『한국민족문화』 62, 2017. 2, 119~149 http://dx.doi.org/10.15299/jk.2017.02.62.119

Heaven's Way in Korea's New Religions
- A New Interpretation of Salvation

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<Abstract>

Korea's Neo-Confucian feudal society began to disintegrate from the nineteenth century under the dual challenges of moribund decline and modernising pressures. This sparked two longer-term religious responses. One was a replacement response that turned to Christianity and the other sought compromise through synthesis, this being discharged by a host of new religious entrepreneurs. It is the latter that this paper investigates, particularly innovations related to a key religious concern, that of salvation, that in East Asian philosophy was generally referred to as "Heaven's Way." What was novel about the "Heaven's Way" of Korea's new religions? What were some of its themes of reconstruction? This paper argues that Korea's "first" new religion, Donghak/ Chondogyo, broadly designed a unique core reinterpretation of "Heaven's Way," with groups that came afterwards crafting further modifications or syntheses.

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* Key Words: New Religions, Religious History of Korea, Won Buddhism, Chondogyo, Family Federation for World Peace and Unification

It has been widely noted in the sociology of religion that when cultures become stressed from obsolescence and/or disturbing external influences, revival is sought through religious, spiritual or philosophical reorientation. The culture will either reaffirm or revise its traditional worldview to restore equilibrium. Over the last few hundred years the worldviews of all cultures have in fact been deeply challenged by the impact of modernisation and contact with other religious ideas, consequently we have witnessed a panoply of religious revitalisation strategies. These strategies generally fall into one of the following categories: reaffirmation, revision or transformation. In reaffirmation the validity of the traditional worldview is confirmed and problems are blamed on imperfect adherence to it. The society is called to repentance and recommitment. This strategy can become harshly reactionary. The revisionary strategy applies syncretistic merging and compromise. In the transformation strategy, the culture abandons the bulk of its religious traditions in favour of another, as in the wide turn to Christianity that is being seen in many non-Western countries or the turn to Western non-religious or secular attitudes.

Korea's religious history of the last two centuries exhibits engagement with all three of these strategies. When the Catholic religion and Western science and technology began to impact upon the country from the latter eighteenth century, this so-called "Western Learning" was banned and thousands died in almost a century of attempts to stamp it out.[1] Such

1) Kirsten Bell, "Pilgrims and Progress: The Production of Religious Experience in a Korean Religion," *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 12,

reactionary resistance was overtaken by a mood of revisionary compromise in which the traditional and novel were synthesised in new religions.[2] Kil-Myung Ro sees the rise of new religions in Korea as a critique of the failures of traditional views to create a fair and just society.[3] New religions are also considered by many to play a valuable role in easing culture clash. Their compromises act as "relief valves" that soften tensions between the traditional and new.[4] And, as one scholar put it in regard to the wave of Japanese new religions, the new religions of today enable people to experience the sacred in a "technocratic" environment.[5] Korea's new religions, particularly the earliest ones, certainly played a part in steering the country towards social and political modernisation. Korea's third response was more radically transformative. The formerly shunned Christianity went on to achieve a rather spectacular rate of growth. This growth stalled in the north following the imposition of Communism but in South Korea adherence today has grown to nearly 30% of the population (as of its 2010 Census).[6] This is the largest acceptance rate of any nation in continental East Asia to date.

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1 (August 2008): 85-6; Inshil Choe Yoon, "Martyrdom and Social Action: The Korean Practice of Catholicism," in *Religions of Korea in Practice,* edited by Robert E. Buswell, Jr. (Princeton NJ: Princeton University, 2007), 355-6, 361; R. Pierce Beaver, "Chondogyo and Religion in Korea," *Journal of Bible and Religion* 30, 2 (1962): 116; Don Baker, *Korean Spirituality* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008), 64-8.

2) Don Baker, "The Great Transformation: Religious Practice in Chondogyo," in *Religions of Korea in Practice,* edited by Robert E. Buswell, Jr. (Princeton NJ: Princeton University, 2007), 449.

3) Kil-Myung Ro, "New Religions and Social Change in Modern Korea History," *The Review of Korean Studies* 5, 1 (2002): 32.

4) Bell, "Pilgrims and Progress: The Production of Religious Experience in a Korean Religion," 88.

5) Ted J. Solomon, "The Response of Three New Religions to the Crisis in the Japanese Value System," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 16, 1 (1977): 3.

6) CIA World Factbook, "Religions – South Korea," https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2122.html, accessed on 09/01/2016.

A great deal of research has been expended on Korea's encounter with Christianity, while this paper explores the lesser considered subject of the compromise approach of its new religions. More specifically, this paper looks at the manner in which Korea's new religions "modernised" Korea's traditional "Heaven's Way." They achieved an innovative form of salvation in which East and West were merged. Though their brand of salvation has more recently been overtaken by that of Christianity, this may not be the last word on the subject. For Korea's new religions exhibit many "New Age" elements. New Age "holistic" philosophies such as that of Deepak Chopra and the green movement have been gaining credence in the Western world over the last fifty years or so to the extent that they are beginning to either rival or supplement Christian thought. The same could occur in Korea, with Koreans choosing more indigenous versions, particularly as these include a moralistic and collective tone that the new Western New Age spiritualities often lack.

