

Materials in Translation

Tonghak: A Progressive Ideological Heritage Indigenous to the Chosŏn Nation*

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Preface

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Tonghak thought and its legacy, since the very beginning of the DPRK regime, were part of its political and ideological structure and a frequently discussed part of North Korean historical discourse. Evaluations of the Tonghak movement, the Kabo Peasant War, Ch'oe Cheu, or the anti-Japanese struggle of Ch'ŏndogyo members variegated through seven decades of the regime to a certain degree, but in spite of partial criticism always remained positive. This attitude was further strengthened in the last two decades when Tonghak gained an even more prominent position in the historical narrative and became a highlighted chapter in the history of the anti-feudal and anti-imperialist struggle of the Korean people.¹ These changes in interpretation of Tonghak are especially

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prominent within the field of the history of philosophy, where Ch'oe Cheu's thought and later developments of the Tonghak doctrine became intensively discussed topics. Such qualitative and quantitative change can be best illustrated by plain numbers: the first comprehensive history of Korean thought, *Chosŏn ch'ŏrhaksa 1*,² published in 1960, spent only three pages out of 370 on Ch'oe Cheu's thought, while an analogous publication of similar size (also titled *Chosŏn ch'ŏrhaksa*)³ published in 2007 contains thirteen pages, in which Chŏn Pongjun's thought is also discussed. The rise of Tonghak to prominence in the sphere of the history of ideas is also attested in the most comprehensive up-to-date North Korean work on the history of Korean philosophy, *Chosŏn ch'ŏrhak chŏnsa*,⁴ where the topic is covered in more than forty pages in the seventh volume.

The shift of the historical debate from the social and political aspects of Tonghak toward its philosophical message is marked not only by new works like Yang Mansŏk's *Tonghak ūi aeguk aejo sasang* [Tonghak patriotic and nation-loving thought] from 2009,⁵ but above all by a surge of articles on Tonghak and the philosophy of the New Man (*sin'in ch'ŏrhak*) in North Korean philosophy journals. *Ch'ŏrhak yŏn'gu* (recently renamed as *Ch'ŏrhak sahoe chŏngch'ihak yŏn'gu*) and issues of *Journal of Kim Il Sung University* focusing on philosophy in recent years published dozens of articles on the topic, more than in all preceding decades combined and more than on most other topics of Korean thought. There is a hectic ongoing interest in Tonghak thought and the here presented study serves as a direct example of the shifting contours within North Korean historical and ideological discourse.

The new focus is also documented by the author of this study. Prof. Ro Hak Hui is an eminent historian of philosophy active both at Kim Il Sung University and the Academy of Sciences. A specialist on traditional Korean thought, he

1. For the basic contours of this phenomenon see George Kallander, "Eastern Bandits or Revolutionary Soldiers? The 1894 Tonghak Uprising in Korean History and Memory," *History Compass* 8 (2010): 1126-1141 or Pae Hangsŏp, "Ch'oe-gŭn Pukhan hakkye ūi Tonghak nongmin chŏnjaeng yŏn'gu tonghyang kwa r'ŭkch'ing" [Direction and character of recent North Korean academic studies on Tonghak Peasants' War], *Minjok munhwa yŏn'gu* 46 (2007): 257-289.

2. Chŏng Chinsŏk, Chŏng Sŏngch'ŏl, Kim Ch'angwŏn, *Chosŏn ch'ŏrhaksa 1* [History of Korean philosophy 1] (Pyongyang: Kwahag'wŏn ch'ulp'ansa, 1960).

3. Chŏng Haesŏp, Chi Ilsin, *Chosŏn ch'ŏrhaksa* [History of Korean philosophy] (Pyongyang: Kim Ilsŏng chonghap taehak ch'ulp'ansa, 2007).

4. Ryang Mansŏk, Pak Ch'ullan, *Chosŏn ch'ŏrhak chŏnsa* [Complete history of Korean philosophy] (Pyongyang: Sahoe kwahak ch'ulp'ansa, 2010).

5. Yang Mansŏk, *Tonghak ūi aeguk aejo sasang* [Tonghak patriotic and nation-loving thought] (Pyongyang: Sahoe kwahak ch'ulp'ansa, 2009).

authored dozens of articles on topics ranging from Parhae and Silla thought to Yulgok's epistemology and several monographs, including *Chosŏn yugyo sŏngnihak yŏn'gu* [Studies on Korean Confucianism and learning of nature and principle]⁶ or *Chosŏn ch'ŏrhaksa saryo chip* [Collected documents on history of Korean philosophy].⁷ The present study revisits many parts of his previous seven articles published on various aspects of Tonghak thought and the philosophy of the New Man. It is rare to gain access to North Korean sources on the history of philosophy, yet it is even rarer to directly see its contemporary development.

Tonghak: A Progressive Ideological Heritage Indigenous to the Chosŏn Nation

Ro Hak Hui

Introduction

The Great Leader Comrade Kim Il Sung⁸ teaches the following: “The Tonghak and Ch'ŏndogyo ideologies, unceasingly animated by the national spirit [ŏl], are the pride of the nation. The patriotism and loyalty of the Ch'ŏndogyo martyrs who devoted themselves to loving the state, nation, and people will long remain in the nation's history.”⁹

Tonghak was a feature of the Chosŏn nation's progressive ideological heritage, which took form, developed, and circulated extensively through the lawful process of development of Chosŏn national philosophical thought that began in the medieval period and carried over into modernity. Tonghak was thus a feature of the progressive thought that preceded the modern philosophical thought of Chosŏn. Along with Enlightenment thought (*kaehwa sasang*), it

6. Ro Hakhŭi [Ro Hak Hui], *Chosŏn yugyo sŏngnihak yŏn'gu* [Studies on Korean Confucianism and learning of nature and principle] (Pyongyang: Sahoe kwahak ch'ulp'ansa, 2002).

7. Ro Hakhŭi [Ro Hak Hui], Pak Munsŏng, Kim Changch'ŏl, *Chosŏn ch'ŏrhaksa saryojip* [Collected documents on history of Korean philosophy] (Pyongyang: Kim Ilsŏng chonghap taehak ch'ulp'ansa, 2017).

8. Throughout the Korean version of this article, Kim Il Sung is not referred to by name but with three dots. For example, *Widaehan suryŏng ... tongji*—Trans.

9. *Kim Il Sung chŏnjip* [Collected works of Kim Il Sung], vol. 99, 396.

greatly influenced the Chosŏn people's uprisings and modern historical development in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The people's uprisings it inspired, including the Kabo Peasant War (*Kabo nongmin chŏnjaeng*), were carried out to oppose feudal rule and foreign invasions and advocate autonomy (*chajusŏng*).

As a patriotic, nationalistic, and popular mode of thought unceasingly animated by the spirit of the Chosŏn nation, Tonghak is important for research on modern Chosŏn progressive philosophical thought prior to the creation of Chuch'e philosophy (*Chuch'e ch'ŏrhak*). Tonghak thought was an important precursor to the philosophy of the New Man (*sinin ch'ŏrhak*), another current of modern Chosŏn philosophical thought that existed prior to Chuch'e philosophy. In order to understand the philosophy of the New Man, therefore, one must first deeply study Tonghak.

