had a prominent position in the central Tonghak leadership during the early 1890's and this role must have increased after the rebellion.

Son Pyŏng-hŭi's important role in the leadership of the movement was further confirmed when Ch'oe Si-hyŏng summoned Son Pyŏng-hŭi, Son's nephew Son Ch'ŏn-min, and long-time disciple Kim Yŏn-guk, in the first lunar month of 1896 and gave them the religious names of Ŭiam, Kuam, and Songam, respectively. From that point on, the *Samam* (meaning the "Three am," the Chinese character the three had in common in their religious names) administered the daily affairs of Tonghak under the supervision of Ch'oe Si-hyŏng, who was elderly and becoming increasingly frail from the many sufferings he had endured. ("Tonghakdo ch'ong yŏksa" n.d.:338; Yi Tŏn-hwa 1933: Part II, 72; Ch'ŏndogyo chungang p'yŏn 1962: 72; Ch'ŏndogyo chungang ch'ŏngbu 1981: 291; "Sich'ŏngyo ch'ong yŏksa" n.d.:126-127).

5. Ch'ŏndogyo chungang p'yŏn 1962: 70; "Ch'ŏndogyosŏ" n.d.:244; Yi Tŏn-hwa 1933: Part II, 71; Ch'ŏndogyo chungang ch'ŏngbu 1981: 298. Sich'ŏngyo sources, from a faction of Tonghak that formed a separate organisation after the formation of Ch'ŏndogyo in 1905, also confirm Son's presence in the company of Ch'oe Si-hyŏng. See "Sich'ŏngyo yŏksa" in *Kungmin shinbo*, May 3, Yunghŭi 4 [1910]: 1; "Sich'ŏngyo ch'ong yŏksa" n.d.:125-126 and Ch'oe Yu-hyŏn

Ch' oe Si-hyŏng was captured and executed by Korean government authorities in 1898 for his role in the 1894 rebellion. His death led to questions about leadership of the movement. The *Samam* exercised a collective leadership under the direction of Ch' oe Si-hyŏng. What was to happen after Ch' oe's death was another question. There were debates as to whether Son or Kim Yŏn-guk should assume supreme leadership of the organisation. Son, however, appears to have been dominant. He retreated for a long period of meditation in 1899, and wrote two doctrinal treatises, the *Kakse chin'gyŏng* (Scripture on the Perception of Truth in the World) and the *Susu myŏngsillok* (True Record of the Transmission and Reception of Light), during this year. In a meeting of Tonghak leaders in late July 1900, Son confronted Kim with the question of leadership. According to Ch' ŏndogyo sources, Kim finally relented and acknowledged Son's primacy. (Yi Tŏn-hwa 1933: Part II, 71: Ch' ŏndogyo chungang ch' ongbu 1981:319-320). This was more than likely due to pressure exerted from the others in attendance, all of whom supported Son. Communications from central headquarters in June and July 1900 appear to give some credence to the story, since they are signed by Son as *taedoju* (Great Leader of the Way) with Kim Yŏn-guk, Son Ch' ŏn-min, and Pak In-ho, a friend of Son Pyŏng-hŭi's who was later to assume greater importance in the Tonghak leadership, as supporting leaders.⁶ His position became even more certain because of renewed government persecution. Just a few weeks after the July 1900 meeting, Son Ch' ŏn-min was captured and executed in August 1900. ("Tonghakdo chong yŏksa" n.d.:371, 377; "Sich' ŏngyo chong yŏksa" n.d.:140). The continuing persecution motivated Son Pyŏng-hŭi to eventually seek refuge in Japan in March 1901. Kim Yŏn-guk was captured and imprisoned in mid-June 1901 and not released until 1905. ("Sich' ŏngyo chong yŏksa" n.d.:140.) Although he was in exile and therefore out of the country, Son Pyŏng-hŭi was the only one left of the *Samam* who was free to exercise authority over Tonghak's religious organisation.