1. Korea's New Religions

In 1860 the spread of "Western Learning" in Korea was met by a counter movement led by a man named Choe Je-U (1824-1864). In a direct challenge to Christian inroads Choe called his new philosophy "Eastern Learning," or Donghak. Donghak merges aspects of Korea's four main religious influences, Confucianism, Buddhism, Daoism and native spiritism, into a single new belief system. Despite his expressed antipathy to Western Learning, Choe also absorbed certain Christian theological assumptions.[7] In 1864 during Korea's last wave of

7) Baker, "The Great Transformation," 449.

anti-Catholic persecution he was in fact rounded up as a closet Christian and executed.[8] Choe's blaze of religious glory was very brief but it was enough to launch a religious revolution on the Korean peninsula that still reverberates. Hundreds of new religions arose in Korea in the wake of Donghak. Ro quotes one study claiming over 500 since 1945 alone.[9] Another source says there have been 400-500 indigenous new religions in all, of which 250 to 300 are presently active.[10] Koreans have also taken up a variety of introduced new religions, particularly from Japan and the United States. Johnson and Grim's worldwide Religious data collections assert that the number of new religion adherents in South Korea is 7 million, ranking it third highest in the world after Japan and Vietnam.[11] This number being 15% of the Korean population would be extremely significant were it not so contrary to the Korean 2010 Census figure of just 1%, that is, just 483,000, of Koreans acknowledging a religious identity outside of Catholic, Protestant, Buddhist, Confucian or None.[12] Johnson and Grim have perhaps uncritically accepted membership figures provided by the new religious groups themselves, which are usually claimed to be in the hundreds of thousands each, whereas closer examination shows such claims to be grossly inflated.

Given that the Census figure must also include Korea's Muslims, which according to one reliable study are a good quarter of this figure alone,[13] and all the other religious groups both new and old that are

8) Beaver, "Chondogyo and Religion in Korea," 116.
9) Ro, "New Religions and Social Change in Modern Korea History," 32.
10) "New Religions," in *Encyclopaedia of Korea,* ed. Yang Hi Choe-Wall (Canberra: Australian National University, 1999), 1009.
11) Todd M. Johnson and Brian J. Grim with Gina A. Bellofatto, *The World's Religions in Figures: An Introduction to International Religious Demography* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 46.
12) CIA World Factbook, "Religions – South Korea."
13) Official statistics of 2012 had over 113,000 migrant worker Muslims living in Korea:

known to exist in Korea, the Census result cannot be considered reliable either. At the same time, using an average estimate of 200 persons per congregation,[14] the figures for Korea's few listed "census" new religions[15] do correlate satisfactorily with their acknowledged number of congregations. For example, the 2005 Census figure for Chondogyo at just under 50,000 plausibly relates to the number of persons its 280 worship halls[16] can accommodate. Nevertheless, problems with the Census result clearly exist. The discrepancy can be partially explained by the probability that some groups with strong leanings toward one of the nominal groups get lumped into that category. It can also be surmised that because new religions do not enjoy the best reputation in Korea many adherents prefer to list themselves as generic Buddhists, Confucians or Christians, or even "None's." The correct figure is more likely to be somewhere between Johnson and Grim's estimate and the Census figure.

Donghak, which in 1905 was renamed Chondogyo or Religion of the Heavenly Way, began as an indigenous response to both the inroads of Catholicism and the perceived shortcomings of traditional modes of religious thought. Donghak must also be placed in the wider context of what some scholars have labelled the "redemptive society" movement.

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see, Jeeyun Kwon, "The Rise of Korean Islam: Migration and Dawa," Middle East Institute, 19 May 2014, http://www.mei.edu/content/map/rise-korean-islam-migration-and-da%E2%80%98wa, accessed on 26/01/2016.

14) This figure is derived from the evidence of fieldwork conducted mostly in 2013 on the Gold Coast (Queensland, Australia), in which the worship services and meetings of nearly fifty different religious groups were attended, in combination with pictorial evidence of new religions congregations in Korea.

15) In addition to Catholic, Protestant, Confucian and Buddhist, the Korean Census lists Chondogyo, Taejonggyo, Jeungsando and Won Buddhism. See Jibum Kim, Jongmo Lee, Jaesok Son, Tom W. Smith, "Trends of Religious Identification in Korea: Changes and Continuities," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 48, 4 (Dec., 2009): 790.

16) Baker, *Korean Spirituality*, 82.

Centred in China and building on precursors, the term refers to a broad template of new religious variants that developed across East and Southeast Asia from the mid-nineteenth century. These groups were extremely varied in their individual expression but had several themes in common: heterodox doctrinal syntheses, millenarianism, laicism, a charismatic leader whose legitimacy rested upon claims of directly-received divine revelation, the utilization of somewhat similar, semi-magical redemptive prescriptions and a concern to uplift the welfare of the common person.[17] Donghak exhibited all of these features. It moreover became, as Thomas Flaherty put it, the "prototype of subsequent Korean syncretistic new religions."[18] The Korean version added three other threads to the broader redemptive society formula. One was Korean messianism, the second was unusual concern for gender parity and the third was a new soteriology that uniquely reinterpreted Heaven's Way. Together Donghak and its "successors" forged a recognizably Korean indigenous redemptive adaptation.

Referencing Korea's hundreds of indigenous religions for the purposes of this discussion might seem an unmanageable task but they have tended to unfold within certain lineages or modes, of which there are just several. These are: the Donghak descendents, these being Chondogyo plus some 25 other offshoots; some sixty Jeungsan groups; the Kim Hang and other Confucian-leaning groups; 45 or so Taejonggyo, or Tangun-revering, groups; some 70 or more Buddhist-leaning groups; Daoist-derived groups like Kaksedo; about 16 "water cure" groups; at least 100 Christian

17) David Ownby, *Falun Gong and the Future of China* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University, 2008), 24-28.

18) Thomas Pearson Flaherty, "JeungSanDo and the Opening of the Later Heaven: Millenarianism, Syncretism, and the Religion of Gang Il-sun," *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 7, 3 (Mar., 2004): 30.

syncretisms; numerous shaman-led spiritist groups; and others that fall outside these categories.[19] Thus, there are a much smaller number of key persons and adaptations involved. These groups, particularly those that were to prove the most influential, generally displayed the following characteristics.

