

Special Feature

“Antagonistic Unity”: Kim Oseong,  
Dialectical Anthropology, and the  
Discovery of Literature, 1929-1938

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## Introduction

In August 1936, the official journal of the Cheondogyo New Faction, *Sin Ingan* (*New Human*), published a letter from Kim Oseong 金午星, one of its editors, to an unnamed friend, “R.”<sup>1</sup> Appearing under the title, “A Means for Health in this Age” (Kim Oseong 1936e), the letter narrated a series of events in the past year of Kim’s life: the continued deterioration of his physical health; his consultation with a doctor at the urging of those around him; the doctor’s recommendation of a holiday away from urban life; his resignation to pursuing this course, followed by an unexpected encounter with a book about Friedrich Nietzsche. At this point the letter paused, and Kim described his surprise and delight at finding in this book a method—“mad” as it might sound—for treating the “sickness of the age” (*sidaebyeong*). “When Nietzsche was in physical pain,” Kim recalled from the book, “he was able to recover and augment his... energy by providing himself with the fantasy that he was healthy” (51). Weak in body, Kim said, Nietzsche was nevertheless able to use his strong mind and powerful will to fight back—and such a method would be just as fitting for the current age, in which the reality of material “crisis” (*wigi*) was producing “anxiety” (*buran*), “agony” (*gonoe*), and “neurasthenia” (*singyeong soeyak*) throughout the young generation.

In narrating his discovery of this cure, Kim—philosopher, journalist, religious activist, and eventually, politician—was outlining a new direction for

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1. Cheondogyo 天道教 (Religion of the Heavenly Way) is a Korean new religion based on the teachings of Suun Choe Je-u (1824-1864), the progenitor of the Donghak Movement of the 1860s and the inspiration for the Donghak Peasant Uprising of 1894-1895. The name, “Cheondogyo,” was the creation of the faith’s third leader, Son Byeonghui, who changed it in 1905. Son also systematized its doctrine—a syncretic mix of Confucian, Buddhist, Daoist, and Catholic influences—and he played an important role in the March 1 Independence Movement, as did other Cheondogyo leaders. Due to the legacy of the Donghak Movement and Uprising, the Cheondogyo faith was heavily concentrated in peasant communities.

an old project. For more than four years, Kim had been using the space of the Cheondogyo publishing network to formulate a dialectical anthropology in which “the human” was understood to be an “antagonistic unity” (*daeripjeok tongil*) of “subject” (*juche*) and “object” (*gaekche*).<sup>2</sup> Since its inception in 1932, the three basic premises of this project had remained relatively consistent: in its “materialist” dimension, it argued that the human could not be separated from the restrictions of her “objective” (*gaekgwanjeok*) environment; in its “idealist” dimension, it argued that she could nevertheless overcome these restrictions and reshape her environment through her “subjective” (*jugwanjeok*) powers of consciousness; and in its historical dimension, it argued that the unending dialectic between these two dual perspectives and positions defined the “unfinished” (*miwan*), developmental nature of the human. At the same time, however, the practical orientation of Kim’s project had shifted continuously: in 1932, an optimistic Kim had seen the promise of mass enlightenment in the collaboration between philosophy and science; by 1934, his increasingly “embattled” view of human life had re-oriented him toward the necessity of grounding philosophy’s abstractions in embodied, religious faith; and by 1936, faced with a shrinking domain for religious organization, he had begun seeking a new means of “constructing” the future through the joint action of philosophy and literature.

For Kim, then, the call to follow Nietzsche in resisting “that bastard sickness” (*geu nom ui byeongma*) was a call to re-embed dialectical practice in the space between philosophy and literature—and it was also, just as importantly, a call to move beyond the discursive domain of the religious. The August 1936 issue of *Sin Ingan* would in fact be the last to carry Kim’s writing, and his break with the publication and its Cheondogyo parent organization would be permanent.<sup>3</sup> Writing exclusively within the space of the literary and cultural sphere (*mundan*) through the end of colonial rule, Kim would continue to develop his dialectical anthropology, but he would never mention Cheondogyo again. During the pivotal year of 1936, Kim’s search for a “new human” (*sin*

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2. The term, “dialectical anthropology,” is my own. “Antagonistic unity” was Kim’s, and it was likely his rendering of the Hegelian-Marxist concept of “the unity/interpenetration of opposites.” For a discussion of related concepts, see Weston (2008).

3. Kim never explicitly mentioned this break in his writings; the reasons behind it are thus hard to establish with certainty.

*ingan*)—previously structured around the Cheondogyo slogan, “the human is heaven” (*in nae cheon* 人乃天)—instead became a search for a “new human type” (*saeroun ingan taip*) pursued under the rubric of a new form of literary and philosophical “humanism” (*hyumeonijeum*),<sup>4</sup> and this transformation not only revived Kim’s antagonistic relationship with the Marxist cultural sphere but also brought his interests and positions closer to theirs than they had ever been before.

This story of inflections is the subject of this paper. First, I show how the basic framework of Kim’s “humanism”—that is, his vision of both human life and human nature as internally dialectical—emerged in a series of articles published in *Sin Ingan* in the early 1930s. Second, I trace how Kim’s ideas shifted in tandem with broader developments in the Cheondogyo New Faction, emphasizing his changing vision of the relationship between philosophy, science, and religion. Third, I demonstrate how Kim pivoted in the year 1936 by “converting” to literature, entering the literary field, dispatching with Cheondogyo terminology, and taking up the term “humanism.” Fourth, using fictional and critical texts by An Hamgwang, Im Hwa, Han Seolya, Yi Giyeong, Song Yeong, and Han Intaek, I suggest that the emergence and reception of Kim’s writings about literature should be understood within the context of a second, parallel “discovery” of literature: that is, in terms of contemporary debates about Socialist Realism’s vision of the specificity of literature and in terms of the emergence of self-reflexive tropes in novels about novelists written by former members of the Korean Artists Proletarian Federation (KAPF) and their associates. I thus offer an alternative perspective on the well-known “humanism” debates of the mid-1930s by asking not only how and why the theory of the subject became a problem for literature but also how and why literature became a problem for the theory of the subject.<sup>5</sup>

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4. In a number of his articles, Kim called his theory “neo-humanism” (*neo hyumeonijeum*). However, he omitted the “neo-” prefix in just as many cases. To be consistent, I use the term “humanism” exclusively.

5. Recent scholarship has focused special attention on the history of “literature” as a concept (Choe 2012) as well as on the *mundan*’s changing relationships with its “others”—in particular, science (Hwang 2013). This paper builds on these developments by linking them together as Kim Yunsik (2011) has done. I thus show how Kim’s discovery of literature from “outside” was tethered to his entry into the *mundan*, as well as how his entry into the *mundan* was tethered to his discussion of the proper meaning of literature.

The majority of the scholarship on “humanism” in 1930s Korea views the emergence of this keyword in terms of the mid-1930s acceleration of ideological “conversion” (*jeonhyang*), the forced breakup of KAPF in 1935, and the subsequent intellectual vacuum in the *mundan*. This literature generally focuses on the critic Baek Cheol and his interlocutors, and there is a specific reason for this: because Baek, a former leader of KAPF, took up the term “humanism” around the time of his conversion and used it repeatedly to instigate a series of debates that spread across the middle years of the 1930s (Im and Han 1990; C. Kim 1995; Kim Yunsik 2008). Additionally, a second line of existing scholarship focuses on the development of the debate in order to outline the transition from a mid-1930s milieu of bourgeois de-politicization to a late 1930s wartime framework of mobilization and Fascist totality; this scholarship often discusses the formulation of “humanism” in tandem with the *mundan*’s reception of German existential and life philosophies, and it is within this context that Kim Oseong is generally brought into the picture (Go 2008; Sin 1998; Son 2002).<sup>6</sup>

In contrast, this article pivots sideways in order to show how the emergence of “humanism” as a literary-critical keyword was bound up with an alternative discourse on the human: that which appeared in the pages of Cheondogyo New Faction publications.<sup>7</sup> In pursuing this line of connection, however, my goal is not to particularize or essentialize Kim’s vision of “humanism” by linking it to Korean “tradition.” On the contrary, just as Donghak and Cheondogyo were always already grounded in hybrid, syncretic discourses, so too did the field of Cheondogyo publications provide a space for crisscrossing concatenations. Just as the New Faction leader, Yi Donhwa, had done before him, Kim sought to harness contemporary philosophical developments to Cheondogyo theory

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6. Go Bongjun (2008), in particular, does a good job of emphasizing that Kim never abandoned reason for the irrational but rather called for the synthesis of these opposing elements. He also clearly notes the structural similarities between the line of reciprocal binaries that Kim establishes in his post-1936 writings.

7. This discourse is overlooked by the existing literature with only a few exceptions. In his detailed study of Baek Cheol, Kim Yunsik (2008) makes frequent reference to Baek’s Cheondogyo upbringing, and he suggests that it had some relationship to the development of the “humanism” discourse; he also makes a few references to Kim Oseong in a similar vein. Kim Jeonghyeon (2008) is the only scholar who has devoted extended attention to the relationship between Kim’s pre-1936 writings and his later texts, yet even this study makes the connection under the rubric of his reception of Nietzsche rather than the question of “humanism.”

in order to disseminate them to a non-specialist audience.<sup>8</sup> Many elements of Kim's thought were thus far from unique: in attempting a synthesis of historical materialism and philosophical (and/or existential) anthropology, Kim drew upon both Herbert Marcuse and Miki Kiyoshi 三木清, and his writing progressed alongside that of the Gyeongseong (Keijō) Imperial University philosophical group;<sup>9</sup> in taking up the call for a new form of "humanism" and a new "active spirit" (*neungdong jeongsin*), he followed Komatsu Kiyoshi 小松清, Baek Cheol, and Yi Heon-gu; in calling for mediation between "realist" and "romanticist" (or "objective" and "subjective") modes of literature, he sutured himself to an on-going debate about Socialist Realism in the KAPF and post-KAPF Marxist cultural movement.

