

Paper prepared for presentation at the SAIS USKI-KNDU-INHA CIS Joint Symposium
Johns Hopkins SAIS Rome building, February 22, 2017

Grassroots Origins of the Korea-US Alliance under Japan's Occupation

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Abstract

Historians generally regard the Korea-US alliance pact as an outcome of the first Korean President Syngman Rhee's strategic calculation. It however conflicts with the conventional wisdom that a President alone cannot sustain such an unprecedented international commitment without widespread acknowledgment and consent among the country's population. The contradiction is heightened even more when we recall the fact that Korean-American relations identity was cultivated amid the challenges mounted by increasingly popular Communist ideologies during the post-liberation era in South Korea. This paper will confront the question of whether the current existing accounts of post-liberation Korean politics have been missing a link between the sustainability of the alliance and the Korean people's particularly positive identity with respect to America. The study intends to introduce the untold stories of a large group of Korean followers of an indigenous religion, *Bocheongyo*, in Jeolla Province, whose adherents allegedly maintained a pro-American identity throughout their doctrinal socialization and their pro-independence activities during Japan's occupation period.

I. The Korean Peasants in North Jeolla Province after the *Tonghak* Revolt

In the latter part of the Joseon Dynasty, the Confucian government faced rapidly politicizing rice farmers who were increasingly dissatisfied with the relentlessly rent-seeking state. The exploitative taxation imposed by the local officials and expanding tenancy had

¹ An earlier version of this paper was previously published by *Korean Political Science Review* in 2014, and this manuscript is the expanded one for workshop distribution at the Washington D.C. Johns Hopkins University SAIS USKI International Symposium held on February 22, 2017.

resulted in a general subsistence crisis in the late nineteenth century. Along with the growing frustration shared by the Korean peasants and other commoners over the class structure, egalitarian ideas were introduced to the Korean people in the mid-nineteenth century by an influential thinker, Je-u Choi. The main focus of his teachings known as *Tonghak* (Eastern Learning), however, was not to advocate violent social reform. It was about stressing the importance of an impending, fundamental transformation of the cosmic order (Seok-san Yun 1996).

Choi was executed in 1864 by the Korean authorities who saw his teachings as threatening to their Confucian order. The egalitarian aspect of his teachings was espoused by radical, dissident intellectuals, and used as a theoretical foundation for their revolutionary ideas. Bong-jun Jeon, the revolutionary leader of the *Tonghak* army, organized a peasant force in 1894, attempting to overthrow the failing regime, sparked by ruthless exploitation of a local governor, Byeong-gab Jo of Gobu County. Since the victorious battle at Hwangtojae, Jeon's forces won several more battles, resulting in an expansion of its influence beyond Jeolla Province. At one time, most counties of Jeolla Province fell under their rule, and 53 revolutionary local authorities (*jibgangsso*) were installed in order to implement their reforms (Shin 1983, 60-76).

The deteriorating, internal order was not the only factor that made Jeon's slogans so popular among the farmers. Amid mounting encroachment of the European powers into Northeast Asia, Japan, a newcomer in this imperialistic competition, forced Korea to open its doors to foreign powers in 1876 (Key-hiuk Kim 1980, 204-255). Japanese cotton yarn and textile goods produced in their modern factories in turn successfully penetrated the Korean market, leading to a crisis in the peasant economy in Korea (Ishii 1991, 267-68; Ishii 2012, 96-98). The Korean landlords were also engaged in selling rice to Japanese traders, which resulted in shortages of domestic rice supply for commoner Koreans. Alarmed local officials in Korea even attempted to prohibit the export of Korean rice to Japan, fearing a possible subsistence crisis.