2. New Syncretistic Revelation

In typical redemptive society style, Choe claimed to have received his new spiritual philosophy directly from heaven, in his case by means of a heavenly voice. Hearing a heavenly voice was a common claim of Asian redemptive societies. Automatic writing was another frequent method.[20] Choe's heavenly voice was that of Sang-Je, Daoism's Heavenly Supreme Ruler of the Universe.[21] Some of the new religious founders, such as the founders of the original Jeungsan group and Won Buddhism, claimed their revelations to have stemmed from self-obtained "enlightenment." Others, however, emulated Choe in believing themselves to have been in direct contact with some heavenly being. The founder of one of the more influential Jeungsan schisms, Cho Cheolche (1895-1958), claimed to have also heard the voice of Sang-Je in heaven, in his case instructing him to adapt the teachings of the Jeungsan founder, Gang Ilsun (1871-1909), who, believing himself to have been the self-enlightened, "incarnated" Sang-Je, re-ascended to heaven in 1909.[22] In 1935 the founder of the

19) "New Religions," *Encyclopaedia of Korea,* 1009.
20) Ownby, *Falun Gong and the Future of China*, 33-34.
21) Don Baker, "The Great Transformation," 455-457.
22) Don Baker, "Renewing Heaven and Earth: Spiritual Discipline in Chungsangyo," in *Religions of Korea in Practice,* edited by Robert E. Buswell, Jr. (Princeton NJ: Princeton University, 2007), 488.

Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU) (better known in its earlier days as the Unification Church), Sun Myung Moon (1920-2012), had a vision of Jesus in which he was told to complete Jesus' unfinished mission on earth.[23] Mountains being sacred in Korea, it is not surprising to find that the revelatory recipients were often on a mountain when they had their prescriptive spiritual experiences.[24]

Though each of Korea's indigenous new religious types demonstrated a particular leaning, the founding figures usually claimed they had found a way to synthesise or unite the disparate religious teachings of Korea's past heritage into a more powerful spiritual philosophy. Bokin Kim observed that harmonising the "three teachings" dominated new religious thinking in early modern Korea.[25] Choe was additionally concerned to find a religious system so superior to Christianity that it would hold off the moral decay that he saw as inevitably resulting from Christian individualism.[26] Yet he was clearly influenced by Christian monotheism, even using the Korean Catholic term for God, Cheonju, interchangeably with the Daoist term Sangje.[27] Though Won Buddhism, founded in 1916 by Park Chungbin (1891-1943), prefers to see itself as a new form of Buddhism, its founder also saw himself as having established a "harmonious religious synthesis."[28] Park claimed Korea's religious

23) Sun Myung Moon, *As a Peace-Loving Global Citizen* (Washington DC: Washington Times Foundation, 2010), 50.

24) For example, Choe Che-u was on Mt. Gumi. Gang Ilsun was on Mt. Moak. Sun Myung Moon was on Mt. Myodu.

25) Bokin Kim, "The Irwon Symbol and its Ecumenical Significance," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 14 (1994): 73.

26) Baker, "The Great Transformation," 455-456.

27) Ibid., 450.

28) Kwangsoo Park, "The Practical Ethics of Won-Buddhism and Liberal Religious Culture as a Path to World Peace," http://www.rk-world.org/dharmaworld/dw_2015octdec_the-practical-ethics-of-won-buddhism.aspx, accessed on 21/05/2016.

teachings of the past had served well for their time but they could now offer more in combination than singly. Bongkil Chung more specifically sees Won Buddhism as a synthesis of Confucianism and Buddhism,[29] but Jin Y. Park has also detailed some Christian influences.[30] The Jeungsan strain of groups demonstrates elements of Buddhism, Confucianism and Daoism mixed with a modicum of Christianity and Korean shamanism.[31] Even the most "Korean" of Korea's new religions, Taejonggyo, founded in 1909 by Na Cheol (1863-1916), exhibits synthesis, including Christian borrowings in its use of the Korean Protestant name for God, Hananim, and its assertion that Hananim is Triune (though in a different sense from the Christian Trinity).

3. Millenarianism and Messianism

Choe saw Korea's troubles as a sign of cosmic change that he called the Great Transformation, the advent of a utopia that would start in Korea and spread from there.[32] The Jeungsan founder said the Great Opening of the Later Heaven, a utopian world of human spiritual maturity, had been inaugurated with his coming and would continue to unfold as more people practiced his precepts.[33] Park Chungbin also saw himself as the instigator of a Great Opening of a new heaven and earth that, similar to Choe,

29) Bongkil Chung, "Won Buddhism: A Synthesis of the Moral Systems of Confucianism and Buddhism," *Korea Journal* 15 (1988): 428.
30) Jin Y. Park, "Won Buddhism, Christianity and Interreligious Dialogue," *Journal of Korean Religions* 5, 1 (2014).
31) Flaherty, "JeungSanDo and the Opening of the Later Heaven: Millenarianism, Syncretism, and the Religion of Gang Il-sun," 27.
32) Baker, "The Great Transformation," 455-7.
33) Flaherty, "JeungSanDo and the Opening of the Later Heaven: Millenarianism, Syncretism, and the Religion of Gang Il-sun," 27-8, 32.

would save the world from enslavement to a blooming materialism.[34] Taejonggyo taught that a reestablishment of the ancient religion of Korea's legendary founder Tangun would restore harmony with Heaven, as a result of which the country and its people would recapture the progressiveness and prosperity of its ancient days.[35]

Such millenarianism typified the redemptive society approach but the Korean version attached a long-standing messianic tradition that was periodically aroused during times of unusual stress.[36] Though Choe made no messianic claims for himself,[37] it was inevitable that as Korea's troubles compounded a wave of home-grown saviours would rise up to add this motif to the paradigm. For, the bulk of the key religious founders that emerged afterwards did make messianic claims for themselves, though derived from different traditions, such as the coming to earth of the Daoist Heavenly Lord Sangje in the Jeungsan group of religions, or the fulfilment of the coming of the Buddhist Lord Maitreya of Won Buddhism or the return of Christ as in the FFWPU and the World Mission Society Church of God.