What was unique, then, about Kim's vision was not its individual elements but rather the way in which it stitched these elements together. For Kim, the structure of "antagonistic unity" defined both truth and method, and this not only made his writing mobile but also kept it from gaining traction. When Kim wove philosophy across science, through religion, and into literature, he entered a discursive sphere in which the question of how, what, and why to write was not only a problem for criticism but also for novelistic production. In their post-KAPF novels about novelists, socialist writers attempted to re-invigorate their own literary practice through self-reflexive accounts of tensions between literature and *saenghwal*.<sup>10</sup> For these writers, it was the double-bound border

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8. For Yi's reformulation of Cheondogyo theology in the language of modern philosophy, see Heo (2011).

9. Most famously, this group included Sin Namcheol, Bak Chiu, and Bak Jonghong; their reception and appropriation of Heideggerian ideas filtered through Miki had a profound influence on that which is often called the "birth" of modern Korean philosophy (Kim Jaehyeon 2002; H. Kim 2009; Yi 2006). I am grateful to Hwang Jong-yon, Jeong Jonghyun, Shin Hyungki, and one of the anonymous *RKS* reviewers for emphasizing the importance of Kim's relationship to this philosophical context and to Miki's influence. For more on Miki's thought in its own context, see Harootunian (2000) and Townsend (2009).

10. *Saenghwal* means "life" or "living" in its practical and practiced dimensions; it thus refers to "the living of one's life." In the remainder of this paper, I use the term in its untranslated form in order to emphasize this practiced and practical sense as well as to distinguish it from other terms that would be translated in overlapping ways (*saeng*, *saengmyeong*, *insaeng*, *sam*, *sallim*). The analysis of *saenghwal* was extremely important to social and cultural thought of the colonial period. Especially in the 1920s, activists and intellectuals discussed the reform of *saenghwal* as a means of re-defining the relationship between the individual and the collective within history but outside of the state. As one of the anonymous *RKS* reviewers phrased it, at stake here was the "politicization of life" in the colonial context. I am grateful for this insight,

between the fictional and the real that made literature powerful. Yet for Kim, “antagonistic unity” could not be localized in such a way, and his contemporary turn inward toward literature’s antinomies thus also sent him fleeing beyond its bounds.

## Background: Kim Oseong and the Circuits of Biography

The events of Kim’s life in themselves offer a persuasive argument for the importance of looking beyond established disciplinary bounds; no single study, however, has connected them in a single narrative. Kim Oseong’s real name was Kim Hyeongjun 金亨俊, and he was born in Yongcheon 龍川, North Pyeongan Province, in 1906.<sup>11</sup> The details of his early life are unknown, but he grew up in a Cheondogyo household that was too poor to send him to middle school. Instead, he pursued his studies on his own as well as through Cheondogyo meetings and reading groups, and through these activities he became a close acquaintance of Baek Semyeong, a young Cheondogyo activist from the same region who was also the older brother of the critic Baek Cheol (Baek 1983, 199). As a result of the economic situation in Yongcheon, Kim also became active in social and political movements in his teens. Located on the banks of the Amnok River, Yongcheon was the site of a tenant farm owned by the Japanese company, Buri Heungeop Jusik Hoesa 不二興業株式會社 (Jp. Fuji Kōgyō Kabushiki Kaisha), and it witnessed a series of contentious labor disputes between 1925 and 1937 (Kim Yongdal 1990).

Kim played multiple different roles in these developments in Yongcheon. In early 1927, the tenants at the farm in question came together to form the

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and it should also be noted here that the discourse on *saenghwal* returned to center stage in the late colonial wartime period, when the imperial state sought to penetrate its subjects’ lives at the level of the bodily and the quotidian. For a related discussion of the late colonial period, see Park (2009).

11. In many of his early writings, Kim used his real name. However, beginning with his time in Tokyo, he also began using a variety of pen names. These included Kim Oseong (or simply Oseong), Kim Dongjun 金東俊, Kim Hyeonggeol 金亨傑, Hyo Jeong 曉汀, and Jeok Seongcheon 赤星天, among others. After entering the *mundan* in 1936, Kim switched to using the name Kim Oseong exclusively. Some sources list Kim’s year of birth as 1908, but I here follow the North Korean state’s official listing (G. Kim 2003, 802).

Yongcheon Tenants' Union (Yongcheon Sojak Johap), and later in the same year, activists attempted to expand the scope of these organizational efforts by creating a broader umbrella group called the Yongcheon Peasants' Federation (Yongcheon Nongmin Yeonhaphoe). Kim was one of the leaders of this latter effort, and when the Federation was formally established in October 1927, he became its Propaganda Leader (Jojik Seonjeonbu), its Director (*jeonim sangmu*), and one of three activists charged with touring the region delivering general educational (*gyoyang*) lectures. Subsequently, moreover, he held a leadership position in the Tenants' Union as well, and this latter position caused him to be detained by the police in late 1928. Finally, during this same period he also held positions as a general affairs manager and a journalist for the *Donga Ilbo's* local branch office in the region (Seong 2009, 89 n118).<sup>12</sup>

Following his involvement in the movement in Yongcheon, Kim left Korea for Tokyo. The son of a poor family, Kim worked in factories during the day and studied at night, graduating from the Nihon University Department of Philosophy in 1931. Kim focused his studies on Hegelian philosophy, yet he also spent his time reading both Marxist theory and works of existential philosophy (Baek 1983, 199). While living in Tokyo, moreover, Kim continued his Cheondogyo activities. As a leader of the Tokyo chapter of the Cheondogyo New Faction's Young Men's Party, Kim worked alongside Kim Jeongju, Baek Cheol, Gang Howon, Jo Gigan, and others in publishing the journals, *Donghak ji Gwang*<sup>13</sup> and *Daejung ji Gwang*.<sup>14</sup> Kim also continued giving public lectures during this period, and in November 1930 he was detained by the police for his part in writing and distributing a "seditious" pamphlet calling for the "organization of national strength" (*minjokjeok him ui gyeolseong*) toward

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12. For Kim's 1927 activities, see the October 20 and October 27, 1927, editions of the *Donga Ilbo*. For his 1928 activities, see the December 22, 1928, edition of the *Donga Ilbo*. For Kim's appointments at the *Donga Ilbo*, see the newspaper's announcements from the September 27, 1927, edition.

13. Extant issues of *Donghak ji Gwang* are reproduced in Kim and Seong (2012).

14. As Seong Juhyeon (2009) describes in detail, the origins of the Cheondogyo Young Men's Party can be traced back to the 1920 establishment of the Cheondogyo Young Men's Association (Cheondogyo Cheongnyeonhae). In 1923, the Young Men's Association established the Cheondogyo Young Men's Party (Cheongnyeondang) with the goal of unifying ideology and linking this ideology to social organizations. In the aftermath of the Cheondogyo "new-old" factional split in 1925, the New Faction's (*sinpa*) Young Men's Party became a "vanguard organization" pursuing the organization of all sectors of society.



“decisive action” (*gyeoljeongjeok silcheon*) (*Donga Ilbo* 1930; Cheongnyeondang Donggyeongbu [1930] 1993, 1240).

Kim returned to Korea in 1932 and began working as a writer and editor at two publications associated with the Cheondogyo New Faction and its Young Men’s Party: *Nongmin* and *Sin Ingan*. He also made frequent contributions to other Cheondogyo publications, including *Hyeseong*, *Jeilseon*, and *Gaebyeok*, and he wrote the “Philosophy” section of the Young Men’s Party’s “Self-study University” (*jasu daehak*) lecture compilation, which was published in eleven installments beginning in 1933 (Sin 1972). Kim continued writing for these publications until 1936, when he made his *mundan* debut in the *Chosun Ilbo*, followed by *Sahae Gongnon*, *Jogwang*, and the *Donga Ilbo*. In 1939, he transferred to the colonial government’s *Maeil Sinbo*, where he continued to write until 1943, the same year when he joined the imperial organization, The Korean Writers’ National Defense Association (Joseon Munin Bogukhoe). During the late colonial period, he also participated in debates about the “new generation” (*sin sedae ron*) and “historical philosophy” (*yeoksa cheollhak*) in the journal, *Inmun Pyeongnon*.

During these post-Cheondogyo *mundan* years, Kim struggled with illness and lived a largely secluded life in the area around Mount Geumgang, where he supported his writing activities by running a small souvenir shop with his second wife (Baek 1983, 200; Kim Oseong 1946, 693-94). During the early 1940s, however, Kim also seems to have used this rural location to organize a small secret organization, and in 1943 a friend introduced him to the socialist independence activist, Yi Yeoseong, who brought Kim into Yeo Unhyeong’s Alliance for Korean National Foundation (Joseon Geonguk Dongmaeng) (Kim Oseong 1946, 693-94). Moreover, Kim continued his relationship with Yeo after Liberation, when he became the Propaganda Secretary (*Seonjeonbu gukjang*) for Yeo’s Korean People’s Party (Joseon Inmindang) (Sim 1991). He was also a leader of the Korean National Democratic Front (Joseon Minjujuui Minjok Jeonseon) (*Donga Ilbo*, November 13, 1946), and later allied with Bak Heonyeong to form the South Korean Workers’ Party (Nam Joseon Nodongdang) (G. Kim 2003, 395). During the first few years after the end of colonial rule, moreover, Kim mixed these political activities with literary and journalistic ones. A member of the left-wing Korean Proletarian Literature Alliance (Joseon Peurolletaria Munhak Dongmaeng) and then a leader of the Korean Writers’ Alliance (Joseon Munhakga Dongmaeng), Kim contributed

articles on culture, literature, and politics to a wide range of publications. At the same time, he also served as the Editor-in-Chief of the Seoul-based *Joseon Inminbo*, an occupation that got him arrested for violation of the American Military Government's media censorship regulations; for his infractions, he was imprisoned for three months (J. Jeong 2010, 98-99).