The task of accurately researching and codifying Tonghak as part of a progressive ideological heritage indigenous to the Chosŏn nation is important for overturning the designs of imperialists to exterminate the national culture. Tonghak is thus also important for more strictly adhering to subjectivity (*chuch'esŏng*) and national character (*minjoksŏng*) in the revolution and construction. Scheming to geld and annihilate the progressive ideological heritage of the Chosŏn people, historians who use bourgeois terminology distort Tonghak by portraying it as a "strongly xenophobic mode of thought" and a "group of fanatics" adhering to a doctrine of murdering foreigners.

The scope of the Kabo Peasant War, which is referred to as the First Tonghak Revolution in Ch'ŏndogyo society, was that of a struggle by the Chosŏn people against feudalism and invasion. In terms of intensity, however, it had a tremendous influence on modern Chosŏn history and the political development of the East and the world as the culmination of peasant wars.

This article elucidates Tonghak thought as a progressive ideological heritage indigenous to the Chosŏn nation that continuously developed as a mode of thought in Chosŏn and was championed in the nineteenth century as the Chosŏn feudal dynasty was in crisis and foreign invasions of Chosŏn gathered in strength. Scholars of the history of Chosŏn philosophy have produced many studies of Tonghak, the topics of which include the socialist historical background of Tonghak's formation and development, Tonghak thought's theoretical origins, and Tonghak's basic content, cognitive norms, religious precepts, and organization. However, there are no studies regarding the claim that Tonghak is a facet of the progressive ideological heritage indigenous to the Chosŏn nation that emerged and developed in Chosŏn under the aegis of the Chosŏn people. Therefore, in this article, Tonghak is elucidated and substantiated as a progressive ideological heritage indigenous to the Chosŏn nation. First, Tonghak formed

and developed on the basis of and had its origins in the historically formed and developed traditional philosophy and faiths of the Chosŏn nation. Second, Tonghak took form and developed in the mid-nineteenth century as an expression of the Chosŏn nation's urgent national demands and interests.

Main Body

Tonghak took form and began to develop in the 1860s in response to the social conditions of a historical epoch in which the corruption of Chosŏn feudal elites and internal and external crises reached their pinnacle. In the realm of ideas, the urgent social demand for new thought also emerged as the hitherto dominant social ideology of neo-Confucianism decayed and withered away. Tonghak thus took form and developed reflecting the aims and demands of the people, who were dissatisfied and desired to escape from feudal rule, at a historical time when corruption of Chosŏn feudal rule and internal and external crises reached their pinnacle.

The Great Leader Comrade Kim Il Sung teaches the following:

Ch'oe Cheu was active at a time characterized by the severest poverty and degeneration of state power due to government by in-law families [*sedo chŏngch'i*] and factional strife. Social and political chaos reached a climax as famine and floods occurred in addition to successive peasant revolts opposed to feudal tyranny. Status and class conflict between the yangban and commoners also came to a head.¹⁰

What was conspicuous about the internal conditions of nineteenth-century Chosŏn was that feudal corruption and social contradictions became extreme while the general people's desire to abscond feudal rule and customs became unprecedentedly intense; the timeworn feudal society faced a crisis of collapse. This was related to the gradual disintegration of feudal relations as capitalist relations emerged out of the conflict and struggle between the feudal landed class and peasants, the social relations of which constituted the very essence of feudal social institutions.

The Chosŏn feudal ruling class adopted a number of measures in the effort to rectify and eventually preserve feudal society, which had been in decline since the seventeenth century. Examples of this include exemption from military service through the payment of taxes (*simp'obŏp*), the reduction of this tax

10. *Ibid.*, 374.

(*kyumyŏkpŏp*), and the policy of impartiality (*tangp'yŏng chŏngch'aek*) designed to appoint personnel to government positions on the basis of merit to reduce inter-factional strife. Nonetheless, the ruling class failed to do away with the internal contradictions and harmful effects inherent to feudal institutions; indeed, they only worsened regardless of the ruling class' intentions. The contradictions and corruption of the Chosŏn feudal state acutely emerged in the anti-feudal struggle to abscond factional strife, government by in-law families, and daily hardship owing to feudal exploitation and oppression.

The Chosŏn ruling class was ignorant of its power struggles and weaknesses. On the one hand, it habitually engaged in government by in-law families and, on the other, intensified exploitation and suppression of the general people. Situated at the intersection between life and death under the dominance and oppression of the feudal ruling class, the people could not but set out to struggle for the autonomy to determine their own destiny.

The people's early-nineteenth-century struggles against the feudal ruling class arose continuously around the country—in Kaesŏng, Ch'unch'ŏn, Hwangju, and so forth—eventually culminating in the P'yŏngan Province Peasant War of 1812–1813. The P'yŏngan Province Peasant War broke out over the rage and resentment of the people, whose livelihood had deteriorated to an extreme degree with the intensification of the corruption of feudal rule owing to government by in-law families and the chaos and exploitative usury of the corrupt “three administrations” that functioned as sources of government revenue (*samjŏng*: land tax [*chŏnjŏn*], military service tax [*kunjŏn*], and grain exchange [*hwanjŏn*]). This war was a manifestation of the social contradictions of feudal society that became ever more severe with the growth and development of capitalist relations. With people of all social classes—from peasants, pieceworkers, craftsmen, and miners to merchants and capitalists—rising up under the direction of Commander-in-chief (*Taedo wŏnsu*) Hong Kyŏngnae to route government forces and topple the feudal government, the P'yŏngan Province Peasant War had the potential for nationwide implications. Carried out with clear objectives following four to five years of war preparations and meticulous organization, the P'yŏngan Province Peasant War was a large-scale anti-feudal struggle incorporating fierce offensive and defensive battles involving direct confrontation with government troops over fourth months and spanning extensive territory across the P'yŏngan, Hwanghae, and Kyŏnggi Provinces.

The people's struggle against the feudal ruling class continued even after the P'yŏngan Province Peasant War with the people of Seoul's rice revolt in 1833 and successive peasant revolts in Chŭngsan in 1840 and Kyŏngju in 1841, developing into the mass revolt of 1862. The people's 1862 uprising against

Western Kyöngsang Provincial Military Commander (*Udo pyöngmasa*) Paek Raksin's despicable exploitation grew to a massive scale incorporating the people of each of the three southern provinces: Kyöngsang, Chölla, and Ch'ungch'öng. It then spread to the north and onto Cheju Island, developing into a peasant war nationwide in character. In terms of the scale of participation and territory, the nationwide 1862 Peasant War was a rare case of large-scale peasant revolt. Over the course of a year, thirty-five different uprisings occurred all over the nation, striking a tremendous blow against the feudal ruling class. Thereafter peasant revolts continued to occur every year without interruption. The nineteenth-century Chosön feudal state thus became like a beehive abuzz over the people's fierce revolts carried out against the feudal ruling class' cruel exploitation and oppression and in the name of autonomy; feudal rule was shaken to its very foundations.