6. See July 1900 *kyŏngt'ong* in "Tonghak kyŏngt'ongmun" (n.d.) and the June 1900 *kyŏngt'ong* in "T'ongmun-Tonghak kwangye" (n.d.). The actual titles of the other leaders were Kim Yŏn-guk as *sindoju* (leader of the way of faith), Son Ch' ŏn-min as *sŏngdoju* (leader of the way of sincerity), and Pak In-ho as *kyŏngdoju* (leader of the way of respect). These names are taken from the major Confucian virtues.

Son Pyŏng-hŭi in Japan

In March 1901, Son Pyŏng-hŭi gathered some of Tonghak's most prominent leaders together and announced his decision to leave Korea as soon as possible. He stated that he had discussed the possibility of going to the United States previously with Son Ch'ŏn-min and Kim Yŏn-guk, but this had been opposed by Kim Yŏn-guk. (Yi Ton-hwa 1933: Part III, 27; Pon'gyo yŏksa:272). He now proposed to leave Korea for 10 years and learn about the world and the new intellectual and political currents that were affecting Korea. Son argued that it was impossible to take the Way to the world if he was continually in hiding and escaping capture. For him, Tonghak was not only for Korea or Japan, but it had a worldwide message, and this involved learning the customs and trends of the world and civilisation. (Ŭiam sŏnsaeng kinyŏm saŏphoe 1967: 160). By doing this, "our Way could more brightly shine forth in the future to the world." (Yi Tŏn-hwa 1933: Part III, 27).

Son's aims for Tonghak come out clearly in this meeting. One of his reasons for going abroad was that it was necessary to know the customs and the trends of the world to spread the Way not only to Korea or Japan, but to all people. Apparently, Son had a vision at this time of expanding missionary work outside of Korea, possibly on a worldwide scale. Although events in subsequent years in Korea made this impossible, it seems that Son believed that Tonghak had the potential of being a world religion. However, the change from nativist sect to world religion could not take place if Tonghak was still persecuted and its leadership was in hiding. It also had to be aware of developments going on in the world to better determine a strategy for evangelisation. This would lead to Son's search for ways to change the situation in Korea so that Tonghak could have freedom of action. It would also lead him to look for new ways of interpreting Tonghak teachings in the light of new intellectual and social currents so that it would have a more effective appeal.

Ch'ŏndogyo histories state that Son's original destination was the United States. (Ch'ŏndogyo chungang p' yŏn 1962:93; Yi Tŏn-hwa 1933 Part III, 27; "Pon'gyo yŏksa" n.d.:272-273). Son and his companions, his brother Son Pyŏng-hŭm and closest disciple Yi Yong-gu,⁷ left

Wŏnsan on a ship for Pusan in March 1901. Finding that there was no direct boat to the United States from Pusan, they boarded a boat for Nagasaki, Japan, hoping to find a boat that would take them to America from there. After arriving at Nagasaki and spending a night there, they went to Osaka. There they realised that they did not have enough money (apparently 60 yen) for the fare to America. Son sent his brother and Yi Yong-gu back to Korea to get the necessary money. However, they came back a month later with insufficient funds. Son decided then to stay in Japan (Ch'ŏndogyo chungang p' yŏn 1962:93; Yi Tŏn-hwa 1933: Part III, 27-28; "Pon' gyo yŏksa" n.d.:273).

All the major Ch'ŏndogyo histories agree on this story. So, what motivated Son to change his mind about going to the United States so quickly and instead stay in Japan? The story about a lack of money does not ring true. During Son's stay in Japan, it is said that his identity was not fully known to those he associated with not only because he travelled under a pseudonym (Yi Sang-hŏn), but also because he talked like a politician and spent money like a rich man. He apparently travelled around in a two-horse drawn carriage and later bought a car and learned how to drive it, apparently one of the first Koreans to learn to do so (Yi Kwang-sun 1977:156-157; Ŭiam sŏnsaeng kinyŏm saŏphoe 1967:161,167). Such a lifestyle demands a large amount of disposable income, so Son may have had enough money to go to the United States had he wanted to do so.

Several factors may have influenced Son's decision to stay in Japan.