Kim went north in 1947 and in 1948 was appointed as a member of the Supreme People's Assembly (Choego Inminhoe) from among the South Korean Workers' Party representatives (G. Kim 2003, 659). In the same year he was also appointed as the Deputy Secretary for Culture and Propaganda (*Munhwa Seonjeon busang*) under Heo Jeongsuk (Seo 2005, 227), and he continued to serve in this position through the period of the Korean War (Baek 1983, 200-1). Kim's subsequent activities are largely unknown. He was purged along with Bak Heonyeong and his allies in 1953, yet recent documents suggest that he was rehabilitated—along with selected other former members of the Southern Workers' Party—at some later point; they likewise suggest that he was not executed in 1953 like Bak but rather lived until 1978, and that he is now commemorated as a “Southern Korean revolutionary” in the North's Sinmiri National Patriots' Tomb (G. Kim 2003, 802).<sup>15</sup>

## Historicity Inside the Human: Dialectical Anthropology and the Theory of the Subject

Kim began his career as a theorist during his time in Tokyo. In these early writings, Kim split his efforts between two tasks: first, theorizing the Young Men's Party as an historical entity; and second, establishing the place of Suunist thought in the history of philosophy. With regard to the former, Kim outlined the origins of the Party in a specific concatenation of dual “objective” (*gaekgwanjeok*) and “subjective” (*jugwanjeok*) conditions wrought by the post-WWI state of capitalism and imperialism (Kim and Seong 2012, 439-43), and he defined its existence in matching terms: as both “an historical expression

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15. Kim's name is listed as one of those commemorated in the North's Sinmiri National Patriots' Tomb (Aeguk Yeolsareung), which was built in 1984 (G. Kim 2003, 820). Jeong Changhyeon (1997) notes the tomb's commemoration of a number of former Southern Workers' Party members linked to the 1953 purges.

(*pyohyeonmul*) produced within a social environment and a political expression (*pyohyeonche*) that reflects the thoughts and opinions of the people (*changmin geup*) as they exist within it”<sup>16</sup> (357); in strategy, as a dialectical entity responding first and foremost to social and material conditions, but doing so first and foremost by changing forms of consciousness (414-20). With respect to the historical place of Suunist thought, he argued that Suun’s vision of the human as a dual spiritual and physical being<sup>17</sup> amounted to a dialectical “synthesis” (*jonghap*) and “supersession” (*jijyang*) of Hegelian “idealism” (*yusimnon*) and Marxist “materialism” (*yumullon*) that not only paralleled—but also sought to go beyond—the ancient and modern syntheses performed by the philosophers of Athens and by Kant (Kim Oseong 1931).<sup>18</sup>

While in Tokyo, Kim kept these two strands separate, yet he soon found an opportunity to tie them together. Returning to Korea in 1932, Kim took up a post at the New Faction organ, *Sin Ingan* (New Human), where historical change was framed first and foremost in terms of the emergence a new subject: in terms of a “new human” understood to be “he who overcomes the old human and creates a new *saenghwal*” (Kim Oseong 1932a). Taking up this project as his own, Kim filtered it through the influences of Miki Kiyoshi, Martin Heidegger, Herbert Marcuse, and Max Scheler in order to embed his vision of the party’s historicity inside Suun’s ontology of the human.<sup>19</sup> The

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16. *Changmin* 蒼民 or *changsaeung* 蒼生 was a term used broadly in Cheondogyo discourse during this period. In his own writing, Kim defined it according to dual “quantitative” and “qualitative” characteristics: with respect to the former, it referred to “the majority” (*daedasu*) of society; with respect to the latter, it referred to those in “subaltern” (*jeoyeol han*) social positions (Kim Oseong 1932d). For Kim, then, the Marxist analytic of class was not to be replaced by either that of nation or that of human universality; instead, it was to be replaced by a socially-defined correlate called “the people” (*changsaeung*).

17. In 1912, Cheondogyo’s third leader, Son Byeonghui, encapsulated this approach in the slogan, “spirit and flesh come together” (*seongsin ssangjeon* 性身雙全) (Y. Jeong 1999, 232).

18. When the Cheondogyo New and Old Factions reunited in late 1930 and early 1931, Kim began publishing in the central, Seoul-based journal, the *Cheondogyohoe Wolbo* (*Cheondogyo Monthly Bulletin*). He continued to do so until the two factions re-split in 1932. For an earlier version of the above argument about Suun, see Kim’s April 1930 *Donghak ji Gwang* text, “Freedom and Necessity in Historical Dialectics: A Study of Problems Emerging in the Developmental Process of Human Nature” (Kim and Seong 2012, 426-28); other installments of this article appear to be lost.

19. Kim discussed the first three of these figures in the following issues of the *Cheondogyohoe Wolbo*: Miki (April, 1931); Heidegger (February and March, 1932); Marcuse (April, 1932). Kim’s April 1931 article did not mention Miki by name, but it was clearly referring to Miki’s

result was a durable, reflexive circuit in which history became a narrative of past forms and understandings of the human, and the nature of the human, in turn, emerged as a dialectical catalyst of historical change.<sup>20</sup>

Kim developed the initial outlines of his dialectical anthropology early in his time at *Sin Ingan*. In a three-part series of articles published between June and August 1932 under the titles, “The Historical Place of the New Human” (June and July) and “The Essential Structure of the Human” (August) (Kim Oseong 1932b; 1932c), Kim argued that in order to define the meaning and significance of the “new human” one first had to delineate the conditions of its historical emergence; one first had to define, in other words, the meaning and significance of the “old human” as well as how it had reached its contemporary point of crisis. For Kim, then, the first task was historical, and he pursued it by following the German philosopher Max Scheler in tracking the relationship between each historical period’s “form of life” (*saenghwal bangsik*) and two corresponding entities: its “concept” (*gaemyeom*) of the human and its “method of self-discovery” (*jagi reul balgyeon haneun bangsik*).<sup>21</sup>

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1927 essay, “The Marxist Form of Anthropology” (Ningengaku no Marukusuteki keitai). He discussed Scheler frequently in texts in *Sin Ingan*.

20. In this paper I only discuss the *Sin Ingan* articles in which Kim elaborated his theory of dialectical anthropology. In fact, Kim wrote more than 100 articles during his time at the journal, and they covered a broad range of topics including the rise of Fascism in Europe, the state of the Korean economy, the progress of Cheondogyo organizational activities, and the history of the Indian independence movement.

21. In addition to borrowing Scheler’s methodology, Kim argued for the necessity of his project by quoting the following passage from Scheler’s 1926 article, “Man and History”:

The views concerning *the essence and constitution of man* have, at no other time, been less sure, less determinate, and more varied than in our own... [T]his is the first time in which man finds himself completely and utterly “problematical,” in which he no longer knows what he is and simultaneously *knows that* he does not have the answer. We can attain valid insights again only if we are willing, for once, to clear away all traditional solutions and look at the being, called man, with an extreme and methodical objectivity, and wonder... In order to slowly shake off these categories, all we can do is investigate their precise cultural origins and overcome them by realizing their presence. In doing so, a *history of man’s consciousness of self*; a history of the ideal, basic forms in which man thought, saw, and felt himself, and through which he placed himself into patterns of being, should precede the study of ideas about man in myth, religion, theology, and philosophy. (Scheler 1958, 65-66)

The above article was translated into Japanese as “Ningen to rekishi” 人間と歴史 by Satō Keiji 佐藤慶二 and Kanba Toshio 樺俊雄 and published in the collection, *Tetsugakuteki ningengaku* 哲学の人間学 (Philosophical anthropology), in 1931.

In the main part of his article, Kim presented a historical narrative that he would subsequently repeat with considerable frequency. He began with the era of “primitive communal life” (*wonsi gongdong saenghwalje*), which he linked to ancient India and Greece, and he argued that in this age the human was understood as a “slave of nature” (*jayeon ui noye*). Human civilization was here bound by the strength of natural forces, and the attempt to overcome this powerless position led to the development of Christianity as a metaphysical system of comprehension. This development, moreover, brought with it a new age and a new vision: nature was controlled by God; the human, as a result of original sin, was fated to serve this God; and this fated position of service was likewise grounded in the formation of the feudal social system and its hierarchies. With the transition to the modern period, however, science conquered nature without the help of theology, the merchant class broke free of the feudal structure under the banner of freedom and equality, and the human was re-imagined as a “self” (*jaa*) possessing “individuality” (*gaeseong*) and self-reflexive powers of “reason” (*iseong*), “consciousness” (*uisik*), and “thought” (*sayu*). Finally, in the contemporary period, Kim said, the preceding emphasis on individual freedom had been inverted; humans were here enslaved to the social, and the corresponding form of human self-knowledge was the Marxist one, which saw the human as a material being determined by contemporary social relations of production.<sup>22</sup>

After tracing this history, Kim then switched into an ontological mode. The human, he said, was not merely an element of “objective” (*gaekgwanjeok*)

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22. Kim’s relationship to Marxist thought was both close and conflicted. While Kim accepted Marx’s analysis of the capitalist present, he rejected its broad historical narrative and its normative vision of the future. Most importantly, he rejected what he understood to be the Marxist vision of human nature, which he called “mechanist” (*gigyajuuijeok*) in its over-emphasis on the determining power of “objective conditions” (*gaekgwanjeok jogeon*). Interestingly, Kim seems to have appropriated important parts of this critique—which targeted Nikolai Bukharin’s interpretations of Marx, among others—from the work of Abram Deborin, the “father” of Soviet Hegelian Marxism. Fighting against “mechanist” understandings of Marxism, Deborin played a pivotal role in the canonization of dialectical materialism as Soviet orthodoxy (Rucker 1979; Weston 2008). Kim published translations of Deborin’s work in the *Chosun Ilbo* in April and May 1930, and he appears to have adopted his deep dedication to dialectics as a general methodology. Nevertheless, throughout the colonial period, Kim’s discourse—in contrast to Deborin’s—remained explicitly critical of orthodox Marxist theory, and this also set it apart from the work of Miki Kiyoshi and his followers, who attempted to translate Marxist theory into new domains.