Tonghak thus emerged in a historical period in which feudal corruption and social contradictions reached their pinnacle and a crisis of governance became apparent as people's efforts to abscond their feudal confines intensified to a degree greater than ever before. This was a mode of thought aimed at controverting the prevailing social reality, saving a society and people mired in misery, and building a new world.

In the early nineteenth century, as feudal corruption and social contradictions reached their pinnacle, the Chosön feudal dynasty faced a crisis of collapse. Meanwhile, externally, the Western capitalist great powers (*Yu-Mi chabonjuüi ryölkang*) began their invasive penetration of Asia, turning a number of countries in the East into colonies and semi-colonies and intensifying their invasion of Chosön. The intrusion of the Catholic Church into Chosön and the intensification of the Western capitalist great powers' invasion of Chosön in the early nineteenth century, along with the internal conditions of the Chosön feudal state, had a tremendous impact on Tonghak's emergence, development, and content.

The distinct character of the external environment surrounding Chosön in the early nineteenth century was characterized by the Western capitalist great powers' initiation of their invasion of Asia. Having brought the capitalist system to fruition on a global scale, the Western capitalist great powers now turned to colonizing or semi-colonizing a number of countries in Asia while intensifying their invasion of Chosön. For the procurement of raw materials, natural resources, and markets for the sale of commodities and capital investment, the Western great powers, which were the first countries to initiate their capitalist development, intensified their overseas expansion, turning many of the continents of the world, including North and South America and parts of

Oceania and Africa, into colonies and semi-colonies. Extending their invasion into Asia, which had developed its own culture since ancient times and traversed a trajectory of historical development distinct from Europe, the Western capitalist great powers forcibly occupied a vast territory encompassing India, Indonesia, Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia by the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In the nineteenth century, aiming to further expand their colonial dominion, they turned their invasion toward Chosŏn, China, and the other nations of the East. The Western capitalist great powers' nineteenth-century invasion had a tremendous impact on the nations of Asia, which, yet under the sway of feudal relations, slumbered in a feudal sleep.

The Western capitalist great powers' invasion of the nations of the East began with religious infiltration. Prior to their invasion, the Western capitalist great powers dispatched the Catholic Church as scout and guide. The Catholic Church was used as guide for the Western Capitalist great powers' invasion of our nation, serving to numb the Chosŏn people's national consciousness (*minjok ūisik*). Infiltrating and spreading as a religious faith throughout Chosŏn under outwardly benign slogans of freedom, equality, and charity, the Catholic Church weaved illusions among the people, propagating European toadyism, the principle of non-resistance, and slavish and subservient thought. All the while, it established exploitative forces, carried out espionage, and drew forward invading forces, serving as informants for the Western capitalist invasion. For the most part, then, the Western capitalist great powers' frequent mid-nineteenth-century invasive designs were carried out under the guidance of the Catholic Church. The invasions by the American *General Sherman* and a French fleet in 1866 particularly attest to this fact.

Having long schemed to dispatch the Catholic Church as a guide for invasion, the expansion of protestant Christians from the early-to-mid-nineteenth century onward allowed the Western capitalist great powers to engage in overt military invasion. Schemes to invade our nation by the likes of the United States were repelled each and every time by our people's obstinate anti-invasion struggle; they could not but fail. However, a severe political situation was created in Chosŏn due to the early-to-mid-nineteenth-century Western capitalist invasion. The Chosŏn feudal state came to face a crisis of foreign invasion.

In this historical context, Ch'oe Cheu¹¹ (1824-64) championed Tonghak as a mode of thought to protect the nation from foreign invasion, save society and the people mired in miserable conditions, and build a new world.

11. His birthname was Chesŏn, pen names Suun and Suunjae, courtesy name Sŏngmuk, early courtesy name Toŏn, and honorary title *Taesinsa*.

The Great Leader Comrade Kim Il Sung teaches the following: “I thoroughly acknowledge Tonghak’s contribution in the struggles against feudalism and invasion and to realize the modernization of the nation and achieve social progress. I also acknowledge Tonghak’s nationalist, patriotic, and popular character.”¹²

Tonghak’s class character and nationalistic character did not conflict with each other but shared a congruous relationship. At the time in Chosŏn, the peasants made up the great majority of the nation. Protecting the country and nation and safeguarding autonomy from foreign invasions promoted the safety and served the interests of the peasantry. Therefore, in terms of class essence and character, more than any other class or social stratum, the oppressed peasants loved and advocated for the nation, had a high level of anti-invasion energy (*panch’imnyakchök kiun*), and actively participated in the struggle for the protection of the nation’s autonomy. Tonghak’s possession of nationalistic character was thus related to the essential class character of the peasants, who provided the class foundation for this character and met its demands.

Tonghak’s legacy as a mode of thought indigenous to the Chosŏn nation is related to its emergence on the basis of the basic principles and foundations of the philosophy and faiths of the Chosŏn nation that took form and developed over time. In terms of how the very concept of Tonghak signified the scholarship of Chosŏn, Tonghak championed and exalted everything inherent to Chosŏn (*Chosŏn ūi kŏt*). Signifying “scholarship of Chosŏn,” the term “Tonghak” is the expression of a decisive historical origin—based on a single unbroken tradition in our nation passed down through history—and of nationalistic character.

The Great Leader Comrade Kim Il Sung teaches the following: “Ch’oe Cheu referred to Ch’öndogyo as Tonghak [Eastern learning], clearly distinguishing it from ‘Sŏhak’ [Western learning; Catholicism]. This fact alone well conveys this religion’s nationalistic character.”¹³

Since the ancient past, Chosŏn has been referred to as “Tongguk,” “Haedong,” and “Haedongsöngguk.” What Tonghak progenitor Ch’oe Cheu referred to as “scholarship of the East” (*Tongbang ūi hangmun*) in response to Western learning (*Sŏhak*) was related to the dissemination of Western learning (Catholicism originating in the West) into Chosŏn. However, the signification of “Tonghak” as the “scholarship of Chosŏn” originated in the ancient tradition of referring to Chosŏn as “Tongguk” (Eastern nation) passed down through history. Since long ago, along with its formal name, Chosŏn has been known among the people of

12. *Kim Il Sung chönjip*, vol. 99, 380–381.

13. *Ibid.*, 344.

the world as well as the Chosŏn people themselves as “Haedong,” “Tongguk,” and “Taedong,” all of which contained the word “Tong” (East), connoting the “nation in the East.”