7. Yi Yong-gu was another prominent leader of Tonghak. Having joined Tonghak in 1891, Yi quickly came to be close to both Ch'oe Si-hyŏng and more especially Son Pyŏng-hŭi. After the 1894 rebellion and losing his family in the ensuing government persecutions, he came to engage in highly successful underground preaching in north western Korea. He was arrested in 1898 but later escaped and was among the chief leaders who confirmed Son's position as supreme leader of Tonghak in 1900. His closeness to Son is manifested by the fact that Son took Yi along with him to Japan. Yi stayed in Japan until 1902, when he was sent back to administer Tonghak's domestic affairs in Korea, becoming the second most important leader of the movement after Son himself. He later became the head of Tonghak's political organisation, the Chinbohoe, in 1904, but after this merged with pro-Japanese elements to form the Iljinhoe, Yi and Son split over collaboration with the new Japanese protectorate established in 1905. This would lead to Son's formation in late 1905 of Ch'ŏndogyo, which opposed continuing links to the Japanese, with the help of reformist converts that he had met in Japan (such as Kwon Tong-jin, O Se-ch'ang and Yang Han-muk, who will be encountered later in the article). Yi was expelled from Ch'ŏndogyo in 1906 and formed a separate organization called the Shich'ŏnggyo, which continued its collaboration with Japan.

Japan was close to Korea, so Son could maintain contacts much more easily with Tonghak leaders in Korea from there than he would have from the United States. Contact with Korea was maintained through letters and envoys sent to and fro between Son and Tonghak leaders. After Son decided to stay in Japan, Son Pyŏng-hŭm and Yi Yong-gu were sent back to Korea, but they were back in Japan soon after (Yi Tŏn-hwa 1933: Part III, 28). This pattern was repeated by them and other Tonghak leaders throughout Son's exile. Son was thus able to keep fairly good tabs on developments in Korea. This would have been much more difficult to do from the United States because of the far greater distance that was involved.

Japan may have proven attractive to Son for his purposes because it was an Asian country applying the new scientific, political, and economic thought from the West to its own circumstances. In this way, Japan was more similar to a possible situation that Korea would face if it seriously applied these new ideas than the United States would be. As a Korean, living in Japan would be easier than in the United States. There were more cultural commonalities and the linguistic barrier would be easier to overcome. Son would still be able to learn about the latest trends in world civilisation in Japan without going too far away from home.

Most importantly, there was a large Korean community in Japan. Many of these people were exiles from the time of the failure of the Japanese-supported Kabo Reform government in 1894-1896. There were also some that were intrigued by Japan's modernisation and had come there to study. Son came into contact with this group and had frequent dealings and exchanges of ideas with them. They came to influence his thinking and several of them eventually joined Tonghak. The existence of this Korean community of prominent people made it easier for Son to learn the latest trends in the world and make alliances with people who were in favour of reforming government in Korea. This would have been more difficult to do in the United States, where the Korean community was made up of less influential people and was more widely dispersed. Whatever the reasons that motivated Son, he stayed in Japan continuously until 1906, except for a short break in late 1901.

Son Pyŏng-hŭi and the Kabo Reform Exiles in Japan

Many exiled Korean reformers had made their homes in Osaka. This could have motivated Son to stay in the Kansai region of Japan for the first half of his stay there. It was here in 1901 that he made his first contacts with some major Korean reformist exiles. These men were considered traitors by the Korean government, which was worried about their existence and activities. Two of them, Cho Hŭi-yŏn and Kwon Tong-jin, who were later to join Tonghak, are mentioned as prominent “villains” involved in the murder of Queen Min in 1895(Sahoe kwahak ch’ulp’ansa 1991:133).

The early Ch’ŏndogyo histories relate that Son met Kwon Tong-jin, Cho Hŭi-mun and his brother, Cho Hŭi-yŏn, and Pak Yŏng-hyo, who had been active in the Kapsin coup of 1884 as well as the Kabo reforms of 1894-1896. He apparently discussed politics and the state of world affairs with them (“Pon’gyo yŏksa” n.d.:273; Yi Tŏn-hwa 1933: Part III, 28). Although some sources vary, most say that at this time, because Son had adopted the pseudonym of Yi Sang-hŏn, people were not aware of his true identity(Ch’ŏndogyo yusi kyoin ildong 1990:90-91; “Ch’ŏndogyosŏ” n.d.:312; Ch’ŏndogyo chungang p’yŏn 1962:93; Yi Tŏn-hwa 1933: Part III, 28; Ch’ŏndogyo chungang ch’ongbu 1981:328). Kwon Tong-jin relates that there were rumours of a “strange” person who had arrived among the Osaka Korean exiles. He says that Son provoked feelings of “doubt” and “unease”, but also piqued his curiosity.⁸ This was to start a close relationship and exchange of ideas between Son and many of these Koreans now living in Japan.