nature; through her “subjective” (*jugwanjeok*) powers of consciousness she molded and re-molded the natural world and thus produced historical progress. Yet at the same time, the human was not super-historical. The human acted consciously to create history, but this history and its structures of material relations also enfolded and restricted her action. In addition to being “subjective” in nature, then, the human was also unavoidably “objective”—and this was because she was in fact the “unity” (*tongilche*) of these two conflicting dimensions of existence. The human, Kim thus argued, possessed a “dialectical character” (*byeonjeungbeopjeok seongil*), and this meant that she was properly understood as a “subject” (*juche*): an agent of history, progress, and change. Moreover, he continued, this also meant that she was properly understood in terms of the Cheondogyo vision of “the human is heaven” (*in nae cheon* 人乃天) and in terms of three overlapping sets of contradictions: the historical and the super-historical, the social and the individual, the finite and the infinite. Ceaselessly circuiting back and forth between these poles—and as such, between structures of “division” (*bunyeol*) and “unification” (*tongil*)—the human was always amidst a process of internally propelled development and change. The prosecution of this dialectical trajectory, therefore, was the historical role of the “new human” as a representative of “the people” (*changsaeng geup*).

What exactly did this mean? First and foremost, Kim saw the role of the Suunist “new human” in terms of education and consciousness-raising, that is, in terms of epistemic and epistemological practice. In a November 1932 editorial, Kim explained that Suunists were an “early-enlightened” (*seongakhan*), “progressive” (*jinbojeok*) vanguard of the people who had come to understand their own situation and their own place in history (Kim Oseong 1932d). Their primary historical task, as such, was to organize and “educationally train” (*gyoyang hullyeon*) the masses, and attaining a proper understanding of the human was thus only a starting point for a broader reconsideration of human knowledge. Kim’s dialectical anthropology, as a result, was accompanied by a corresponding vision of disciplinary relations in which knowledge of the world more broadly would have to be seen in similar terms.

Kim first addressed this question of disciplinary relations in an article published in three installments between July and September 1933 (Kim Oseong 1933a; 1933b). Kim here narrated the history of (Western) culture and thought in terms of three apples: the Apple of Discord from the Greek myth of the Judgment of Paris; Eve’s Biblical apple from the Garden of Eden; and Newton’s

falling apple, which supposedly catalyzed his theory of gravity. For Kim, the goal of tracing such a narrative was to define “the unique contemplative (*sasaekjeok*) stance characteristic of the people of each age”: in Ancient Greece, then, culture was based upon philosophical thought and the abstract, ideal contemplation of beauty; in the early and Medieval Christian periods, religion took center stage; and during the modern era, natural science became the foundation not only of all thought, but also of all forms of culture and *saenghwal*.

As always, Kim’s intention in tracing such an historical narrative was to frame an argument about the present context and its possibilities for future-oriented change. Kim here described science in positivist terms; having begun with Bacon’s empiricism, he said, it was an experimental discipline that studied “the facts of human experience” (*ingan ui gyeongheomjeok sasil*) while accepting them unquestioningly as “actually existing entities” (*hwaksilhan jonjae*). Science thus took the existence of entities as its starting point—it measured them, observed them, and manipulated them—but it had no place for studies of the essential nature of entities themselves. This, then, was the proper role of philosophy, whose task was to seek ontology. Philosophy was a mode of “essential thought” (*bonjiljeok sayu*), and it thus offered a necessary foundation and methodological starting point for positivist science. Moreover, while science sought specialized knowledge in specialized domains of study, only philosophy—as a “unified worldview”—offered an overarching organizing scheme.

Kim’s point here, then, was to argue that knowledge of the world—like knowledge of human nature—required a reciprocal relation between different modes of study. Interestingly, however, he had little to say about the need for vigorous religious thought. Indeed, despite his position as a writer and editor for a religious organization, Kim had little to say about the topic of “religion,” itself.<sup>23</sup> By 1934, however, this began to change, and Kim gradually turned his attention both to drawing out the link between dialectical anthropology and Cheondogyo doctrine and to the meaning of “religion” as a domain of thought and action.

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23. Kim did not hesitate to call Cheondogyo a (new) religion and to argue for its importance as such (Heo 2011). However, in this early period he was not primarily concerned with its “religiosity”; instead, he treated it as a worldview-endowed social organization.

## Toward Religion and *Saenghwal*: “Collaboration,” “Resistance,” and “Antagonistic Unity”

For the Cheondogyo organization in general—and the New Faction in particular—1934 was a year of significant change. In the early 1930s, the Cheondogyo New Faction enfolded two quite different groups and trajectories. Between the mid-1920s and early 1930s, Choe Rin, one of the group’s most powerful leaders, led a series of movements promoting Korean “self-rule” (*jachi*) (Jo 2006). “Self-rule” here meant self-government within the Japanese Empire—not independence—and in 1934 Choe’s vision morphed into outright support for the existing structure of colonial relations (H. Jeong 1999). Spearheading the 1934 formation of the explicitly pro-imperial organization, the Sijunghoe 時中會, Choe became a spokesman for the expansionist program of “Greater East Asianism” (*daedongbangjuui*) and its emphasis on a new spirit of “collaboration” (*hyeomnyeok*) (J. Jeong 2010).

At the same time, however, another group of New Faction leaders was involved in a secret independence movement organized under the aegis of the Osimdang 吾心黨. Founded in 1923, the Osimdang was not officially linked to the Cheondogyo New Faction, but many of its central members were New Faction leaders, including Kim Gijeon, Jo Gigan, Kim Dohyeon, and Baek Semyeong. In 1932, the leaders of the group decided to take action toward independence, as they believed that the Japanese Empire was reaching a point of crisis and collapse, but the group was discovered by the colonial authorities in 1934. At this time, 230 of its members were interrogated and 72 spent time in prison, where many were tortured (Seong 2009, 118). These two developments came together to produce a single phenomenon; under both voluntary and non-voluntary pressures, the New Faction re-invented itself as a purely “religious” organization and declared its distance from the realm of politics. This policy of religious revival was promulgated under the slogan, “the rebirth of faith” (*sinang gaengsaeng*), and it had a major impact not only on the discourse of *Sin Ingan* in general but also on that of Kim Oseong in particular.

Following the program of “religious revival,” Kim began to attempt a more precise formulation of the relationship between dialectical anthropology and the Cheondogyo slogan of “the human is heaven” (*in nae cheon* 人乃天). In a series of articles published between January and April 1934, Kim thus began making important revisions to his theory, writing:



In the realm of truth, Suunism means “the human is heaven,” and in the realm of *saenghwal* it means “the movement [to establish] the proper place of the human” (*ingan bonwi undong*). This is because until this time all thought (and culture) has been disconnected from the human and because until this time human *saenghwal* has been inhuman (*bi inganjeok*). Before [attempting] to understand and study Suunism, I will thus first try to answer the question, “What is the proper place of the human in the realm of *saenghwal*?” through a study of human self-interpretation. (Kim Oseong 1934a, 35)

In his earlier articles, Kim had emphasized the leading role of thought and ideology, and he had thus claimed that the creation of a new historical form of *saenghwal* required the creation of a new theory of the human. With respect to *saenghwal*, then, Kim had been content with tracing its historical forms and their relationship with contemporary visions of the human, but he had never seen it necessary to theorize the proper meaning of *saenghwal* in general.

Yet such a project is exactly what Kim began to turn to here. After presenting an historical narrative broadly resembling the one described in the previous section, he argued that the human existed in a reciprocal relationship with the dual spheres within which it was contained: the smaller sphere of society and the larger sphere of the “universe” or “cosmos” (*uju, hanul*). As such, the human could never exist as an “atomistic” individual, but was always already emplaced within both a “social body” (*sahoejeok sinche*) and a “cosmic body” (*hanuljeok sinche*). Beginning in May 1934, moreover, Kim expanded this vision with a five-part article focused on defining the meaning of Suunists’ “human stance” (*inganjeok taedo*)—that is, their way of living in the world (Kim Oseong 1934b). Unlike idealists or materialists, Kim here said, Suunists understood the world in terms of the reciprocal relation between humans and nature, humans and their environment. What did this mean? First, it meant that the human—by controlling and manipulating nature—lived in the world as a “subject” (*juche*). Second, however, it meant that the relationship worked in the opposite direction as well: that nature, for its part, always pushed back and restricted human subjectivity, and that the human also had to be seen as an “object” (*gaekche*).