According to historical records, Koguryŏ was already referred to as “Haedong” by the fourth century.¹⁴ By the seventh and eighth centuries, people in neighboring countries also referred to Chosŏn as “Haedong.” In the *T’ongjŏn* (Ch. *Tongdian*; Comprehensive institutions), Parhae is referred to as “Haedongsŏngguk.”¹⁵ There are also records referring to Paekche and Silla as “Haedong.”¹⁶ Buddhist scholar of the seventh century Wŏnhyo’s (617–686) Buddhist sect, which was well known to the world at the time, was also referred to as “*Haedong chong*” (Haedong School), signifying a religious sect formed in Chosŏn. Other examples include the iron coinage produced in Koryŏ and widely used from the tenth to twelfth centuries, which was known as “*Haedong chungbo*,” “*Haedong t’ongbo*,” and “*Tongguk chungbo*.” The thirteenth-century Buddhist monk Kakhun, who was ordered by the king to produce a book composed of the biographies of numerous Koguryŏ and Silla Buddhist monks, called his work *Haedong kosŏngjŏn* (Lives of eminent monks of Haedong). In the same period, the name of the collected works of Ri Kyubo was the *Tongguk Ri sangguk chip*.

By the time of the Chosŏn feudal dynasty period, the terms “Haedong,” “Tongguk,” and “Taedong” were more widely used. Particularly in the realm of scholarship, books pertaining to the things of our nation or written by the Chosŏn people regarding history, geography, literature, medicine, and the military often included the terms “Haedong,” “Tongguk,” “Taedong,” or other terms containing the word “Tong” (East) in their titles. One can also observe the following examples: the *Haedong chegukki*, written by Sin Sukchu in the fifteenth century and published and distributed in the seventeenth century; the *Tongguk saryak*, *Tongguk ryagun*, *Tongguk chŏn’gun*, *Tongguk mun’gam*, and *Tongguk pyŏnggam*, each written in the fifteenth century; and the *Haedong kao*, *Haedong myŏngjangjŏn*, *Haedong ryŏksa*, *Haedong jamnok*, *Tongguk t’onggam*, *Tongguk chiriji*, *Tongguk yŏji sŏngnam*, *Tongsa kangmok*, *Tongmunsŏn*, *Taedong sugyŏng*, and *Taedong yŏjido*, all produced in the Chosŏn feudal dynasty period. During this time people referred to Chosŏn as

14. *Samguk sagi* [History of the Three Kingdoms] 18, “Koguryŏ pon’gi” [Record of Koryŏ] 6, “Sosurim Wang” [King Sosurim].

15. *Samguk yusa* [Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms] 1, “Kii” [Wonder] 1, “Malgal, Parhae.”

16. *Samguk yusa* 1, “Kii” 1, “T’aejong Ch’unch’u-gong” [Kim Muryŏl]; *Samguk yusa* 4, “Uihae,” “Ŭisang ũi pulgyo chŏndo” [Ŭisang’s Buddhist propagation]; *Samguk sagi* 28, “Paekche pon’gi” [Record of Paekche], “Ŭija Wang” [King Ŭija].

“Haedong,” Tongguk,” “Taedong,” or with other terms containing the word “Tong” (East). This usage was particularly common in scholarly works.

As to the term “Tonghak” itself, evidence shows it was directly or indirectly used since long ago in close association with the concepts of “Tongguk,” “Haedong,” and “Taedong.” In the *Samguk yusa*, one can observe references to Chosŏn as the “East” and learning of nations West of Chosŏn as “Western learning” (*Sŏhak*) already by the time of the Three Kingdoms (*Senara sigi*).¹⁷ (Here, while the term “Tonghak” is not explicitly used, it is an implicit prerequisite for “*Sŏhak*.”)

The term “Tonghak” was also used in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Sixteenth-to-seventeenth-century philosopher Chang Yu wrote, “Yet one can observe that reverence and admiration for the Cheng-Zhu School leads to the subservience of our Eastern Scholarship [*Tonghakkye*] and inferiority of Confucianism.”¹⁸ Ri Ikto, a representative *Sirhak* (Practical learning) scholar of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, also used the term “Tonghak.”

Of course, this is not to say that the term “Tonghak” was used in a modern sense from the Three Kingdoms period onward, that is, referring to the “scholarship of Chosŏn” in a way clearly distinguishing between “East” and “West.” The term “*Sŏhak*” (Western learning) was used in the Three Kingdoms period to refer to the region west of Chosŏn territory (the Gulf of Parhae served to mark this territorial divide), primarily China and India, and to travelling to these territories to learn. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the term “*Tonghakkye*” referred to Chosŏn scholars, not Chosŏn scholarship or thought. Nonetheless, it is clear that the use of the term *Sŏhak* (Western learning) in the Three Kingdoms period presupposed and corresponded to Chosŏn as east of the Gulf of Parhae. Meanwhile, the “Tong” (East) in the term “*Tonghakkye*” used in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries neither connoted the modern terms “Orient” (*Tongyang*) nor “Eastern barbarians” (*Tong’i*)¹⁹ used by a number of ancient Chinese historians in historical records to disparagingly refer to the various tribes of the East, but “Chosŏn.” The historical reference to Chosŏn as “Haedong,” Tongguk,” and “Taedong,” therefore, did not have a disparaging connotation. These were rather terms of respect, as best represented in the

17. In volume four of the *Samguk yusa*, “Western learning” (*Sŏhak*) is referred to as “Wŏngwang’s study in the West” (*Wŏngwang Sŏhak*).

18. *Kyegokchip* (Collected works of Chang Yu), “Manp’il” [Miscellaneous notes].

19. While the “Tong” in “*Tonggi*” also means “East,” it did not refer only to Chosŏn but a much more general territory known as “the East” (*Tongbang*). Although designation of “Eastern barbarians” varied depending on the historical document, nine tribes were typically mentioned, including the Japanese, Mohe (Malgal), and Jurchen (Nyŏjin).

phrase “*Tongbang ryeü chi kuk*” (The country of decorum in the East).

Ch’oe Cheu used the term “Tonghak” to refer to his scholarship and thought as the scholarship of Chosön, signifying a basis in this ancient historical tradition along with a “scholarship of the East” in opposition to Catholicism flowing in from the West. Therefore, “Tonghak” offered to the people an easily comprehensible mode of thought indigenous to the Chosön nation, not to mention a powerful nationalist awareness in opposition to foreign and invasive *Söhak* (Western learning).

Tonghak progenitor Ch’oe Cheu designated Ch’öndogyo (Religion of the heavenly way) “Tonghak” in order to emphasize the faiths and philosophy of the Chosön people, who lived in the East, in opposition to the Western learning of the Catholic Church. Meanwhile, the philosophical and socio-political views, superstition, and mysticism that formed Tonghak’s basic content had their roots and basis in Chosön’s preexisting ideological heritage and national faiths.