Son’s contacts with these dissidents apparently worried Korean officials in Japan, who issued him a warning to return to Korea or risk being declared an outlaw. The exact time that this happened is under dispute, but by September 1901, Son had left Japan for Shanghai. Later sources say that he met Sun Yat-sen, the later founder of the Chinese republic, although this is not corroborated in earlier histories(Cho Ki-jo 1979:218-220; Ch’ŏndogyo chungang ch’ongbu 1981:328). Before leav-

8. “Ch’ŏndogyo chungjin Kwon Tong-jin ssi (4)”, *Tong-a ilbo*, Jan. 31, 1930, 2. Kwon makes a play on words between Son’s pseudonym, Yi Sang-hŏn, and the Korean word for “strange” (*isanghan*).

ing for Shanghai, Son sent his brother, Son Pyŏng-hŭm, over to Korea to tell the believers there of the necessity of absorbing the new learning that Son had become acquainted with while he was in Japan. After doing this, Son Pyŏng-hŭm joined his brother in Shanghai. The two came over to Korea in October 1901(Ch'ŏndogyo chungang p' yŏn 1962:94; Ch'ŏndogyo yusi kyŏin ildong 1990:91).

Son did not stay a long time in Korea before going back to Japan in March 1902. He stayed long enough to consult with his followers, buy a house in Seoul, and organise increased missionary work in the north-west, which was fast becoming Tonghak's chief area of strength.²⁷ He left Korea with 24 students to study the "new learning" that he was now emphasising. On his return to Japan, Son enrolled these students in schools in Nara and Kyoto, where they learned Japanese and enrolled in a state middle school to acquire the "modern" learning that was now being taught in Japan. Forty more students came to Japan under Tonghak sponsorship in the beginning of 1904("Pon' gyo yŏksa" n.d.:274; Ch'ŏndogyo chungang p' yŏn 1962:94; Ch'ŏndogyo chungang ch' ongbu 1981:332). This was the beginning of a preoccupation with education that was to become characteristic of Tonghak and Ch'ŏndogyo in subsequent years.

Son came back into contact with the Korean exiles that he had met the year before. He continued his meetings with them and became more convinced of the need for reform in Korea. As a result of these discussions, Son predicted in 1903 that war would soon arise between Japan and Russia over dominance in Northeast Asia. Son foresaw a Japanese victory, mainly because of Japan's closer geographic position and because it had more at stake than Russia in the conflict, thus giving it more motivation for victory. For Son, this meant that it was important for Korea to be on the side of the victor so as to best maintain its independence and international position(Weems 1964:53-54; Yi Tŏn-hwa 1933: Part III,32-33).

However, the conservative faction in power in Korea tended to favour Russia. Son became convinced that the pro-Russian faction in Korea had to be overthrown. This led him to meet a certain General Tamura with the assistance of some of his reformist exile friends. Son proposed to raise up Tonghak elements and with the help of Japanese troops, launch a coordinated attack on Seoul and overthrow the gov-

ernment. This plan failed, however, when General Tamura and Son's brother, Son Pyŏng-hŭm, both died suddenly in Pusan in August 1903.⁹

This episode shows Son's growing closeness to the Korean reformist exiles and a growing interest in Korean and international politics. Looking back, it might seem strange that Son and his Korean reformist friends actually agreed to plot with the Japanese to overthrow the Korean government. However, it is important to note that those desiring change in Korean government often looked to Japan's Meiji Restoration as an example that Korea could follow. This led reformists to often seek Japanese help to implement their vision. Japan willingly gave this aid in order to increase its influence in Korea. It is for this reason that so many Korean reformists were in exile in Japan. The reformists had an admiration for the Japanese model and Japan was sympathetic to their aims. Unfortunately, they often overlooked the fact that Japan might have had an agenda of its own, and this was to have disastrous consequences for Korea in the future.