In this way, Kim pivoted laterally. In his earlier articles, Kim had recurred to the claim that human nature could only be understood via the dialectical synthesis of “subjective” and “objective” perspectives and that this meant

seeing the human as a “subject” (*juche*). Here, however, he theorized human *saenghwal*—human life in the world—in terms of both “subject” (*juche*) and “object” (*gaekche*), and thus embedded his previous vision and its domain of epistemological perspectives within a broader structure. Moreover, in pursuing this vision, Kim here introduced the language of Cheondogyo theology in a more in-depth fashion than before. Separating these two dimensions into the inside and outside of the human, he quoted Suun’s formulation as follows: “On the inside there is body and spirit; on the outside, there is energetic change” (*naeyu sillyeong oeyu gihwa* 內有身靈 外有氣化) (Kim Oseong 1934b, September, 9). For Kim, then, although the human-as-subject (*juche*) controlled and manipulated nature, she did so within the broader context of the universe, and her subjective practice could also be seen in terms of the broader universe’s dynamic self-transformation.<sup>24</sup>

Although he did not use the language of “dialectics” in this 1934 set of articles, he did do so the following year. In December 1935, as part of a subsequent series of articles on the same topic, Kim framed this vision of the human as both subject and object in its relation to the world in terms of the necessary reciprocity between the part and the whole, the universal and the particular:

Even while possessing its own unique character, the human always has a close and unbreakable connection to the universal cosmos (*bopyeonjeok hanul*) and the natural phenomena within it, and its meaning is thus found in its participation in the movement of the cosmos (as well as the universe, the world, nature, and society). The meaning of “the human is heaven” can only be found in [the human’s] existence as a part in opposition to the whole as well as a part within the whole, its participation in the universal even while standing in opposition to it as the particular—in other words, in the dialectical unity (*byeonjeungbeopjeok tongil*) or antagonistic unity (*daeripjeok tongil*) of the whole and the part, the universal and the particular. (Kim Oseong 1935-36a/b/c, December, 18)

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24. Kim repeated this same argument in an October 1936 *Chosun Ilbo* article called “The Theory of Neo-humanism.” This article—which became one of Kim’s most controversial in the *mundan*—transposed the above language into the Heideggerian terminology of “being-in-the-world” (*segye nae jonjae*).

Kim here redoubled his dialectical anthropology by inserting the “small self” (*so-a*) of the human inside the “big self” (*dae-a*) of the world, and this emplacement of the human inside the dynamic space of the world also re-focused Kim’s disciplinary, practice-oriented vision around questions of experience and embodiment: around the importance of pre-epistemic modes of action and non-epistemological modes of consciousness and imagination.

Kim presented this new approach most clearly in “Faith and Intuition” (Kim Oseong 1935c), published between April and May 1935, in which he claimed that the faculty of “intuition” (*jikgwan*)—which he linked to the experience of “everyday life” (*ilsang saenghwal*)—necessary preceded (both ontologically and historically) that of abstract thought (*sayu*). Linking his vision to contemporary developments in European “anti-intellectual” (*ban jujijuumi*) philosophy,<sup>25</sup> Kim here suggested that if the human was always already enfolded in the flows and functions of the world, then she also necessarily developed certain ways of coping with it in an everyday sense.<sup>26</sup> Kim described this coping in terms of the human’s “*saenghwal* consciousness” (*saenghwal uisik*) and “*saenghwal* stance” (*saenghwal taedo*), and he argued that its precondition was not only a certain “belief” (*sinmyeom*) about the reality of the world but also a connection to ideals for the future: in other words, to the “world of faith” (*sinang segye*).

In his early anthropology, Kim had argued with confidence that the dissemination of proper knowledge of—and ways of knowing—the present would give rise to a new “subject” (*juche*) and thus a new age. In this later vision, however, his pairing of historical subjectivity with the counter-action of objectification tempered this teleological optimism to a significant degree. Emphasizing the relationship between faith and intuition, Kim here began arguing that human *saenghwal* was both always already emplaced in a world of embodied experience and oriented toward its outside (the future). This tension was the basis of the religious perspective, and in its philosophical transposition it produced a vision of the nature of *saenghwal* itself as continuous “struggle”

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25. By “anti-intellectual” philosophy, Kim said that he meant a certain strain of thought beginning with Dilthey’s hermeneutics, developing through Simmel, Husserl, and Bergson, and coming to fruition in the existential philosophy of Jaspers and Heidegger.

26. Kim explored these emphases on experience and embodiment in more detail in “Faith and Experience” (Kim Oseong 1935a).

(*tujaeng*) and “resistance” (*banhang*), a pair of terms that Kim began using in early 1935.<sup>27</sup>

In the February 1936 issue of *Sin Ingan*, then, Kim published an open letter (Kim Oseong 1936a) to Cheondogyo youths on the importance of moving from “passive agony” (*sudongjeok gonoe*) to “active movement” (*neungdongjeok hwaldong*):

Giving in to reality—this is to forget how the human attained its humanity, and for a religious person, to forget one’s proper domain. This is because the human was first able to express its human form only by overcoming (*chogeuk*) an adverse reality, and because the basic task of the religious person is to remake our present chaotic reality by waking up those among the people who cannot themselves see the proper task of the human as a human. (17)

At stake here was a new claim that the proper humanity of the human lay in struggle and overcoming. For Kim, human life consisted in doing “battle against a menacing reality” and *saenghwal* itself was thus properly understood as “a spoil of war won by doing battle against the external reality (such as nature) that threatens us” (17). The essential task of religion, therefore, was to call attention

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27. The politics of this move toward “resistance” are hard to define. Beginning in November 1935, *Sin Ingan* published “Fascism’s Basic Thought,” written by Benito Mussolini. In this text, Mussolini claimed that Fascism understood “life (*saengmyeong*) as battle (*ssaum*),” and the overlaps between this conception and Kim’s are significant. At the same time, other writers made similar claims from very different political positions. In his January 1935 article, “My Vision of Life,” Bak Chiu (2010, 79) differentiated his vision of a properly “human human” (*ingan daun ingan*) from that offered by existential philosophy by saying:

Unlike Heidegger’s interpretation of the human, which defines the essence of human existence (*Dasein*) as care (*Sorge*), I am confident that the essence of human existence has to be seen [in terms of] a much stronger, living (*saenghwaljeogin*) practice (*silcheon*). This is because I see the basic characteristic of the human in the fact that she is a being of ceaseless battle (*ssaum*), a being of practice.

Additionally, in the next year, in a speech that Kim would subsequently quote, André Malraux defined the difference between Fascism and its opponents as follows:

...[F]ascist civilisation in its last stage ends in a total militarisation of the nation. And fascist art, when it exists, will end in making war an aesthetic value. Now one soldier’s enemy is another soldier; another man, whereas with liberalism and communism man’s enemy is not man—it is the earth. (Malraux 1936, 495)

to and thus catalyze this faculty for “active” response.

By and large, the New Faction’s policy of “religious revival” meant disengagement in politics, and it thus emphasized a new spirit of “collaboration” (*hyeomnyeok*).<sup>28</sup> Kim, too, followed this line to a significant extent. Yet at the same time, he also moved in the opposite direction, turning to the trope of religious faith in order to re-frame anthropology in terms of *saenghwal* and *saenghwal* in terms of “struggle.” Kim nevertheless left the exact content of such religious practice unclear, and in a counter-intuitive way, his new emphasis on the meaning of religion soon drew him into a parallel domain: that of literary creation, in which the call for a “new human” re-emerged under the guise of the “new human type.”

### Cleavages, 1936: Literature, Philosophy, and the Two Sides of Humanist “Action”

For Kim, literature emerged as a concern within the domain of practice, and it functioned as one part of a two-dimensional vision of human “activeness” (*neungdongseong*) and “activism” (*neungdongjuui*). The language of “the active,” as described above, had been part of Kim’s discourse since the previous year’s turn toward “struggle.” Yet it took on a new importance in 1936 in its function as a coordinating interface between two quite different lines of thought. Although relatively new in Kim’s writing, the term *neungdongseong* was not itself new in Cheondogyo discourse; Yi Donhwa, for example, had defined human nature in terms of the “active subject” (*neungdongjeok jugwan*) in his 1931 text, *Sinin cheolhak* (Philosophy of the new human) (Yi 1968, 59).<sup>29</sup> Yet the more important—and explicitly named—source for Kim’s use of the term was in fact not religious at all but rather literary.

In his first introduction of the term in April 1935, Kim had begun by

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28. For examples of this discourse on “collaboration,” see the 1935 *Sin Ingan* New Year messages by Yi Donhwa and Choe Rin. Kim’s article on “Democracy’s New Prospects” (*Minjujuui ui sin jeonmang*), published in the same issue, likewise emphasized the need for “cooperative action” (*gongdong hyeopjak*), as did other subsequent articles.

29. Reprints of Yi’s text list the original publication date as 1924, but according to Heo Su (2011, 234), this is a misprint.

referencing current debates in the French and Japanese literary fields concerning the meaning of an “active spirit” (*neungdongjeok jeongsin*) and its relationship to phenomena of “crisis” (*wigi*) and “anxiety” (*buran*) (Kim Oseong 1935b).<sup>30</sup> Initially, Kim had given little attention to the literary context from which he had appropriated the term; as mentioned above, he had moved to connect it to his increasingly religious view of human *saenghwal*, and he had been quite critical of the literary field’s use of the term. Yet in the beginning of 1936, Kim turned to this context with new interest, and in particular, he gave special emphasis to the relationship between an “active” vision of the human and the global emergence of a discourse on “humanism” (*inganjuui*) (Kim Oseong 1936b).<sup>31</sup>

This emergence, Kim said, was a surprise; when Cheondogyo, decades ago, had first begun promoting the culture and thought of *in nae cheon* (“the human is heaven”), the response of Korean intellectuals had been contempt and dismissal. Yet it was also something to be expected since all things, as Suun said, “return to one body” (*donggwi ilche* 同歸一體). According to Kim, then, the content of this “humanism” was indeed nothing other than *in nae cheon*. He thus wrote:

Its basic intention lies in the search for a synthetic unity (*jonghap tongil*) that neither ignores individuality like objectivism (*gaekwanjuui*) nor like subjectivism (*jugwanjuui*) only values individuality and thus scorns objectivity and sociality, one that has the flexibility [to move] toward objective sociality through individuality and toward individuality via

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30. In Japan, the debate about “active spirit” began in response to the writings of Komatsu Kiyoshi 小松清. Komatsu was a literary and art critic who had lived in France between 1921 and 1931. During this time, he had befriended André Malraux, and he had returned to Japan in 1931 as a correspondent for the *Nouvelle Revue Française* (NRF). In 1934, he began writing articles about Malraux, André Gide, Ramon Fernandez, and other members of the French literary world. For more on this topic, see Wang (2004); for its relationship to Kim Oseong’s *mundan* writings, see Go (2008).