Tonghak took form and developed under the influence of various aspects of thought historically sustained through time, such as philosophical thought, folk beliefs, Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism. As a complex mode of thought in which these elements intertwined, it outwardly appeared as binding together different currents of thought; in other words, it appeared a combination of three different modes of thought: Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism. However, Tonghak was philosophically based on the ideas that the universe emanates from material force (*chigi irwöllon*) and that “man and Heaven are one” (*innaech’öllon*). It was also based on the calls to “save the oppressed people” (*kwangje ch’angsöng*), “build the kingdom of Heaven on earth” (*chisang ch’ön’guk*), “protect the nation and tend to the people” (*poguk anmin*), and “propagate the virtuous teachings of Tonghak throughout the world” (*p’odök ch’önha*). In this regard, Tonghak thought was a systematization of the ideological heritage indigenous to the Chosön nation rooted in Chosön’s preexisting philosophical thought and national faiths. The doctrine that the universe emanates from material force (*chigi irwöllon*) and the idea that “man and Heaven are one” (*innaech’ön*), which served as Tonghak’s philosophical basis, were systematized based on Chosön’s medieval materialist philosophy (*chungse umullon ch’örhak*) and view of human nature.

In terms of explaining the general characteristics of the world, Tonghak was rooted in *ki irwöllon*, a mainstream philosophical theory of the Chosön medieval period claiming that “material force” (*ki*) generates the universe and all things in it independent of “principle” (*ri*). Tonghak also drew upon Chosön medieval thought with regard to human nature, ever an important issue for Tonghak thought. Describing human beings as the most divine beings, the

Tonghak idea of *innaech'ŏn* (man and Heaven are one) elevated humanity to the level of *Hanül*, the supreme lord of all things.

The ideas of “saving the oppressed people” (*kwangje ch'angsaeng*) and “building the kingdom of Heaven on earth” (*chisang ch'ŏn'guk*), which displayed an anti-feudal character and occupied important positions within Tonghak's socio-economic views, served to articulate Tonghak's ultimate purpose and fundamental ideology. These were ideas that sought to oppose the cruel feudal order, save the oppressed and neglected common people subject to feudal domination, and establish a new society in which everyone could live happily together, free of exploitation and oppression. The Tonghak ideas of “saving the oppressed people,” “building the kingdom of Heaven on earth,” and “protecting the nation and tending to the people” were also rooted in ideas of “virtue” (*sŏn*) inherited from ancient times in Chosŏn and encompassing progressive social, anti-invasion, and patriotic thought.

Tonghak's nationalistic character was especially apparent in elements of superstitious faiths. Its religious objects, content, consciousness, and hierarchies were either outright extensions or modified and systematized versions of nationalistic faiths indigenous to the Chosŏn nation. These included the worship of *Hanül*, shamanism, the idea of the enlightened immortal (*sŏnin sasang*), theories of divination (*ch'amwisŏl*), and the ceremony of ancestral rites, which was rooted in ancestral worship.

Regarding his journey toward spiritual awakening, Ch'oe Cheu described how, as his mind became clear and his body trembled, he was startled to hear what seemed like the words of an enlightened immortal (*sinsŏn*). Upon inquiring as to this presence, the following answer came from Heaven: “Do not be afraid. The people of the world call me the Lord of Heaven [*Sangje*]. Do you not know the Lord of Heaven?”²⁰ This description is analogous to that of becoming a shaman in shamanism.

With respect to Tonghak's religious content, there is little need for further explanation with respect to the ancient worship of *Hanül* and a view of human nature elevating humanity to the most important existing thing in the universe, as expressed in the phrase, “The will of Heaven is the will of man” (*ch'onsim i kot insim ida*). These practices were passed down from ancient times.

Other components of Tonghak's religious content included the *ryŏngbu* and *chumun*, the “sacred talisman” and “sacred incantation.” These were comprehensive systemizations of various ideas, including philosophical thought—specifically, the theory that material force generates the universe and all material

20. *Tonggyŏng taejŏn* (The sacred scriptures of Tonghak).

things within it independent of principle (*ki irwöllon*) and a view of the Great Ultimate (*T'aegŭk*)—popular folk faiths such as shamanism, the worship of *Hanŭl*, and the idea of the enlightened immortal (*sŏnin sasang*). The *ryŏngbu* and *chumun* were also based on national religious content indigenous to the Chosŏn nation.

There are dozens of talismans (*pujŏk*) used in the shamanistic practices of the Chosŏn nation. Examples include talismans for curing disease, repelling natural disasters, long life, harmonious relations and household affairs, and warding off “evil spirits” (*akkwi*) and disasters. The *chumun* (sacred incantation) also contained dozens of talismanic symbols, including the *ch'ilsŏng ryemun* (prayer to the big dipper), *sansin ryemun*, (prayer to the mountain god), *ryongwanggyŏng* (prayer to river or sea god), *chijang ryemun* (prayer to the god of the land), and *ch'ŏngnyonggyŏng* (prayer to the god of the sky).

This fact demonstrates how Tonghak's *ryŏngbu* and *chumun* were based on the elementary content of Chosŏn shamanistic beliefs. Tonghak followed in the footsteps of the “talismans” (*pujŏk*) and “incantations” (*chumun*) of shamanistic practices, adding content combining the idea of the enlightened immortal (*sŏnin sasang*), the Great Ultimate (*T'aegŭk*), the *Chŏnggammok* (Record of Chŏng Kam), theory that material force generates the universe and all matter within it independent of principle (*ki irwöllon*), and worship of *Hanŭl*. In this manner, Tonghak organized polytheistic practices into a new pantheistic form.

As further religious content, the beliefs in “eternal life” (*changsaeng pulsa*) and the “immortal on earth” (*chisang sinsŏn*) were extensions of the idea of the enlightened immortal (*sŏnin sasang*). The Tonghak beliefs in “eternal life” and the “immortal on earth” reflected the people's demand to escape feudal subjugation and realize a happy life free of exploitation and oppression. Here there are also Taoist elements. However, unlike the Taoist “world of the immortal” (*sinsŏn segye*) located in Heaven, these ideas, which were indigenous to the Chosŏn nation, depicted “eternal life” and the “immortal on earth” in the real world of humanity.

Here there is a problem that must be mentioned. *Sŏnin* thought (*sŏnin sasang*), or the idea that man could achieve immortality, was a progressive ideological legacy indigenous to the Chosŏn nation that emerged in ancient Chosŏn and developed thereafter. However, there are those that distortedly regard *sŏnin* thought as a foreign idea. In other words, they assert that Chosŏn's *sŏnin* thought was actually Taoist *shenxian* (*sinsŏn*) thought that had spread to Chosŏn from China.

In a number of works, including Kim Ryongjŏng's *Koguryŏ kobun pyŏkhwa* (Koguryŏ tomb murals, 1958), the immortals (*sŏnin*) depicted in Koguryŏ tomb

murals are misrepresented as Taoist immortals (*shenxian*). It is argued that *sōnin* thought did not exist in Chosŏn as a distinct idea but was actually a Taoist idea that came from China. Chosŏn's *sōnin* thought has thus been misrepresented as an idea that spread to Chosŏn along with Taoism from China.

What is unjust about the misrepresentation of Chosŏn's *sōnin* thought as an extension of Taoist thought? The problem may be clearly elucidated through the following comparisons: when *sōnin* thought emerged in Chosŏn versus when Taoism emerged in China; when Koguryŏ tomb murals were composed versus when Taoism spread to Chosŏn; and the content of Chosŏn's *sōnin* thought versus the content of Taoism.