Son had his own motivations for supporting the reformists. His attraction to their policies was likely genuine. However, there were also political advantages for Tonghak in supporting them. It was the conservative government in Korea that was persecuting Tonghak and restricting its activities. There was little hope that it would change its policy. Ch'ŏndogyo sources say that Son's politics were motivated by a desire to "proclaim the Way" (Ch'ŏndogyo chungang ch'ongbu 1981:338). Looking at it from this angle, it was logical for Son to support the reformist agenda. If the reformers came to power with Tonghak support, they would legalise the religion, cease the persecutions, and permit it to freely pursue its activities. Tonghak could increase its influence in Korean society, and from there expand to the outside world.¹⁰

Several of these reformers also joined Tonghak in Japan. Among those who joined were Kwon Tong-jin, O Se-ch'ang, and Yang Han-

9. Weems 1964:54; Ch'ŏndogyo chungang p'yŏn 1962:95; "Pon'gyo yŏksa" n.d.:275; Yi Tŏn-hwa 1933: Part III, 32-34. It is unclear exactly when General Tamura died. The above sources state that he died just a few days after Son Pyŏng-hŭm. Kwon Tong-jin states that Tamura died in a "Red Cross Hospital" soon after, although the location or exact date are not clear. See "Ch'ŏndogyo chungjin Kwon Tong-jin ssi (5)", *Tong-a ilbo*, Feb. 1, 1930, 2.

10. Ch'oe Ki-yŏng, a Korean historian, sets out similar reasons, but emphasises more the importance of Tonghak having connections with government. See Ch'oe Ki-yŏng 1994:100, 103.

muk(Yi Pyŏng-hŏn 1959:84; Yi Tŏn-hwa 1933: Part III, 43). These men were soon to exercise a strong influence on Tonghak and Ch'ŏndogyo's political, organisational, and doctrinal development. They were also among the signers of the Korean Declaration of Independence in 1919. A mixture of both political and religious considerations likely influenced these reformers' conversions. Just as Son likely got together with the reformers to help him modernise Tonghak and legalise its position in Korea, so the reformers may have seen Tonghak as a way to help push along the reform agenda. Kwon says that when he came to realise Son's real identity as Tonghak patriarch and understood that there were "3 000 000 [sic] Tonghak followers", he and O were convinced that it was necessary to join such a powerful organisation.¹¹ By imbuing reformist ideas into an organisation with a mass base, it would be easier to bring about their application in Korean society. This would give the reformers a popular basis, something that they had lacked up until now and which had always led to failure. There does appear also to have been a religious motivation behind the conversions. This is clearest in Yang Han-muk, who later became involved in elaborating Ch'ŏndogyo's doctrines.¹² However, Kwon also had a mixture of religious and political motives. He states that he was attracted to Tonghak by its "wonderful doctrine" and its practice of cleansing the heart. Kwon stayed closely involved with Ch'ŏndogyo well into the late 1930's. O is less clear on his religious motivations. He states that he joined because he was impressed by Son's words. O was deeply involved in Ch'ŏndogyo's media activities up to 1919, but there is less evidence of his involvement after this(Yi Pyŏng-hŏn 1959:186, 512).

The reformists brought with them new ideas and a new culture that was to affect and change Tonghak in the future. They had not participated in the 1894 rebellion; indeed, they had been on the side of the

11. "Silam Kwon Tong-jin ssi-ŭi hoegodam", *Ch'ŏndogyohoe wolbo* 261 (Nov. 1932), 22. The figure of three million is surely an exaggeration.
12. Yang's motivations for being in Japan were much less clearly political than either Kwon Tong-jin's or O Se-ch'ang's. He does not appear to have been as involved in the Kabo Reforms (although he did hold office at the provincial level in this period) and appears to have been in Japan more on a study mission rather than political exile. See Ch'oe Ki-yŏng 1995:97-98.
13. Yang Han-muk makes it clear that he was not involved in the "violence of the *Tonghakdang*." See Yi Pyŏng-hŏn 1959:271.