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34) Chung, "Won Buddhism: A Synthesis of the Moral Systems of Confucianism and Buddhism," 427-8.

35) Don Baker, "The Korean God is not the Christian God: Taejonggyo's Challenge to Foreign Religions," in *Religions of Korea in Practice,* edited by Robert E. Buswell, Jr. (Princeton NJ: Princeton University, 2007), 464.

36) Ro, "New Religions and Social Change in Modern Korea History," 50-1.

37) Though Paul Beirne suggests that Choe very possibly did see himself as the fulfilment of the True Man, the *Jin-in,* who a 16th century Korean book of prophecy, the *Jeonggam-nok*, predicted would appear at some future time to ring a new utopian age. See Paul Beirne, *Su-un and his World of Symbols: The Founder of Korea's First Indigenous Religion* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2009), 38, 63, and 82.

4. Healing and Longevity through Shamanist Magic

Though redemptive society salvation was moralistic and welfare-minded, the larger emphasis was placed upon individual material improvement. Claims included physical healing and long life through the application of magical strategies.[38] The Korean groups followed suit, with their prescriptions often evocative of traditional shamanist practices. In Donghak, burning a paper on which a sacred symbol that had been given to Choe by Sang-Je was written, then ingesting the ashes mixed with water, purportedly had the power to heal disease.[39] This practice was later discontinued in Chondogyo as too "superstitious."[40] Chondogyo also instituted a "religious training" practice, wherein followers attended week-long retreats in which one of its sacred incantations was repeated for hours at a time. This frequently produced phenomena reminiscent of those of the Pentecostal "baptism" of the Holy Spirit. A parallel with the phenomena exhibited by a Korean shaman[41] in trance has also been noted.[42] Such experiences suggest to the persons concerned that they have achieved direct contact with Heaven and become their own shaman. Kim Yonggun (1898-1950) and a number of groups that followed his line of adaptation believed in the healing power of water.[43] The Jeungsan groups, similarly to early Donghak, promoted the efficacy of the burning of papers on which magical spells were written in the healing of disease

38) Ownby, *Falun Gong and the Future of China*, 34-6.
39) Beaver, "Chondogyo and Religion in Korea," 116.
40) Carl F. Young, "Doctrine, Ritual, and Social Action in Ch'ŏndogyo, 1906–1908," in *Eastern Learning and the Heavenly Way: The Tonghak and Chondogyo Movements and the Twilight of Korean Independence* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 2014), 161.
41) Korean shamans have usually been women rather than men.
42) Bell, "Pilgrims and Progress: The Production of Religious Experience in a Korean Religion," 92-5.
43) Ro, "New Religions and Social Change in Modern Korea History," 45.

(also a Korean shamanistic practice).[44] The Jeungsan groups also believed the repetition of their mantras would remedy personal problems including ill-health.[45] Taejonggyo and its descendents practiced mental and physical exercises that were believed to stimulate healing benefits from an internal energy called *ki* (the equivalent of the Chinese *qi*).[46] These stem more from Korea's Daoist roots than its shamanism. *Ki*-based healing and longevity systems have since become the trademark of a host of new, new religions in Korea. The largest of these is Dahnhak, established in 1980 by Ilchi Lee, which has spread internationally to a significant extent.[47] Dahnhak in its earlier days was judged to be a Taejonggyo "descendant" but today has morphed into what is more like a commercial practice system that has a light background of semi-magical and semi-spiritual assumptions.[48] It is comparable to the many *qigong* and yogic-energy systems that have become popular of late.

5. Primacy of the Collective

Concern for collective welfare was part of the redemptive model. But,

44) Flaherty, "JeungSanDo and the Opening of the Later Heaven: Millenarianism, Syncretism, and the Religion of Gang Il-sun," 35.

45) Baker, "Renewing Heaven and Earth," 492-3.

46) Baker, "The Korean God is not the Christian God," 470.

47) Kai Falkenberg, "Dahn Yoga: Body, Brain and Wallet," *Forbes,* 16 July 2009, http://www.forbes.com/forbes/2009/0803/fraud-dahn-yoga-centers-body-brain-and-wallet.html, accessed on 18/01/2016; Don Baker, "Internal Alchemy in the Dahn World School," in *Religions of Korea in Practice,* edited by Robert E. Buswell, Jr. (Princeton NJ: Princeton University, 2007); PRWeb.com, "Dahn Yoga video introduces history and growth of Dahn Yoga founded by Ilchi Lee," 12 March 2011, http://www.prweb.com/releases/dahn_yoga_video/history/prweb8202558.htm, accessed on 25 January 2016; Brain Wave Vibration, "What is brain wave vibration?," http://www.brainwavevibration.com/learn/, accessed on 25/01/2016.