31. By “global emergence,” Kim said he meant two things in particular: first, thanks to the efforts of André Gide and Ramon Fernandez, its discussion in detail at the 1935 Paris International Writers’ Congress for the Defense of Culture and its spread throughout the cultural arena; and second, through the work of Martin Heidegger and Karl Jaspers, its popularization within the field of philosophy in Europe and Japan. Kim noted that the roots of this thought could be found in Feuerbach, Nietzsche, and Dilthey, but he said that its growth had really accelerated following the First World War. He also noted the influence of Miki Kiyoshi in spreading this “humanist” orientation in Japan.

objectivity and sociality. (Kim Oseong 1936b, 45)

Faced with the mutual breakdown of both "subjectivist" and "objectivist" perspectives on the human, this new "humanism" sought their unification in a "new human type" (*saeroun ingan taip*)—a task, Kim said, that Cheondogyo had already been pursuing for years.

Yet even while domesticating the content of this "humanism," Kim was also beginning to absorb its influence. By June 1936, Kim thus reiterated his call for a "human culture uniting object and subject" (*gaekche wa juche reul tongilhan inganjeogin munhwa*) while connecting it to new visions of practice: in particular, to the pursuit of a "new human type" through a new "literature and philosophy" (Kim Oseong 1936d). This was Kim's first mention of literature as a domain of practice, and it signaled an important shift. In early 1936, after more than five years publishing almost exclusively in Cheondogyo-affiliated journals, Kim began publishing in daily newspapers and their associated magazines as part of a specifically literary discursive field, and by August 1936 he had written his last articles for *Sin Ingan*.

Kim entered the *mundan* through the *Chosun Ilbo*, debuting in February 1936 with a six-part article called, "In Pursuit of an Active Human: The Intersection between Literature and Philosophy." In this text, Kim presented a vision of the contemporary context that would have struck *Sin Ingan* readers as quite familiar:

Too subjective and individualistic to control the real coercions of objectivity and sociality, subjectivism—the guiding ideology of bourgeois society—has lost its ruling power. [Likewise,] the objectivism that stands in opposition to it is experiencing a lack of subjective (*juchejeok*) productivity in relation to reality because it is too objective and inhuman (*mol inganjeok*)... (Kim Oseong 1936c, February 23)

The perspectives of "subjectivism" and "objectivism," Kim here repeated, had each lost their "productivity" (*saengsanseong*) and the cultural and intellectual world was mired in a state of chaos that neither the "literature of anxiety" nor the "philosophy of crisis" could resolve.

For Kim, the present crisis called for a means to spur passive individuals into action. The goal of literature, he thus said, was to activate "latent" (*jamjaejeok*) potentials within the human, and it was to accomplish this task

through the creation and dissemination of “new human types” balancing the dual perspectives of the “realist” (*riariseuteu*) and the “romanticist” (*romantiseuteu*). All humans, Kim said, possessed the capacity for “subjective” (*juchejeok*) overcoming of present restrictions, yet this capacity had to be put in motion through modeling: through an approach to the world that calibrated emphases on the real and the ideal. In order to make this connection between the possible and the actual, then, literature had to be grounded in a philosophical analysis of human *saenghwal*, and Kim thus recurred to his previous account. “What we must remember here,” he wrote, “is not only that the human is simultaneously both a subject and an object but also—and going one step further—that it is an antagonistic, dialectical unity of subject and object” (Kim Oseong 1936c, February 27). At this point, Kim called this vision “activism” (*neungdongjuui*), but by October 1936, it would finally become “humanism” (*hyumeonijeum*).

The core of Kim’s early *mundan* vision, then, was the elaboration of reciprocity between the “latent” potential for “activism” disclosed by philosophical analysis of human *saenghwal* and literary production’s creation of an “active human type,” and in subsequent articles he attempted to work out this relationship in more detail. In a *Chosun Ilbo* article published in July and August under the title, “Contemporary Literature’s New Position: On Its Connection with Philosophy” (Kim Oseong 1936f), Kim focused his attention on the necessarily interconnected yet “antinomic” (*antinomijeok*) relationship between these two forms of practice: literature, he said, was grounded in the realm of “pathos” (*patoseu*) and “emotion” (*gamjeong*), and it was produced through the activity of “passion” (*gyeokjeong*) directed toward the realization of a utopian “mythos” (*myutoseu*); philosophy, on the other hand, functioned through the realm of “intellect” (*jiseong*) and “logos” (*rogoseu*), and its action was oriented toward the systematization of existing modes of thought.

According to Kim’s account, these were two different realms with their own forms of logic, yet they were necessarily related. In fact, each required the other in order to develop its own abilities and to help “life practice” (*saenghwal haengdong*) develop toward the future: in order to bring the new into actual existence, literature needed philosophy’s action of unification and generalization; in order to break out of its rigidities and move in new directions, philosophy required the “negation” offered by literature and its imagination. For Kim, then, the goal of contemporary practice was to seek a kind of limit-space between



these two domains, to bind them together in “philosophical literature” and “literary philosophy” without ever being able to reconcile or suppress their antinomic tendencies. In this vision, Kim’s primary targets of critique were the proponents of “pure literature” and the practitioners of “ivory tower” philosophy. Yet in accordance with the logic of “antagonistic unity,” those who rose up to challenge him were writers and theorists from a very different domain: writers and theorists who sought—like him—dialectical forms of engagement.

### **The Second “Discovery” of Literature: Socialist Realism, Self-Reflexivity, and the Post-KAPF *Mundan***

The strenuous reaction that Kim’s writings elicited from the former KAPF group has been well documented in previous scholarship; beginning with Im Hwa and Han Seolya, and then incorporating Han Hyo, An Hamgwang, and others, these critics responded to Kim’s formulations by re-doubling their critiques of universalism and abstraction as well as by linking the discourse of “humanism” both to liberal bourgeois and Fascist forms of reaction (Im and Han 1990; Son 2002). What has not been discussed, however—and indeed, was not discussed at the time, either—is the fact that Kim’s 1936 conflict with the literary and critical left was not his first. As Heo Su (2011) and Kim Jeong-in (2009) have discussed, late 1932 saw the beginning of an intense debate between the Cheondogyo New Faction’s Young Men’s Party and the socialist left over proper leadership of Korean social and cultural movements. Sparked by a claim for leadership voiced by Jo Gigan, then head of the Party, a group of critics at the socialist publications, *Sin Gyedan*, *Bipan*, and *Joseon ji Gwang* took on the New Faction as targets for their critiques of religion; in November 1932, they thus organized the Critical Association for the Exposure of Cheondogyo’s Identity (Cheondogyo Jeongche Pongno Bipanhoe) and the debate continued at least through 1933.

Writing under more than one pseudonym, Kim was one of the principal partisans on the Cheondogyo side of the debate, and his interlocutors at *Sin Gyedan* and *Bipan* included Im Hwa and Han Seolya, among others.<sup>32</sup> At an early stage of the debate, moreover, Kim visited the Association along with Baek Semyeong (Heo 2011, 210; Kim Jeongin 2009, 288), and it is therefore quite

likely that when he began writing for the *Chosun Ilbo* in 1936, his critics were already quite sure of who he was and what they thought of him. Yet no one on either side appears to have mentioned this history, and this is significant for a number of reasons, including the following: namely, that the hybrid idealist-materialist form of thought that served as one of the Association's targets of critique had itself returned in an alternative form in the mid-1930s debates on Socialist Realism.

By invoking the need to unify realist and romanticist modes of literary imagination, Kim was in fact inserting himself into a very specific set of debates then underway in the *mundan*. The appearance of Socialist Realism in Soviet literary theory between 1932 and 1934 and its introduction into the Korean *mundan* produced a set of discussions on the “creative method” (*changjak bangbeop*) that lasted until the latter years of the 1930s.<sup>33</sup> At this moment, the writers associated with KAPF found themselves in a fraught and uncertain position: the state was intensifying its crackdown on the group's activities; the concomitant phenomenon of ideological “conversion” was accelerating; and the rise of both literary modernism and popular, journalistic forms of writing was creating a much more competitive and varied literary sphere. If the preceding trajectory of proletarian literature was now judged to be too “political” (*jeongchijuuijeok*) to be practicable and too “mechanist” (*gigyejuuijeok*) to be compelling, Socialist Realism's form of self-critique offered the possibility of re-invigorating the revolutionary movement by transplanting historical materialism's analytic of contradictions from the domain of social relations of production into that of literary creation.

As Cha Seunggi (1991), Jeong Huimo (1999), and others have shown, the starting point for this debate was the claim—by those supporting the elaboration of a new Socialist Realist vision—that the categories of “worldview” (*seggyegwan*) and “creative method” (*changjak bangbeop*) were not identical and that the dialectical materialist worldview of Marxist theory could not simply be imported into the sphere of literary practice but rather had to be complemented with a corresponding theory attuned to the “specificity” (*teuksuseong*) of

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32. For Im Hwa's critique of “Suunist culture,” see the March 1933 edition of *Sin Gyedan*. For Han Seolya's article, “Cheondogyo's Political Significance,” see the January 1933 edition of *Joseon ji Gwang*.

33. On the debate over “method” in the Soviet Union, see Günther (2011).

the literary as a domain of creation. At stake here was the assertion that literature had to be understood in terms of the "subjective practice" (*juchejeok silcheon*) of the writer and its reciprocal relationship with "objective reality" (*gaekgwanjeok hyeonsil*). This was a call, as such, to see literature as *internally dialectical*: simultaneously both a practice of critical realism oriented toward present conditions and a practice of creative romanticism seeking "reality in its revolutionary development," as Andrei Zhdanov famously described it. To be sure, not everyone in the socialist literary movement embraced this vision in its totality.<sup>34</sup> By 1936, however, the call for a synthesis of realism and romanticism became widespread (Im and Han 1990), and so too did a parallel form of literary practice.