Japanese-supported government that helped put it down.¹³ The growing importance of these people in Tonghak further distanced it from the heritage of the uprising. This may have been seen as desirable at this time, since the rebellion's failure had led to so many problems for Tonghak. Son was attached to the teachings of Ch'oe Che-u and Ch'oe Si-hyŏng, but was anxious to reinterpret them so that they could be relevant in a rapidly changing world. His exchanges with the reformists helped him to start this process, as can be seen by his writings while he was in Japan.

Developments in Son Pyŏng-hŭi's Thought

The doctrinal treatises (*pŏpsŏl*) written by Son Pyŏng-hŭi while he was in Japan are some of the few contemporary sources that evidence his stay there. Three of these doctrinal treatises, *Myŏngnijŏn* (Preaching on the Principle of Light), *Samjŏllon* (Exposition of the Three Struggles), and *Muhasŏl* (Discourse on No-Thing), all written in 1903, are included in the Ch'ŏndogyo scriptures. They clearly show the effect that Son's exposure to new ideas had on his vision of Tonghak's role in the changing domestic and international situation. They also provide the first signs of his attempts to reinterpret Tonghak teachings in the light of these new ideas. Tonghak thought had been interpreted using the language of the dominant Neo-Confucian discourse of traditional Korea. Although many of these concepts were retained, especially in the area of ethics, Son sought to update the interpretation of Tonghak's teachings so it could better function in a world in which Western political, philosophical, and economic thought was now dominant. Son's purpose was to make his followers in Korea aware of the changes going on in the outside world. He wanted to teach and persuade them of the need for Tonghak to take its place in shaping the events that would affect Korea. *Myŏngnijŏn* and *Samjŏllon* show this most clearly. Although these are termed doctrinal treatises, most of what is written here really relates to the fields of politics, economics, and culture. This preoccupation with what could be termed as secular subjects has often led to the question of whether Tonghak was mainly a socio-political movement or a religious movement. This is a non-issue because it is unlikely that Son Pyŏng-hŭi and most Tonghak followers would have

made a sharp distinction between the secular and religious spheres. Tonghak's social action was justified and motivated by its religious agenda. Bringing society into harmony with the Way of Heaven was an essential part of bringing all creation to a realisation of its oneness with the Way.

In both *Myöngnijön* and *Samjöllon*, Son summarises the traditional accounts of creation and the beginnings of civilisation in the persons of the Five Emperors and Three Sage Kings of East Asian tradition (Ch'öndogyo chungang ch'ongbu 1997:580-584, 629-630). Although starting in a traditional Neo-Confucian vein, Son quickly questions the relevance of these ideas. He goes against this nostalgia for the past by emphasising the need to look at the present because the cosmos is shifting its orientation. The world is moving quickly toward more interaction and integration, with all creation becoming as one. According to this account, the sages came from the East, but it appears that the movement of the cosmos is changing direction. The Westerners seem to be riding on the ascendant wave. Their activities and research helped increase their talent and technology, leading to success in industry. In this situation, it is important to seize hold of the Way and of virtue, because a place that has these things is difficult to overrun. Son compares such a place to the wind that is able to exert its influence in all directions (Ch'öndogyo chungang ch'ongbu 1997:585-588, 626-628, 631-632). This is what he hopes can happen in Korea.

Son discusses Western government with admiration. In the West, the relationship between king and officials is still maintained, but it is governed by a constitution that ensures public peace and good policy, which in turn strengthens civilisation (Ch'öndogyo chungang ch'ongbu 1997:588). Son emphasises the importance of the people in the governance of the nation. He contends that even in East Asian tradition, the title of the king and his person originally came from the people. Through this, "the people are clearly shown to be the root of the nation" (Ch'öndogyo chungang ch'ongbu 1997:589). However, this is not the case at present in the Orient. The people are slaves below the king and the king lives in fear of his people "as if they were tigers." Son stresses the need for Easterners to return to the truth that the people are the most important element of the nation (Ch'öndogyo chungang ch'ongbu 1997:589-590). Son defines the nation as "the name

designating a land and the people that nurture it" and a king as the "man that rules over and enlightens the people" (Ch'ŏndogyo chungang ch'ongbu 1997:612). If the king governs well, the people of themselves will become rich and strong. However, this is not the case in the Orient (specifically Korea) and Son was worried that if a policy of *poguk anmin* (protecting the nation and peace for the people) was not applied soon, it would be difficult for good governance and the people's welfare to be maintained (Ch'ŏndogyo chungang ch'ongbu 1997:612-614)