Chosŏn's *sōnin* thought emerged in the thirtieth century BC. One can observe this in the *Sanhaegyŏng* (Classic of mountains and seas), in which Tan'gun is referred to as an immortal (*sōnin*) and in which it is described how Emperor Huangdi (*Hŏnhwŏn hwangje*; Yellow Emperor) came to Chosŏn and learned *sōnin* thought. Meanwhile, founded in China as one of the three great religions (*taejonggyo*) of the East along with Buddhism and Confucianism, Taoism emerged in the second century AD in the "Way of the Five Pecks of Rice" (C. *Wudoumidao*; K. *Odumido*), also known as the Way of the Celestial Master (C. *Tianshidao*; K. *Ch'ŏnsado*). This religion was founded by Zhang Daoling (Chang Torŭng) and systematized by his grandson Zhang Lu (Chang Ro). Taoism came to full fruition under Wei Boyang (Wi Paegyang) of Eastern Han and Ge Hong (Kal Hong, 286–363) of Eastern Jin. Furthermore, Kou Qianzhi (Ku Kyŏmji, 365–448) of Northern Wei systematized the method of becoming an immortal (*sinsŏnsul*) and the content of the idea of eternal life (*pullo changsaeng*). Taoism became a state religion in the seventh century under the Tang Dynasty. The periods in which *sōnin* thought and Taoism emerged were thus ultimately separated by close to thirty-seven centuries.

Comparing the periods in which Koguryŏ tomb murals were composed and Taoism spread to Koguryŏ, Anak Tomb no. 3 was constructed in the fourth century, the Tŏkhŭng-ri tomb was constructed in the fifth century, and Ji'an Tombs no. 4 and 5 were constructed in the sixth century. The remaining tomb murals were mostly composed in the fourth century, while only the mid- and large-size tombs in Kangsŏ were constructed in the seventh century. Meanwhile, Taoism came to Chosŏn in the early part of the seventh century. In 624 (King Yŏngnyu 7), the Tang Dynasty dispatched Taoist master (*tosa*) Suktal to Koguryŏ along with eight other people and the *Daodejing* (*Todŏkkyŏng*). Taoism was accepted in 634 (King Pojang 2) by Koguryŏ Grand Minister Plenipotentiary (*Mangniji*) Yŏn Kaesomun. The *Daodejing* arrived in Silla from Tang in 738 (King Hyosŏng 2). There is also a record showing that Paekche

General Mak Kohae was aware of the words of a Taoist master in 369, during the reign of Paekche's first king. These records demonstrate that Koguryŏ tombs were constructed before Taoism's systematization in China and before Taoism's propagation to Koguryŏ.

The contents of Chinese Taoism and Chosŏn's *sŏnin* thought are also different. As a religion, Chinese Taoism has clear objects of worship. Chosŏn's *sŏnin* thought, on the other hand, as one among many currents of thought, has no object of worship. The objects of worship in Taoism are the Celestial Venerable of the Primordial Beginning (C. *Yuanshi tianzun*; K. *Wŏnsi ch'ŏnjon*), Jade Emperor Lord of Heaven (*Yu huang shangdi*; *Okhwang sangje*), also known as the Great Jade Emperor (*Yu huang dadi*; *Okhwang taeje*), Grand Pure One (*Taishang laojun*; *T'aesang rogun*), of whom Laozi (Roja) was regarded as a manifestation, North Star (*Pukkŭksŏng*), Big Dipper (*Puktu ch'ŏlsŏng*), and so on. (The objects of worship were mainly in the sky.)

Furthermore, Taoism's content does not purely pertain to social thought but also to a philosophical worldview. In terms of social thought, Taoism not only describes a different immortal livelihood (*sinsŏn saenghwal*) but also a different manner by which to achieve immortality. In Chosŏn's *sŏnin* thought, immortality is achievable by human beings on earth, but in Taoism's *shenxian* thought, one can only achieve immortality by ascending to the City of Jade (*Okkyŏng sŏndae*).

These comparisons substantiate the fact that Chosŏn's *sŏnin* thought was not a foreign thought that spread to Chosŏn along with Taoism from China. *Sŏnin* thought emerged in ancient Chosŏn and was passed down without interruption, eventually cohering into the Tonghak ideas of "building the kingdom of Heaven on earth" (*chisang ch'ŏn'guk*) and "immortality on earth" (*chisang sinsŏn*).

Tonghak's religious rituals were also rooted in preexisting traditional and popular religious rituals indigenous to the Chosŏn nation. One may observe how the Tonghak practice of commencing religious rituals by offering pure water in a brass bowl (*ch'ŏngsu pongjŏn*), performance of ancestral rites (*chesa ũsik*), and ceremony for inducting new believers into the faith (*iptosik*) were similar to traditional ancestral rites, which was a custom of ancestor worship passed down over the generations wherein one would recite the inscription (*wi*) on the ancestral tablet, prepare and offer food, and read a written prayer (*chungmun*). Only the content of the written prayer, the kind of food, and the direction of the inscription on the ancestral tablet were different, while the ritualistic form remained intact.²¹

21. See the *Sangje ryoch'o* (Funeral and ancestral rites), *Tonggyŏng taejŏn*, *Chungmun* (Ritual

All of these facts support the claim that Tonghak's content and elements of superstitious faith were popularly formed and rooted in Chosŏn's traditional ideological heritage and folk religions.

In terms of philosophy, the thought indigenous to the Chosŏn nation that served as Tonghak's fundamental basis was rooted in none other than superstitious mysticism adapted from medieval materialist philosophy. However, at the time religious faiths and rituals were still amply embedded in the minds of the people. Thus what was important in this age of foreign religious invasion was not whether an idea was superstitious or not, but whether the national ideological content and heritage that had originated, disseminated, and taken root among the people would be excluded and annihilated or preserved in the process of taking on a new form to protect against the invasion of foreign thought. This was a particularly important problem at a time in which the Catholic and Western capitalist invasion was intensifying but when scientific thought was yet unavailable.

The systematization of Tonghak on the basic principles and foundations of the historically rooted national ideological heritage and popular superstitious faiths commenced under prevailing historical conditions with the aim of saving those things acknowledged as of the nation, protecting against the invasion of foreign thought, and preserving the nation and its people against foreign invasion—specifically, the Western capitalist invasion. This was most clearly expressed by Ch'oe Cheu's opposition to Catholicism: "The Way is the Way of Heaven [*ch'ŏndo*], but as scholarship it is Eastern Learning since it is of the East and received from the East [*Tonghak*]." ²²

While rooted in the ideological heritage indigenous to the Chosŏn nation and folk faiths, Tonghak also embraced Confucian, Buddhist, and Taoist elements. To the degree that Tonghak founders Ch'oe Cheu and Ch'oe Sihyŏng adopted a nationalist position, however, they sought to organize and root Tonghak in national beliefs indigenous to the Chosŏn nation and escape the influences of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism.