48) Baker, "Internal Alchemy," 509-510.

whereas it tended to fall second in emphasis to individual improvement, in the Korean version the priority was reversed, this modification no doubt the product of Korea's long-standing, Confucian-derived idealism concerning the priority of a well-functioning society. Korea's traditional spiritual instinct was far less concerned with doctrinal belief than with how people behaved towards each other. Choe determined to instigate nothing less than an ethical revolution in Korea. He talked about creating a world of virtue; aiding the people; saving the country.[49] Such collective idealism was particularly pronounced in the writings of Chondogyo's fourth Patriarch, Yi Ton-hwa (1884-?). Yi pinpointed a direct correlation between the persistence of humanity's inadequate spiritual state and what he called the "false conventions" of society.[50] In Chondogyo thought the perfection of the individual and the perfection of society were regarded as co-dependent. For Choe, evil was a disease that was curable through his method.[51] As R. Pierce Beaver summed up the Chondogyo position, "Salvation is the liberation of mankind from all man-inflicted suffering ."[52] Won Buddhism also presupposes that if all is interconnected, no one can become fully enlightened until all are fully enlightened.[53] This collective orientation caused, and continues to influence, Korea's new religions to be heavily proactive in the social arena.[54]

This included political activism. Donghak and Taejonggyo were at the forefront of usually peaceful political protest movements in the cause of

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49) Ro, "New Religions and Social Change in Modern Korea History," 39.
50) Albert L. Park, "A Heavenly Kingdom on Earth: The Rise of Religious Social Ideology," chapter in *Building a Heaven on Earth: Religion, Activism, and Social Protest in Japanese Occupied Korea* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 2015), 93.
51) Yong Choon Kim, "Chondogyo Escatology," *Numen* 21, 2 (1974): 142.
52) Beaver, "Chondogyo and Religion in Korea," 120-121.
53) J. Y. Park, "Won Buddhism, Christianity, and Interreligious Dialogue," 111.
54) Young, "Doctrine, Ritual, and Social Action in Ch'ŏndogyo," 140.

human rights, though in the 1890's a militant wing promoted armed resistance, the ill-fated Farmer's Revolts which inadvertently paved the way for the rise of Japanese hegemony over the Korean peninsula from 1905.[55] Japanese takeover too was strongly resisted by Korea's religious patriots. Chondogyo followers comprised almost 50% of the signatories of the 1920 Korean Declaration of Independence from Japan and were at the forefront of the Samil (March 1st) peace marches that followed publication of that document.[56] Korea's new religions were also highly opposed to Communist takeover. In 1960 Chondogyo's spiritual leader became president of the Asian People's Anti-Communist League.[57] Reverend Moon invested a sizable amount of his organisation's resources in Marxist critique programmes that were given throughout the world during the 1970's and 1980's.[58]

Korea's indigenous new religions were also unusually concerned to uphold a high level of personal morality, regarding this as central to both personal and collective salvation. In Chondogyo the secret was the frequent repetition of its mantra. This repetition was believed to achieve a mystical union with the divine that in opening up the individual to the divine moral conscience already within would engender a social obligation to act in ways that benefit society rather than just the self.[59]

Universalist slogans were characteristic. Donghak's slogan following

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55) In 1905 Korea was forced into relinquishing many sovereign rights and becoming a Protectorate of Japan in the Eulsa Treaty. This was the beginning of a colonization that was formalized in 1910 with outright annexation.

56) Beaver, "Chondogyo and Religion in Korea," 117-8.

57) Ibid., 119.

58) Universal Peace Federation, "Reverend Moon's Central Role in Peaceful Downfall of Communism," http://www.reverendsunmyungmoon.org/works_communism.html, accessed on 20/04/2016.

59) Beaver, "Chondogyo and Religion in Korea," 116; Yong Choon Kim, 148-9; Young, "Doctrine, Ritual, and Social Action in Ch'ŏndogyo," 148.

the death of Choe became, "All men are equal,"[60] a clear borrowing from Christian ethos that when repacked in Korean context became a powerful rallying cry for the peasant protests and uprisings that came afterwards. The philosophy of Taejonggyo was *hongikingan*, or "broadly benefiting mankind."[61] One of Won Buddhism's Four Platforms was "egoless service to humanity."[62] Reverend Moon's key saying was, "Living for the sake of others."

This emphasis upon the aggregate social entity is to be noted in the bulk of the major Korean indigenous groups at least up through the Korean War. Since then there seems to have been a reversion to redemptive society individualism, as evidenced by the numerous *ki* groups that have developed in Korea over the last few decades and the Christian-based World Mission Society Church of God, where salvation is more typically Christian in its requirement for individuals to take up faith in its returned Christ before a predicted, imminent, cataclysmic end of the world.[63]

6. Gender Parity

Considering that Korea remains a patriarchal bastion, that its indigenous groups from Choe onwards demonstrated an unusual concern to improve the status of women or at least give them more recognition and opportunity is noteworthy. Jeungsan teachings held that in the new

60) Beaver, "Chondogyo and Religion in Korea," 116.
61) Don Baker, "The Korean God is not the Christian God," 465.
62) Chung, "Won Buddhism: A Synthesis of the Moral Systems of Confucianism and Buddhism," 430.
63) World Mission Society Church of God, "About Us," http://zionusa.org/about-world-mission-society-church-of-god/, accessed on 19/01/2016.

world order gender disparity will end because the balance between yin and yang energies will be restored.[64] One of the Jeungsan schisms was led by Gang's wife, to whom he gave great status as the "Mother of the Universe."[65] Choe's sparse writings expressed sorrow for what women have had to endure throughout Korean history. And almost immediately following his spiritual encounter he released his two female servants from their indentured bondage.[66] This concern to elevate opportunities for women was developed further in the writings of Chondogyo's second Patriarch, which later inspired the formation of a Women's Cultivation Association that worked for improvements in opportunities for women.[67] The struggle in the FFWPU to achieve greater gender parity has been ongoing but Reverend Moon frequently gave women high roles in his organisation and, though Mrs. Moon's leadership succession following his death has been challenged by one of their sons, it has been accepted by the vast majority of members. Won Buddhism has been concerned for much of its history to support gender equality within its organisation and in 1931 required an equal number of women and men to be appointed to its newly formed Supreme Council.[68] All the above emphases are the direct outcome of Choe's new vision of the Great Ultimate. This vision encompasses a new view of human salvation, a new Heaven's Way.