There was much from the Confucian tradition on which Son could draw upon to justify his stance. Mencius especially emphasised the importance of the people's welfare as the priority of the ruler. However, Son's ideas were more radical than this. His contention that the king and his function arose from the people is reminiscent of Western ideas on the "social contract." Son's stress on the importance of the nation as constituting the people and its land is also reminiscent of 19th century nationalist thought. Son still uses quotes from Confucius, Mencius, and the Confucian classics throughout his treatise, but also introduces new concepts he had learned in Japan. Confucianism still had a strong hold on Korea. Son deftly used old teachings to bring forth new ideas. This was to be a strong characteristic of his teaching in the future.

Struggle was a major theme during the 19th century. Social Darwinism, with its discourse of survival of the fittest and strong nations absorbing the weak, was an important part of the intellectual stage at this time. For Son, this struggle was not merely one of arms. There are weapons other than military might. Son defined these as *dojŏn* (struggle of the Way), *chaejŏn* (the struggle of goods and property), and *ŏnjŏn* (the struggle of words). The correct use of these weapons will bring protection to the nation and welfare to the people (*poguk anmin*) and peace to the world (*p'yŏng ch'ŏnha*) (Ch'ŏndogyo chungang ch'ongbu 1997:629-630).

In the fields of economic and cultural struggle, Son was short on specific policies, but had some ideas. He admired the prosperity and power of the West and emphasised the need to gain knowledge of the Westerners' position and imitate their development. Studying abroad was seen as one way to obtain this new learning. For Son, it was important to have a common language, which would permit the shar-

ing of wisdom and knowledge. This common ground encourages communication and would help prevent conflict and establish peace (Ch' ŏndogyo chungang ch' ongbu 1997:639-642) In this case, the word "language" is not so much to be understood in the sense it is used in English, that is using the same words and sounds. It is more to be understood in the French term *langage*, which incorporates a commonality of concepts and symbols. Son was encouraging his followers to become aware of the new concepts and learning that were being spread across the world through increased communication, trade, and contacts.

Son also advocated that the rich invest their capital and the poor their work. He predicted that within ten years, the rich would be richer and the poor would have what they needed to live decently. This would lead to a rich nation and a peaceful people. A society run in accordance with the Way would be characterised by material prosperity, skill, and peace among the people. Reform would bring material rewards that would make a civilisation of virtue better able to spread itself in the world (Ch' ŏndogyo chungang ch' ongbu 1997:605-607, 612, 619-621). By following the road of change, Korea would be able to act independently in the realm of nations.

Although Confucian and Western visions were influential, Son's main inspiration for his political vision was drawn from Tonghak doctrine. He advocated the need for a unifying teaching for the nation. For Son, it was only possible to govern well if one's heart was clear. The way one does this is through realising that "Man is a Heavenly Man" (*in shi ch'ŏn in*) and that the "Way is Heaven's Way" (*do shi ch'ŏn do*). Man unites with Heaven by being in tune with his original nature. He is thereby in harmony with its knowledge and wisdom (Ch' ŏndogyo chungang ch' ongbu 1997:591-594). At the beginning of *Samjŏllon*, Son emphasises the importance of acting as Heaven while carrying it within oneself. When people act in this manner, they become the "body of Heaven" (*ch'ech'ŏn*). Virtue is defined as acting as Heaven towards other people (Ch' ŏndogyo chungang ch' ongbu 1997:624-625) Man's original nature is Heaven and people carry Heaven within themselves. This is why the people are so important. Establishing a way that will help rule the people well will ensure that they will prosper and live in peace (Ch' ŏndogyo chungang ch' ongbu 1997:632-634) Son stressed the

need for a change in what was being taught in order to bring peace to the people, make each aware of their work and responsibilities, and bring prosperity to the nation. This new national teaching would lead to “the civilization of culture” (*kaemyŏng munhwa*)(Ch’ŏndogyo chungang ch’ongbu 1997:632) If this was established, this world would become a “world of bliss” (*kŭngnak segye*).¹⁴ It was clear that this teaching for Korea was Tonghak, since it was Tonghak that taught the true nature of Heaven.