When Ch'oe Cheu took refuge at Ŭnjŏk Temple, an old monk named Song Wŏltang asked him which among the Three Teachings of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism was the most reasonable. Ch'oe Cheu replied, "This is an age that cannot give way to a new one through Buddhism, Confucianism, or other outmoded things."²³ At a later time he also said the following to Ch'oe

address), and *Ch'ŏndogyo ch'anggŏnsa* (A history of the founding of Ch'ŏndogyo).

22. *Tonggyŏng taejŏn*.

23. *Ch'ŏndogyo ch'anggŏnsa*, vol. 1, ch. 7, 33–34.

Sihyŏng: “Our Way is not the Way of Confucianism or Buddhism or Taoism.... The Way of Heaven [*ch’ŏndo*] is not Confucianism, Buddhism, or Taoism. Rather, Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism are an amalgam of the Way of Heaven.... In terms of thought, our Way is unprecedented and incomparable to anything past or present.”²⁴

Ch’oe Sihyŏng also said the following: “Our Way is like Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, but is not in fact Confucianism, Buddhism, or Taoism. Therefore, in speaking of ‘The Timeless and Boundless Great Way,’ wise men only speak of secondary things without speaking of essence. Suun Taesinsa [Ch’oe Cheu] was the first to reveal the essence of the world [*ch’ŏnji*], yin and yang, time, spirits, vitality [*kiun*], and harmony.”²⁵

This demonstrates that Ch’oe Cheu and Ch’oe Sihyŏng recognized and discarded Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism as one-sided modes of thought lagging behind the times. It also demonstrates that Tonghak was a newly organized mode of thought that “revealed the essential reason [*kimbon rich’i*] of the natural world and human society” and that was essentially distinct from Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism even while incorporating their religious principles. This fact is also confirmed by another historical document:

Concerned with moral obligations and integrity, Confucianism does not know the role of virtue. Buddhism eliminates the human race through Nirvana. Taoism is concerned with molding human behavior in accordance with the cycles of nature and is inadequate with respect to the ways of governance. Tonghak did not originate in Confucianism, Buddhism, or Taoism. Rather, Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism are elements of the Way of Heaven.²⁶

Tonghak was thus not rooted in or a combination of foreign religions, namely, Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, but originated, took form, and developed as a facet of the age-old ideological heritage of the Chosŏn nation and was a mode of thought indigenous to the Chosŏn nation that itself contained the principles of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism.

Tonghak’s character as a facet of Chosŏn’s indigenous ideological heritage was also related to its direct representation of the urgent demands and interests of the Chosŏn nation at the time. Tonghak did not merely express the various popular faiths and ideas of Chosŏn at the level of superstition with respect to

24. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, ch. 9, 40.

25. *Ch’ŏndo Yu Bul Sŏn* [The Way of Heaven and Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism].

26. *Chosŏn chejonggyo* [Chosŏn religions] (Chosŏn hŭngmunhoe, 1922), 322. This text was published in Japanese.

separate and partial matter and phenomena. It consolidated and organized these faiths into a single totalizing view with respect to the universe and nature while developing social demands regarding the prevailing problems of our nation into a single, independent system of thought.

Reflecting the socio-historical demands with respect to the intensifying internal and external contradictions of the Chosŏn feudal dynasty, Tonghak mainly operated on the basis of ideological rather than religious content, endeavoring to awaken and reorient the popular consciousness and overcome prevailing social contradictions. The purpose of Tonghak's resonance with folk faiths, as evident in rituals such as the sword dance (*kŏmmu*), talismans (*ryŏngbu*), and incantations (*chumun*), was to attract the attention of the masses and arouse their nationalist attention, since at the time the people widely believed in these kinds of folk faiths.

Within its outer shell of folk faiths, Tonghak contained as ideological content concern over the urgent problems that might determine the fate of the Chosŏn nation. In the early part of the nineteenth century, the most urgent demand with regard to improving the Chosŏn people's fate, along with resolving feudal subjugation, was to repel the Western invasion and advocate national autonomy. This demand is well reflected in the writings of Ch'oe Cheu.

So too does the ruler who buys and sells government offices.
 The Lord of Heaven's will is *kunggung*.
 So too does the wealthy miser piling money and grain.
 The Lord of Heaven's will is *kunggung*.
 So too does the lowly beggar.
 The Lord of Heaven's will is *kunggung*.
 So too does the wanderer
 Seek out Heaven [*kunggung ch'on*]
 Or go deep into the mountains.²⁷

"*Kunggung*" is an idea described in the *Chŏnggammok*. It is described as a means to preserve one's life and improve one's fate during times of calamity, transition, and foreign invasion. However, in including the ruling class along with the exploited general people among those seeking out Heaven (*kunggung ch'on*), Ch'oe Cheu shows how the social crisis had created an urgent demand among all members of society. From the mid-nineteenth century onward, Chosŏn feudal rule faced a severe crisis and the Chosŏn nation faced a tremendous threat in the form of Western invaders' frequent scheming to

27. *Mongjung roso mundapka* (Song of questions and answers between the elderly and young in a dream).

infiltrate Chosŏn and their forced occupations of China's Hong Kong and Shanghai, along with other port cities and Beijing. At the time, Tonghak provided a mode of thought reflecting the urgent demands of the people regarding the nation's fate and advocating for the nation's interests and autonomy.

Above all, Tonghak thought manifested most clearly in the idea of "protecting the nation and tending to the people" (*poguk anmin*). As one of Tonghak thought's fundamental tenets, the *poguk anmin* idea served to preserve national sovereignty against foreign invasion and advocate for the interests of the people. In general, Tonghak's *poguk anmin* idea concerned protecting the country and the nation against foreign invasion and promoting the safety of the common people. In other words, the content of this idea pertained to the security of the country (*nara*), nation (*minjok*), and common people (*paeksŏngdŭl*).

One important aim of Ch'oe Cheu in founding Tonghak thought, along with saving the people suffering under cruel feudal rule, was to stave off foreign and Western capitalist invasions and promote the safety of the country and the nation. Domestically, Ch'oe Cheu anticipated the inevitability and approaching crisis of Chosŏn feudal society's collapse. He expressed this in the ideas of "saving the oppressed masses" (*kwangje ch'angsaeng*) and "building the kingdom of Heaven on earth" (*chisang ch'ŏn'guk*). Internationally, he perceived the threat of foreign and Western capitalist invasions. He mainly expressed this perception in the *poguk anmin* idea.