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64) Baker, "Renewing Heaven and Earth," 488.

65) Flaherty, "JeungSanDo and the Opening of the Later Heaven: Millenarianism, Syncretism, and the Religion of Gang Il-sun," 27.

66) Hyo Dong Lee, "Prologue: A Meeting of Two Stories," in *Spirit, Qi, and the Multitude: A Comparative Theology for the Democracy of Creation* (New York: Fordham University, 2014): 5.

67) Chondogyo, "The Cultural Movement," paragraph 5, http://www.chondogyo.or.kr/niabbs4/bbs.php?bbst ble=chuneng&no=33&page=1&categori11=5, accessed on 4/06/2016.

68) Michael Pye, "Won Buddhism as a Korean New Religion," *Numen* 49, 2 (2002): 128.

7. Heaven's Way of Korea's New Religions

Choe said the entire universe both visible and invisible is comprised of one and the same sacred Infinite Energy, which he related to the Great Ultimate of East Asian philosophy. The visible world is individualised conglomerates of this Energy. For Choe, this universally shared Being not only enabled humans to communicate directly with Heaven without recourse to a sage, shaman or priest, but by means of his sacred mantra he believed a personal empathy with the divine became available out of which arose a universal empathy. Such shared nature meant humans partake of God and best "serve" this universal Presence by treating everything, particularly fellow human beings, who are the highest manifestation of this conglomerated Energy, like one would treat God.[69] As people come in closer touch with the Great Ultimate within and learn to harness their Infinite Energy for good, humanity's Heaven-nature will expand and a Heaven on Earth will eventually result.[70] East Asian religion has long held belief in an all-pervasive psycho-physical energy of an impersonal and mechanical nature, referred to as the Great Ultimate. For personal experiences of the sacred one had to turn to higher-up conglomerates of the Great Ultimate, that is, the gods, of which there were a great many.[71] Choe's emphasis upon the singularity of the Great Ultimate and its capacity for personal relationship denote Christian influences upon his thought.

The God of the Abrahamic religions is transcendent, while immanence characterises Eastern approaches. Choe's new vision of the Great

69) Chondogyo, "Humankind," http://www.chondogyo.or.kr/niabbs4/bbs.php?bbstable=chuneng&no=19&pag =1&categori11=3, accessed on 4/06/2016.
70) Beaver, "Chondogyo and Religion in Korea," 121.
71) Baker, "Great Transformation," 450.

Ultimate achieved something of an amalgamation of the two. Don Baker has described Choe's innovations, as further developed in Chondogyo, as a divinisation of personal *qi*, or *ki* in Korean.[72] Hyo-Dong Lee likened this version of *ki* to the Christian Holy Spirit, minus its transcendent hierarchialism. Lee outlined the Korean Neo-Confucian precedents for Choe's sacralisation of *ki* but noted he uniquely "democratised" the situation.[73] Lee, in fact, saw Choe's version of "Spirit" as "subversive" to both the *qi* and the Holy Spirit "hegemonic" interpretations.[74] Because everyone "bears Heaven," a common expression in Chondogyo, everyone has the capacity to directly encounter Heaven and manifest its virtue.[75] As the Chondogyo-ist attunes to the "heart-mind" of the Great Ultimate within, accessing and embracing its empathy simultaneously universalises the individual.[76] The idealism of Korean Neo-Confucianism, in other words, was modified through the inclusion of a cosmic Personalism.

Choe's early death did not allow him to expound upon and develop this insight to any great depth but his legacy lived on to achieve some significant effects. First, it took an Ockham's razor to the Asian Heaven, excising most of the complex interim realms of deity. Second, it changed the abstract Asian God into something more approachable and caring. Third, it undercut the intricate and class-oriented behavioural systems that

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72) Ibid., 452.

73) Hyo-Dong Lee, "The Democracy of Numinous Spirits: The Panentheism of 'Subaltern' Ultimate Energy in Donghak," in *Spirit, Qi, and the Multitude: A Comparative Theology for the Democracy of Creation* (New York: Fordham University, 2014): 212.

74) Hyo-Dong Lee, "Introduction: A Decolonising Asian Theology of Spirit as a Comparative Theology of Spirit-Qi," in *Spirit, Qi, and the Multitude: A Comparative Theology for the Democracy of Creation* (New York: Fordham University, 2014): 33-34.

75) Young, "Won Buddhism: A Synthesis of the Moral Systems of Confucianism and Buddhism," 146.

76) Lee, "Democracy of Numinous Spirits," 218-224.

had characterised former interpretations of Heaven's Way. Fourth, because everyone equally "bears Heaven," communication with Heaven and the achievement of Sagehood were no longer limited to an educated upper class or priestly or monkish elite. Fifth, the Great Primordial as immanent divinised material existence, thus achieving a theological rationalisation for material perfection that challenged the traditional seconding of the material world to the perfection of Heaven. And, sixth, the Great Primordial as immanent divinised the human person, thus erecting a theological platform for human equality that radically criticised the rigid class differentiation and exploitation over which Korea's former religious systems had presided.

To summarise, flowing out of an essential idea of Cosmic common being and value, a religious doctrine of human equality and freedom emerged in Korea, thus heavily injecting the utopianism of Korea's new religions with altruistic activism. Complex ritualism, doctrines and clericalism were disposed of, as particularly illustrated in Won Buddhism, which specifically differentiated itself from traditional Buddhism in its aniconic, lay and service emphases.[77] Most of Korea's new religions kept Choe's qualified monism,[78] though each had its own twist on the matter, such as the "Buddha-nature" of Won Buddhism.[79] God gained more personality in the Korean adaptation, particularly in the Jeungsan[80] and Taejonggyo[81] modifications. The three most numerically successful of

77) J. Y. Park, "Won Buddhism, Christianity, and Interreligious Dialogue," 111.