These writings show the impact of Western thought on Son. He seems to have been impressed by the West’s political and economic thought as well as its scientific advances. It was important for Korea to become acquainted with these things and apply them so that it could preserve its independence and thus protect the nation and ensure the welfare of the people. However, this does not mean a wholesale rejection of tradition. The ethical ideas of Neo-Confucianism are still very apparent. The arguments in favour of change are also couched in Confucian terms, more than likely to improve communication of his ideas to his followers, who were in a Korea where the Confucian world-view was still strong.

Nor did new thought bring the Tonghak tradition into question. Western thought on the importance of rule by the people helped reinforce the Tonghak concept of people being the “body of Heaven” and thus the “root of the nation.” For Tonghak followers, it was important to understand and learn to work in a rapidly changing environment so that they could continue their project of being in harmony with Heaven in a new order. For Son, this involved the need for change in Korean society. Tonghak followers were to be agents of this change. For reform to work, it would also need to reach the people, not just the elite. Spreading the agenda of reform so that it could take hold on the people and allow Tonghak to better exercise its influence was to become one of Son Pyŏng-hŭi’s pressing concerns.

14. Ch’ŏndogyo chungang ch’ongbu 1997:603. The same term is used in Buddhism to describe the Pure Land of Amida Buddha, although the significance here is that of an earthly paradise.

Conclusion

Son Pyŏng-hŭi's early years of leadership were influential in determining the future direction of Tonghak. The movement in this period was illegal and suffered from government oppression, which greatly hampered its effectiveness. A desire to escape persecution and learn more about the world led him to flee to Japan. Here, Son found what he was looking for. He found a secure base where he could be free from harassment. He was also able to meet many Korean reformers in exile and learn about the new thought that he was interested in. Politically and ideologically, this turned Son to the direction of reform. There was little hope that the restrictions on Tonghak would be lifted by the conservative government presently in power in Korea. Son seems to have calculated that it was to his advantage to throw his lot in with the reformers, who seemed more open to the idea of freedom of religion. Son also started reinterpreting Tonghak teachings in the light of the new learning.

It would be a mistake, however, to say that he rejected tradition completely. He used the new Western-inspired thought to reinterpret and expand on ideas already existing within the Tonghak tradition. He was still attached to the ideas of Confucian ethics and used his knowledge of the Confucian tradition to help convince his followers of the necessity of reform. Son's style was highly eclectic. He advocated reinterpreting tradition and using new knowledge so that Tonghak could more effectively act in a changing world. The state of government and society in Korea was important to Tonghak, because Korea was the base from which it operated. A reformed, prosperous and independent Korea would provide a better place for the movement to operate and eventually expand into the outside world.

Son's experiences during his early years of leadership set the foundation for Tonghak and Ch'ŏndogyo's later social activism. Reform in Korea had failed because it had been an elite enterprise that did not enlist much active involvement by the general population. Son seems to have seen this problem and stressed the need to involve the people, who were the root of the nation and the body of Heaven, in reforming Korean society. Tonghak's religious thought came to be reinterpreted and combined new ideas of politics and nation. Cultural renewal and

social action became important parts of Tonghak's religious mission of enhancing the "Way of Heaven" in people and society. This became the foundation of Tonghak and Ch'öndogyo's later contributions to Korean nationalist movements.

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Carl Young is a Ph.D. candidate at the History Department of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, UK. He is currently in the process of finishing his Ph.D. thesis on developments in the Tonghak and Ch'ŏndogyo movements between 1895 and 1910.