For many writers, the path to Socialist Realism's internal dialectics began in the domain of history. The KAPF critic An Hamgwang,<sup>35</sup> for example, began his May 1936 article, "The Process of Development and [Future] Prospects of the Creative Method Debate," by narrating literary history in terms of thesis-antithesis oppositions framed between varying forms of realism and romanticism (An 1936). The present task, he then argued, was to attempt a new synthesis, which he called "contemporary realism" (*hyeondae rieollijeum*). For An, this method contained "revolutionary romanticism" (*hyeongmyeongjeok romaentisijeum*) as an internal attribute, and it operated via the "synthetic unity" of the "subjective" (*jugwan*) and the "objective" (*gaekgwang*). This meant that literary creation's relationship to "actual *saenghwal*" likewise had to operate dialectically; it had to engage deeply with present reality, yet it then had to go beyond it toward the future via the "activeness" (*neungdongseong*) of social consciousness and the writer's "pre-literary passion" (*munhak ijeon ui jeongnyeol*).

This formulation brought An's vision close to the one that the poet and critic Im Hwa had been articulating since 1934. Yet for Im, the call to bring realist and romanticist modes of literary practice together was not a call to create something entirely new, but rather to restore and re-invigorate a form of reciprocity progressively torn apart through history. Literature, Im argued in an early 1936 *Donga Ilbo* article, "The Indeterminacy (*bi gyujeongseong*) of

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34. For example, for critics like Kim Namcheon, the gap between Korea's colonial-capitalist present and the Soviet Union's socialist present obviated the utility of Socialist Realism's revisions.

35. An was one of the critics who initially opposed Socialist Realism (Im and Han 1990, 22-28).

Literature: A Critique of Theorylessness” (Im Hwa 1936b), found its grounding doubly in both the processes of linguistic representation and those of desire, conceptualization, and imagination. Even the highest form of romanticism thus had to pass through language’s system of likenesses and reflections, and even the most realistic form of representation likewise relied upon the abstractions and extensions of the writer’s consciousness. The task for the present, then, was to push back against the attempt to pull these two stands of practice apart. “Literature,” Im wrote in his famous January 1936 article, “The Mighty Romantic Spirit” (Im Hwa 1936a), was ultimately nothing other than “an expression of the burning, active desire to bring the contradiction and dissonance of reality and the ideal—dreams—into unified harmony” (January 1 [New Year’s Supplement 7]).

Despite disagreeing with Im on a number of issues, the novelist and critic Han Seolya presented a number of quite similar ideas. Writing in the *Chosun Ilbo* in January 1937, Han agreed that literature always already brought together emphases on both the real and the romantic, stating, “It goes without saying that... the problem of the real and the romantic has always traveled together with literature and that it is literature’s inseparable breath and pulse...” (Han Seolya 1937a, January 1 [New Year’s Supplement 7]). He also agreed that contemporary literature had to re-constitute this connection by tempering the “one-sided” focus on realism with a “literature that negates reality” (*byeonsil bujeong ui munhak*) and thus seeks historical “leadership” (*jidoseong*) (January 8). Yet Han differentiated his vision from Im’s by arguing that contemporary literature’s primary goal in re-constituting this reciprocal interaction was to establish its historical specificity, and he extended this logic to the realm of literary method by underlining the power and importance of writerly self-reflexivity: the constitution of a position of “subjectivity” (*jucheseong*) in relation to historical reality.

In a February 1937 article in the *Chosun Ilbo* Han thus complemented his critique of the contemporary trend toward the “psychological novel” with a vision of its potential (Han Seolya 1937b). After attaining an “essential and critical” grasp of “history, reality, and human *saenghwal*,” the writer could then remove herself from it, develop a world of “contemplation” (*gwanjo*) centered around the “self” (*jaa*), and finally re-embed the real into this world:

Only then can the psychological novel be simultaneously both subjective

(*jugwanjeok*) and passionate (*jeongnyeoljeok*) as well as coldly objective (*gaekgwanjeok*, *naengsijeok*)... Of course, "subjective honesty" (*jugwanjeok jinsilseong*) is only possible once "objective reality" (*gaekchejeok hyeonilseong*) is enfolded in this way within the writer's self (*jaa*), and literary truth (*jinsil*) can only come into being there where "objective reality" (*gaekchejeok hyeonilseong*) and "subjective honesty" (*juchejeok jinsilseong*) are united as such. (February 9)

The writerly self, in other words, was for Han an essential point of concatenation in the synthetic action of literature, and this was more than a metaphor. As Han argued in his July 1936 *Donga Ilbo* article, "On Popular Fiction" (Han Seolya 1936), the heights of literary artistry (*yesulseong*) could be attained not only through the clear and distinct translation of an overarching "idea" (*idee*) into concrete form but also through the writer's ability "to accurately (*yeosilhi*) express the contradictions of the age's social *saenghwal* through the large divisions (*burnyeol*) and large contradictions (*mosun*) within herself" (July 7).

Han's reference here was Lenin's famous discussion of Leon Tolstoy, and his article mainly focused on the artistry of nineteenth century classics. Yet he also pursued parallel visions in his own writings. Responding to a survey about diary-writing in the May 1937 issue of *Jogwang*, Han thus contributed a sample entry of his own:

... Inside me right now, there are two opposing entities fighting each other. On one side there is the easy-going (*iji-going han*) me tending toward philistinism (*songmulhwa*) and common sense (*sangsikhwa*), and on the other side is the consciousness-endowed (*uisikjeok*) me that resists them... Today the battle was fierce, yet what I hope is that it splits my checks apart. While history is something that moves forward unceasingly, the individual is not necessarily the same, and the fight to keep oneself from becoming a living corpse (*san songjang*) is generally a more tragic (*bijang han*) form of struggle than that between Fascism and the people (*inmin*). I am hoping to break out of the misery of immersion in ordinary idleness (*hangan ui anil*) and to continue to have such happy days of forward-moving friction (*jeonjin e ui machal*)... (*Jogwang* 1937, 222)

For Han, then, the path of the writer passed first and foremost through a method of subjective self-fashioning in the image of the real and its internal contradictions.

Han, moreover, had important allies in presenting this vision. Following Friedrich Engels, Yi Giyeong argued that the structure of dialectical contradiction should be seen as the basis not only for socio-historical change but also for the operation of nature and human *saenghwal* in general. In his June 1936 essay, “The Duet of Light and Dark,” Yi thus argued that “although upon first glance, the innumerable contrasts of good and evil, the beautiful and the ugly, male and female, day and night, warm and cold, high and low, long and short, white and black, far and near, and the like seem to be absolute opposites, in reality they are amount to nothing more than relative differences” (1936a, 99-100). These opposites, Yi continued, were in fact “unified aggregates” (*tongil jipseong*) and this meant that power and potential could be found even in the most powerless positions. Life and death, Yi said, were just as interpenetrating as the other pairs listed above—they were two halves, he said, of “the unified phenomenon of living evolution” (*saengmul jinbwa ui tongiljeok hyeonsang*)—and he then sutured this theoretical vision to a discussion of a poor destitute woman’s suicide. Just as death “propels the birth of new life,” her suicide too, he said, voiced a “mighty protest” (*widaehan hangui*) and spurred social conscience and empathy.

For Yi, moreover, this never-ending duet of opposites and their development was also an important part of literary practice. In a roughly contemporary article in *Jogwang*, Yi thus argued:

Writerly agony (*gomin*) is of course present in every age, but it has likely never been as extreme as it is in the current age of emergency (*bisang si*)... [Yet] in a sense, the more intense the writer’s agony the more she can enliven her art. This is because her intense agony can be translated into art... (Yi Giyeong 1936b, 253-54)

Like Han Seolya, Yi here argued that writerly practice was tethered to a certain relationship to the writerly self as an historical entity. Yet unlike Han—who emphasized the writer’s location of social contradictions inside her individual self—Yi here argued that the dialectical nature of reality in general allowed the writer to translate her individual conflicts with social structures into socially progressive and productive power.

Moreover, Yi attempted to put this vision into practice in his contemporary literary writings. In his 1937 story, “Money”, for example, Yi narrated the

hardships of a writer who is unable to support his family—unable to turn literature into *saenghwal*.<sup>36</sup> The story’s protagonist, Gyeonggu, is a novelist who stays true to his beliefs despite the *mundan* trend toward “conversion,” and the results of this stance are tragic; life is a constant struggle, and without proper nutrition and medical attention, his children are chronically sick. For the writer and his family, *saenghwal* is impossible—yet this impossibility itself also turns toward both productivity and social engagement. When his son finally dies of his ailments, Gyeonggu is overcome with grief and pain, and this surge of emotion allows him to sit and write the novel that he has been planning. Sitting beside his son’s dead body, Gyeonggu writes with passionate fervor, and the novel that he produces is itself called *The Poor* (Gananhan saramdeul). Through his inability to translate literary practice into personal *saenghwal*, Gyeonggu becomes able to represent the truths of popular *saenghwal* inside his texts, and literature’s lacks thus produce the honesty and generality of the real.

Yi, in fact, was not alone in presenting this kind of narrative. In his 1936 story, “Father,” Song Yeong likewise tells the story of an imprisoned novelist and his elderly father, who attempts to produce a livelihood by completing his son’s unfinished manuscripts (Song 1936). At stake here is the question of how—and whether—texts aiming at social utility can be converted into monetary value, and the story likewise points to an alternative tension within the meaning of literature. Planning to write a full-length novel about Korean fathers—like Song’s story, to be titled “Father(s)” —the son has begun by writing a series of reminiscences about his troubled relationship with his own father. The father discovers these notes, reads them with great emotion and sorrowful regret, and then feels closer to his son than ever before. In Song’s text, the literary finds unexpected power not only in the bequeath of fractured texts, but also—and more importantly—in the pre-novelistic tangling that it effects between the writer’s past life and future imagination.