78) Beaver observes that Chondogyo's view of the relationship between God and human is not the unqualified Monism of the Hindu Brahman and atman, where they are considered to be identical. Beaver, "Chondogyo and Religion in Korea," 121.

79) Jin Y. Park, "The Won Buddhist Practice of the Buddha-Nature," in *Religions of Korea in Practice*, edited by Robert E. Buswell, Jr. (Princeton NJ: Princeton University, 2007), 477.

80) Don Baker, "Renewing Heaven and Earth," 487.

81) Baker, "The Korean God is not the Christian God," 471.

Korea's organised indigenous new religions have been Donghak itself in its two main descendents, Chondogyo and Sichonggyo, Won Buddhism, which is presently the most numerically successful group within Korea at 130,000 in 2005,[82] and the FFWPU of Sun Myung Moon, which has achieved the largest worldwide presence of any Korean new religion to date. This group has about 50-60,000 members in Korea and 250,000 worldwide, covering most countries.[83] Oddly in view of the historical enmity between Korea and Japan, the FFWPU flourishes most in Japan, where its website lists close to 300 branches.[84] Judging from photos and reports, Japanese FFWPU facilities burst at their seams and its congregations are larger than average,[85] with its total membership very likely approaching 90,000 and accounting for almost half of worldwide membership.

One reason for the higher success of these three particular groups could be because they have stayed more true to the deeper thrust of the

82) Korea's 2005 Census had membership at 130,000 and its official number of worship halls was 550. See Baker, "Constructing Korea's Won Buddhism," 4, 27. 130,000 correlates well with 550 worship halls. Up-to-date figures are not available but it is safe to assume the group has grown since then.

83) These are my estimates based on the number of worship centres I have identified and branch reports that I have been able to access. Korea has 230 branches (source: Family Federation for World Peace and Unification, Korea, "Korean Branches," https://translate.googleusercontent.com/translate_c?depth=1&hl en&prev=search&rurl=translate.google.com.au&sl=ko&u=https://www.ffwp.org/index .asp%3Fmid%3DWelcome0503%26menu_srl%3D64%26listorder%3D2%26parent_srl %3D607194&usg=ALkJrhgpB6tPs4-N7H7s-MipUO1hVQ_QIw, accessed on 15/01/2016.

84) This number has increased from just over 250 branches in 2013 (branches listed on website accessed in September 2013). Family Federation for World Peace and Unification, Japan, "Branch Locations," http://ffwpu.jp/?page_id=91, accessed on 15/01/2016.

85) In 2014 the Niigata branch completed a new church that seats 1000. Myungho Moon, "1000-Capacity Niigata Church Dedicated," Family Federation Headquarters, 3 December 2014, http://familyfedihq.org/2014/12/1000-capacity-niigata-church-dedicated/, accessed on 15/01/2016.

ontological reformulation inaugurated by Choe, even if they express it in very different ways. The international success of the FFWPU in fact may derive from the unique manner in which Reverend Moon Christianised the new Heaven's Way. His teachings are contained in the *Divine Principle (DP)*[86] and its Principle of Creation is also elaborated in a more philosophical text called *Unification Thought (UT)*.[87] The *DP* more specifically reinterprets Christianity to accord with Korea's inherited religious traditions as adapted in the Korean new religions "Formula." The *DP* both magnifies and modifies the new ontology. As one of its three major principles, we encounter for example the substance-function dichotomy that is integral to the Neo-Confucian portrait of the Great Ultimate. This is referenced in Chondogyo thought as Principle and Movement, or *yi (*or *li)* and *ki.*[88] In the Unification texts this cosmic binary is described as Internal Nature (Sung Sang) and External Form (Hyung Sang).[89] In this adaptation, these two primal conditions are perpetually interactive and interdependent, the action of which generates forces that are comparable to the psycho-physical Great Ultimate.[90] Its theology clarifies this as a complementary unitarianism rather than the traditional yin-yang opposition. The resulting energies of the "harmonious give and take" interaction between Sung-sang and Hyung-sang generate a fourth pole, a progeny that carries the Divine Blueprint ever-onwards to produce all that exists.[91] Won Buddhism also paints a very clear portrait

86) Hyo-Won Eu, *Exposition of the Divine Principle, 1996 translation* (New York: HSA-UWC, 1996).
87) Sang-Hun Lee, *New Essentials of Unification Thought: Head-Wing Thought*, English edition (Tokyo: Unification Thought Institute, 2006).
88) Young, "Won Buddhism: A Synthesis of the Moral Systems of Confucianism and Buddhism," 148.
89) *DP*, 31-3.
90) *DP*, 35.
91) *DP*, 37-8.

of Infinite Energy as a universal Buddha-nature which has both cooperative and interactive functions. This primal condition underlies its philosophy that, as all people partake of the Buddha-nature, they will embody its beneficence.[92]

In Asian philosophy there is a mechanical quality to the operation of the psycho-physical Great Ultimate, which Korea's new religions adaptation overcomes with their added Personalism. This is less developed in Chondoism, where the omnipresence of Great Ultimate Energy or Spirit enables an empathetic channelling. The *DP* expands upon this Personalism by endowing the Great Ultimate with a Character of Divine Mind, Heart and Will, or Heart (Shimjung), Logos and Creativity, that humankind in particular inherits the capacity to consciously express.[93] Won Buddhism also endows Cosmic Nature with a character of compassion and loving-kindness that is to be expressed on the human realm.[94] The Unification system goes further to equate the Primordial Binary Unity with an "Original" Father and Mother. So, God in the Unification system is more than just a primordial creative force or all-encompassing energy or being. It is also the universal Parent of all, the Heavenly True Parent as God later came to be called in Unificationism.[95]

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92) J. Y. Park, "Won Buddhist Practice," 477.