What was primarily important in Tonghak's anti-invasion *poguk anmin* idea was opposing the Western-capitalist and Japanese invasions. Ch'oe Cheu observed the frequent incursions into the seas surrounding Chosŏn by the ships of Western capitalist invaders and was powerfully awakened to the disastrous fate awaiting the country and nation. In this regard, the following is recorded in a document of the feudal government: "Ch'oe Han [Ch'oe Cheu] stated, 'If the Western invaders appear, I shall attempt to repel the enemy through incantations [*chumun*] and masked dances [*t'alch'um*].'"²⁸

Ch'oe Cheu perceived a great danger in Western schemes to invade China, which was adjacent to our nation. In particular, he perceived a great and immediate threat to our nation with the forced occupation of Beijing by Great Britain and France in 1860. Ch'oe Cheu judged that the Western invasive forces that forcibly occupied Beijing would soon invade our nearby nation. In these conditions, he acknowledged that without opposing and fighting the Western invading powers, the nation could not be protected or the safety of the people assured. He thus included anti-invasion thought opposed to the Western

28. *Ilŏngnok* [Records of daily reflection], March 2, *kapcha* year, reign of King Kojong.

invading powers as a major part of Tonghak's content.

Along with the Western invaders, Tonghak also abhorred and opposed the Japanese invaders who had violently violated the nation's sovereignty and interests of the Chosŏn nation in the past.²⁹ Tonghak condemned the intruding Japanese invaders as sworn enemies with which coexistence was impossible. In the *Ryongdam yusa* (Hymns of dragon lake), Ch'oe Cheu wrote, "Receive the harmony of the Lord of Heaven, destroy the dog-like Japanese bastards in a single day, and swear eternal opposition to them at the Altar of Great Gratitude [*Taebodan*]."³⁰

Why would Ch'oe Cheu have condemned and opposed the Japanese invaders as enemies? At the time, the Japanese invaders had not yet engaged in outright invasion of our nation. Domestically, Japan was in the midst of the Meiji Restoration and was therefore undergoing a period of instability. Nonetheless, among neighboring nations, Japan was Chosŏn's main invader. In particular, Japan was the invasive power that had inflicted the most terrible disaster of the Chosŏn feudal dynasty period upon the Chosŏn people. (The Imjin Fatherland War [*Imjin choguk chŏnjaeng*] was the biggest war of the Chosŏn feudal dynasty period.) Therefore, Ch'oe Cheu's antagonism toward the Japanese was related to the ineradicable resentment etched into the hearts of our people during the Imjin Fatherland War. Furthermore, it was at this time that, amid the complications of the Meiji Restoration, the Japanese invaders began to cry out for the conquest of Chosŏn.

Ch'oe Cheu thus wrote the following in the "Ansimga" in the *Ryongdam yusa*:

Pitiful, pitiful.
 The fortune of that foreign land is pitiful.
 The dog-like Japanese bastards came and went in the *imjin* year.
 To one who had never used a spoon, of what use could a metal spoon be?
 Who in the world could know such an enemy?

This passage is imbued with Ch'oe Cheu's rage against Japanese invaders and thoroughgoing opposition to foreign invaders.

In response to the rapidly changing political conditions of the 1890s, Tonghak's second founder Ch'oe Sihyŏng advocated *poguk anmin* thought even more ardently. The intense expression of *poguk anmin* thought at this time was related to the overt dissemination of Western learning (*Sŏhak*) under the

29. *Ryongdam yusa* [Hymns of dragon lake], "Ansimga" [Song of a mind at peace].

30. *Ibid.*

protection of the feudal government. Now not only Catholicism, but also Methodism and Presbyterianism openly spread under the protection of the feudal government.

Meanwhile, the invasive and interventionist scheming of neighboring countries including Japan was intensifying. Following the signing of the 1876 Korea-Japan Treaty of Amity and Commerce (*Han-Il suho t'ongsang choyak*), the Japanese invaders' large-scale infiltration was complemented by the Qing invaders' forceful response while the Russian Tsar advanced southward from the north. In these conditions, repelling foreign invasion and saving the country and the nation emerged as urgent demands of the times. In reflection of such a prevailing atmosphere, even proponents of Enlightenment thought (*kaehwa sasang*) and Patriotic and Cultural Enlightenment thought (*aeguk munhwa kyemong sasang*) advocated anti-invasion thought.

Ch'oe Sihyŏng put forward the slogans of "Expel Japanese and Westerners" (*ch'ök Wae Yang*), "Repel the Western and Japanese invasions" (*ch'ök Yang ch'ök Wae*), and "Annihilate the Japanese and Western bastards" (*sop'a Wae Yang*). He condemned the Japanese invaders as the "*imjin* enemy" (*imjin wŏnsu*) and "*imjin* enemy with whom coexistence is impossible." Furthermore, he denounced placation of the Japanese invaders as treason.

This manner of Tonghak thought intensified all the more and was expressed practically in the form of anti-invasion struggle over the course of the Kabo Peasant War (1894). Arising under Tonghak's influence, the Kabo Peasant War deserves special mention as one of Asia's three great wars of resistance along with China's Taiping Heavenly Kingdom Peasant War and India's Rebellion of 1857. This was a historical event signaling the dawn of anti-imperialist national liberation struggles in nineteenth-century Asia. Furthermore, Chosŏn's Kabo Peasant War greatly impacted political developments at the global as well as regional level.

Evaluating Tonghak's global significance, one historian declared that the Tonghak revolution that occurred in Chosŏn became the starting point for every world historical event in the twentieth century. Without the Tonghak revolution (Kabo Peasant War), this historian claimed, the First Sino-Japanese War would not have occurred; in which case, the Russians would not have invaded Manchuria; in which case, the Russians would not have been defeated in the Russo-Japanese War; in which case, the Ottoman Empire would not have expanded into the Balkan Peninsula, binding together Bosnia and Herzegovina; in which case there would have been no war between Austria and Serbia; in which case, there would have been no First World War; and in which case, the Romanov Dynasty would not have fallen and Red Russia would never have

been born. This historian thus called Tonghak the mother of Soviet Russia.

Tonghak's nationalistic character is distinct from the content of Enlightenment thought, which argued for opening the nation's doors to receive the civilizational fruits of the West in the name of Chosŏn's modern development. It was also essentially distinct from the anti-invasion demands of those within the feudal ruling class, who rejected and suppressed Western thought and invaders while groveling before feudal China to preserve their own dominant status. Tonghak was nationalist thought composed of national faiths and national elements. Tonghak's nationalistic character played a positive role in awakening the people to national demands and interests, orienting them toward their shared national ideology, and prompting them to lead the struggle to oppose foreign invaders violating Chosŏn national autonomy and interests. In this respect, Tonghak was a mode of thought indigenous to the Chosŏn nation rooted in the traditional folk faiths, philosophies, and social thought of the Chosŏn nation and reflecting the demands and interests of the Chosŏn nation at the time. Therefore, the unscientific arguments that Tonghak was "a mechanical consolidation of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism," "the thought of people's uprisings," or "foreign thought" do not accord with historical facts.

Conclusion

Valuing all things of the Chosŏn nation, Tonghak decisively contributed to protecting the country and nation from foreign thought and invasions. However, no form of modern thought, including Tonghak, was ultimately able to save the country and the nation, which fell to Japanese colonialism. It would be decades before the Great Leader would create Chuch'e thought and lead the way down the long and arduous path to national liberation, whereby the Chosŏn people would establish an autonomous nation and proudly claim their place in history.

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