In contrast, other contemporary writers moved in an alternative direction, looking beyond the literary. Han Inaek’s 1936 story, “The Dismissal Order” (Haejik saryeong), is a particularly instructive example. Published twice in the

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36. In the mid-1930s, the possibilities and proprieties of literary *saenghwal*—making a living as a writer—were recurrent topics of discussion. For example, see the January 1, 1935, symposium in the *Maeil Sinbo*.

space of a year—once in the February 1936 issue of *Sin Donga* (Han Intaek 1936)—and once in the February 1937 issue of *Sahae Gongnon* (Han Intaek 1937) this text presents a narrative in which literary production's inability to produce *saenghwal* drives the protagonist to seek work in a sector he would likely never have considered entering; he becomes a production manager at a silk manufacturing company. Implying that he harbors left-leaning sympathies, the text describes the distress that the protagonist feels when he tours the factories under supervision; he grimaces at the overseers' expressions of power.

The protagonist, in other words, finds himself acting beyond the bounds of his conscience and he thus takes creative action; consulting on a regular basis with the workers under his oversight, he channels their needs and desires into a proposal for factory reform and improvement that he then presents to the head office's management. His supervisors had instructed him to keep the workers under control, and this is what he does; yet he does it by unexpected means, and it is no surprise, therefore, that the text ends with his arrest by the police. Essential here, however, is the role of writing in this turn in the plot. For the protagonist, literature is unable to sustain family *saenghwal* and he thus enters the business sector. But when he inserts himself into the workers' field, he does so by transposing his literary abilities into the domain of labor. For Han, literature can neither be abandoned altogether nor insulated from the encroachment of the world. What literature can do is to test its own boundaries by both clinging to and contesting its distinction from *saenghwal*.

## Conclusion: From the “New Human Type” to the New “Humanist” Writer

By mid-1937, as the Japanese Empire pushed into full-scale war with China, Kim began following the lead of the writers mentioned above in transposing his dialectical structure into literature itself without recourse to philosophy. In his September 1937 *Chosun Ilbo* text, “Ethics and Logic in Literature” (Kim Oseong 1937a),<sup>37</sup> he thus argued that in order for literature to be creative in an historical sense, it had to coordinate two opposing trajectories: that of *logos*,

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37. The first two installments of this article are no longer extant.



which pulled it through language and logic toward external “objects” (*daesang*); and that of *pathos*, which separated it out from the world through “internal consciousness” (*naemyeon uisik*). For Kim, the human was an ethical being because she found herself with the choice of how to act in the real, material world beyond the bounds of “necessity.” Yet these bounds of necessity—which addressed the human as a logical object—could not simply be ignored. The writer, then, had to present both sides of the equation—the ethical subject’s “honesty” (*jinsilseong*) as well as the context’s “reality” (*hyeonsilseong*)—and this required the concatenation of “subjective realism” (*juchejeok riarijeum*) and “objective realism” (*gaekgwanjeok riarijeum*) to form “creative realism” (*changjojeok riarijeum*). This latter “realism,” Kim then concluded, was the meaning of “humanism.”

In this article, Kim re-emphasized that the vision of literature he had in mind was based upon a “spirit of resistance” (*banhang ui jeongsin*). Yet he was unable to say what exactly it was resisting, and this was in part because he had begun to see struggle—or rather, “antagonistic unity”—all around him. In the following month’s “The Artistic and the Ideological in Literature: For the Collaboration of Creation and Criticism” (Kim Oseong 1937b), Kim thus constructed a spiraling web of reflections: “sensibility” (*gamseong*) and “intellect” (*jiseong*), creation and criticism defined dual dimensions of the literary; literature, seeking “essence” (*bonjil*) in “appearance” (*gasang* 假象), operated in tandem with “ideology” (*sasang*); ideology, as the calibration of abstract theory and concrete practice, was the meaning of both “humanism” and “*saenghwal* itself.” Focusing in upon literature, Kim discovered that its practice—in its dual “humanist” and “ideological” potential—was nothing other than *saenghwal*, and among other things, this meant that the call for a “new human type” could once again be re-framed, this time as a call for a new “humanist” writer.

Kim accomplished this transformation in “Sensibility and Intellect: The Writer’s Pre-creative Stance,” published in *Jogwang* in January 1938 (Kim Oseong 1938). Addressing himself to the ongoing “creative method” debate, Kim here claimed that what was necessary was a new emphasis on the prerequisites of literary creation. Great literature, Kim wrote, could only be produced through the concatenation of “intellect” (*jiseong*) and “sensibility” (*gamseong*); only through the “amalgamation” (*yunghap*) and “exchange” (*gyoryu*) of these two dimensions of human understanding and action could literature straddle the binaries of thought and intuition, observation and

experience, sensation and foresight, universality and particularity, the present-real and the progressive-ideal. Yet the constitution of such a perspective—which Kim here called “prescient” (*yejjeok*) or “knowing” (*jjeok*) “sensibility”—had to be accomplished before the literary act. For Kim, at stake here was a question of the writer’s “education” (*gyoyang*)—and his goal, in fact, was not simply to call on writers to become “humanists” but also to emphasize that doing so entailed a practice of *self-fashioning*.

What was necessary, in other words, was a certain form of writerly *saenghwal*, and the question of the literary itself thus faded from Kim’s view, as did the term “humanism.” By figuring the pre-creative, self-reflexive writer, Kim was able to supersede the question of literary practice, and he subsequently oriented himself back toward philosophy as well as toward the new wartime-era question of synthetic social relations: the relationship between philosophers and the masses, new and old generations, the urban and the rural, “Eastern culture” and “Western science.”<sup>38</sup> For Kim, the contradictions of present human *saenghwal* here became deviations produced by the onset of the modern rather than the nature of the human itself, and his vision thus took up the constitution of human totality as a project for future Fascist construction.

In Kim’s case, then, “humanism” functioned—above all—as a strategic technique of mediation aimed at connecting the problem of subjectivity to that of disciplinary practice.<sup>39</sup> This is significant for a number of reasons. Paired with his turn inward toward literature as a discipline, Kim’s appropriation of writerly self-fashioning led him both beyond the literary and back toward the social, and this suggests that narratives of the mid- to late 1930s colonial literary and intellectual spheres require a corresponding emphasis on circuits linking differentiation and integration within the dual dimensions of subjectivity and practice. Conventional accounts of the period’s intellectual scene describe two orthogonal lines of development: one emphasizing disciplinary specialization and political polarization; and a second emphasizing integration via proliferating media forms and an increasingly penetrating state apparatus. Likewise, narratives of the era’s literary production generally divide the novelistic field between the

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38. For a discussion of related wartime questions in the work of Seo Insik, see Workman (2013).

39. Kim Cheol (1995) has also discussed how the Baek Cheol’s writings on “humanism” were linked to the emergence of “subjectivity” as a problem.

internalization of the “I-novel” (*sa soseol*) and the externalization of the “social novel” (*setae soseol*) as two modes of constructing subjectivity. What Kim’s case demonstrates, however, is that all four of these lines must be seen together in their links.

Likewise, Kim’s narrative suggests the need to embed accounts of the “late colonial” within a broader view. Kim’s writings from the post-1936 period were inseparable from their early 1930s origins; although his vision of practice shifted significantly, Kim’s “humanism” remained tied to its Cheondogyo roots. Likewise, these post-1936 writings—especially their late turn toward the social—provided essential bases for Kim’s post-Liberation activities. As recent scholarship has highlighted, the mid-1930s emergence of subject formation as a problem for both thought and writing not only served as a precondition for the late colonial project of “imperialization” (*hwangminhwa*) but also grounded post-Liberation attempts to re-imagine sovereignty in its multiple, contentious forms (Hughes 2012). For Kim, too, the project of “Liberation” likewise demanded a new collective subject, and he thus pursued it—for at least one short moment in 1946—by calling for a “new human type,” a “new national type” (*saeroun minjokjeok taip*), and a new “dialectical relationship” between politics and literature (Hangukhak Jaryowon 2005, 178-79). For Kim, as for a number of his contemporaries on both sides of the political divide and both sides of the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel, the “humanist” project of mediation did not disappear after 1945 but rather accrued a new set of meanings and a new set of tropes that had a lasting impact on the development of critical and theoretical discourse in Korea.

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## Abstract

This paper offers an alternative perspective on the well-known “humanism” debates of the mid-1930s by focusing on the early writings of Kim Oseong 金午星 and their changing vision of disciplinary relations. First, I show how the basic content of Kim’s “humanism” (*hyumeonijeum*)—that is, his vision of both human life and human nature as internally dialectical—emerged in a series of early 1930s articles published in the Cheondogyo New Faction journal, *Sin Ingan* (*New Human*). Second, I trace how Kim’s ideas shifted in tandem with broader developments in the New Faction, emphasizing his changing vision of the relationship between philosophy, science, and religion. Third, I demonstrate how Kim pivoted in the year 1936 by “converting” to literature, entering the literary field, dispatching with Cheondogyo terminology, and taking up the term “humanism.” Fourth, using fictional and critical texts by An Hamgwang, Im Hwa, Han Seolya, Yi Giyeong, Song Yeong, and Han Intaek, I suggest that Kim’s relationship to literature should be understood within the context of both contemporary debates about Socialist Realism and the emergence of self-reflexive tropes in novels about novelists written by former members of the Korean Artists Proletarian Federation (KAPF) and their associates.

**Keywords:** Kim Oseong, Cheondogyo New Faction, *Sin Ingan*, humanism, KAPF