93) *UT*, 2.

94) Won Buddhism Valley, "Loving-kindness: Won Buddhism Dharma talk by Ven. Chun Ohun Lee, Ph.D", http://sfv.wonbuddhism.org/programs/33-dharma-talks/videos/36-loving-kindness-won-buddhism-dharma-talk, accessed on 15/06/2016.

95) *UT*, 95-6. This dual parentalism is less referenced in the *DP* because, as an early document, it was crafted for a Christian audience and complied with the Christian emphasis on the masculine Father God. But as Mrs. Moon's personality has expanded in the movement (and also due to the dissatisfaction of Western members concerning the apparent contradiction of the implication contained in the text), Reverend Moon gave more voice in his later speeches to the reciprocal and equal character of God's dual essentiality. (For example, his reference in a speech given in 2005 to God as True Father and True Mother: see "Peace Message 1: God's Ideal Family and the Kingdom

In effect, in the Unification approach Choe's more personal Great Ultimate and the Parentalism of the Christian God meet. In Christianity God's Fatherhood is adoptive, whereas in Unification theology God is the literal Parent of all things, whose "DNA," or primordial Character and Form, is intrinsic to all existence, though more fully manifested at the human level. In Chondogyo the universality of psycho-physical energy is the common denominator by which all things in heaven and earth are related. In Won Buddhism it is the universal Buddha nature.

In the Korean indigenous new religions we find a new goal of human history rather clearly articulated. It is one of bringing God to earth rather than people to heaven. Everything being of one and the same spiritual substance is innately sacred. Spirit or energy and matter are just different manifestations of that oneness. *Unification Thought* likens it to the situation of H2O, which can appear as ice, liquid water or steam depending upon the forces that are brought to bear upon it.[96] The Way of Heaven and the Way of Earth, in other words, are one and the same. Salvation, or the elimination of suffering, stems from recognising that universal oneness and enacting the universal caring that this knowledge demands. In the Korean Formula Heaven's Way is not just admiring or contacting or cooperating or harmonising with the Universal Pattern. It is consciously *being* the Universal Pattern.

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of the Peaceful, Ideal World," http://rev-moon.blogspot. com.au/2010/09/speeches-of-rev-dr-sun-myung-moon-peace.html, accessed on 24/02/2016.) And following Mrs. Moon's accession to international leadership following Reverend Moon's death, to bolster her authority she has enlarged that emphasis, going as far as instructing members to change their form of address to God in prayer from Heavenly Father to Heavenly Parent, to the dismay of some factions that favour a patriarchal emphasis. (See Hak Ja Han, "Address God as 'Heavenly Parents,'" 8 January 2013, http://www.tparents.org/Moon-Talks/HakJaHanMoon-13/0-Toc.htm, accessed on 16/07/2013.)

96) *UT*, 9.

8. Conclusion

East Asian religion has long upheld a vision of salvation being a life lived in harmony with the primordial pattern of Heaven, or Heaven's Way. Two opposing versions of Heaven's Way dominated Korea's religious history, that of Daoism and that of Confucianism. In Neo-Confucianism these achieved an uneasy peace and elements of Buddhism were also drawn in. In the adaptation of Korea's new religions the collective concern of its Neo-Confucian past is retained but its rationale is altered. The strict behavioural conformity and submersion of individuality of Neo-Confucian salvation are no longer ideal. Rather, through the personal discovery of and embrace of our true heritage and nature a radical individual autonomy and value are achieved that paradoxically are most fully exercised when applied to the moral and social upliftment of the collective. The Heaven's Way of Korea's new religions, therefore, presents an interesting new paradigm of salvation that merges East and West. Its salvation is both individual and collective. One cannot be achieved without the other. Most especially, it says that salvation stems not from believing in certain immutable doctrines or persons or devoting oneself to complex ritual or austerity practices. It comes from the personal experience and knowledge of the Great Ultimate, which alone illuminates our true nature and place in the universal scheme.

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<국문초록>

한국의 신종교에서 천도
- 구원의 새로운 해석

알렉사 블로너(Alexa Blonner)

한국의 신유학적 봉건 사회는 소멸직전의 쇠퇴와 현대화 압력의 두 가지 도전 속에서 19 세기부터 붕괴되기 시작했다. 이는 장기간에 걸친 두 가지 종교적 반응을 불러 일으켰다. 하나는 기독교를 향한 교체 반응이었고 다른 하나는 통합을 통한 타협을 추구하는 반응이었는데 후자의 경우는 여러 새로운 종교 창시자들에 의해 퇴출되었다. 본 논문이 조사한 것은 후자의 반응이며 특히 핵심 종교적 관심사인 구원과 관련된 혁신들이다. 동아시아 철학에서 구원은 일반적으로 "천도(天道)"라고 불린다. 한국의 신종교로서 "천도"는 과연 무엇이 새로웠나? 천도의 재건 주제에는 어떤 것들이 있었나? 본 논문은 한국 "최초"의 신종교인 동학/천도교가 "천도" 에 대한 독특한 핵심적 재해석을 대략 설계하고 이후에 나타난 단체들이 추가적인 수정 또는 통합으로 정교화하였다고 주장한다.

주요어: 신종교, 한국의 종교사, 원불교, 천도교, 세계평화통일가정연합

· 논문투고일: 2016년 9월 26일 **· 심사완료일**: 2016년 12월 5일 **· 게재결정일**: 2017년 2월 25일