Japan, seeking an opportunity to occupy Korea, readily responded to the Korean government's request for help in suppressing the massive *Tonghak* uprising of 1894. The peasant forces armed with bamboo spears then had to face the advanced Japanese army allied with their own government forces. The result was disastrous for the peasant forces. It caused thousands of casualties in the decisive battle near Gongju. Jeon was arrested and executed in

public, forcing the farmers to return to their hometowns deeply frustrated and full of fierce anti-Japanese sentiment. Hyeong-yeol Kim, Gyeong-seok Cha, Gongshin Mun, and Gong-u Bak, who later founded separate religious denominations based on the Guri Village teachings, had been among these unsuccessful *Tonghak* fighters. A more unfortunate fate awaiting the disillusioned *Tonghak* followers was that Jeolla Province turned into one of the major regions which supplied rice to Japan after its annexation of Korea in 1910. Following this transformation, the farmers of Jeolla Province were deprived of the opportunity to enjoy their increased crops due to Japan's exorbitant rice extraction program.

Until the harsh repression of indigenous religions started in 1936, the North Jeolla region ironically remained less resistant to occupation authorities compared to other provinces of the Korean peninsula. The Government-General in Seoul reported in 1937 to the Imperial Diet in Tokyo that the number of strikes and participants of both tenant farmers and factory workers in the province had remained below average most of the times from 1921 through 1936 (Hanguk yeoksa yeonguhoi 1992b, 154-167). Compared to the seven other agricultural provinces of Korea, North Jeolla province had the least average number of tenant disputes and participants between 1921 and 1929 (Hanguk yeoksa yeonguhoi 1992b, 166-167).² Japanese Military Police Command in Seoul also reported to the Vice-Secretary of the Imperial Army in 1935 that North Jeolla Province was the second-least rebellious among the 13 Korean provinces (Hanguk yeoksa yeonguhoi 1992a, 327-425). The same report discloses that until 1935, except for communist incidents, all indicators of North Jeolla relating to labor strikes, tenant disputes and anti-Japan conflicts concur with the overall assessment. A secret report³ documented by Japanese authorities showed another example where residents of North Jeolla province area were noticeably less active in anti-Japanese political activities from October 1919 through September 1920. Jehwa Lee (1988, 215-222), a historian of the anti-Japanese movement, concurred with the ironic observation by presenting contrasting statistical data of active regions and the less active North Jeolla Province. Small-sized tenancy strikes in the region are recorded by the Japanese authorities to have occurred since the late 1920s (Ji 1993,

² The total numbers of tenant disputes and participants in North Jeolla province during the 1921-1929 period amounted to 17 cases and 910 persons, respectively, while those of a similar farming area, South Jeolla province, were 98 cases and 6,306 persons, respectively. The annual statistics shows a clear contrast with the averages of seven other provinces, which were 61 and 4,178, respectively. For a detailed study with respect to the contrasting tenancy disputes of South Jeolla province, see chapter articles of Yeoksamunjeyeonguso (1993).

³ A detailed introduction is available in the article, "Secret investigation map of Japanese occupation authorities is discovered," *JoongAng Ilbo*, March 1, 1996.

166-178), but not all of the counties of Jeolla Province were at the center of the armed struggle for liberation in the occupied Korea. Numerous factory strikes and sporadic armed clashes waged by the Korean communists kept occurring in the far northern cities of the peninsula. Jeolla Province, the birthplace of the *Tonghak* revolt in 1895, in contrast was not a haven for these pro-independence guerrilla fighters.

One might wonder what happened to the once most nationalistic peasants of North Jeolla Province. This ironical incongruence of “harsher alien extraction and less resistance” in the 1920s warrants some explanation. An answer among many other variables this author wishes to put forward is that new religious beliefs popular among the peasants was an element in constructing dual attitudes toward rice extraction by alien forces. Their retreat to spiritual world was closely related to their master’s promise of a panacea, Korea-US alliance. This article thus aims at exploring the evolution of their unique view of Japan’s imperialism, focusing on the non-violence doctrinal aspect, and the embryonic formation of pro-American identity viewing the U.S. as liberating intervening force, which could be a factor in forming their tactical and temporary accommodation of the alien occupation.

II. Japan’s Rice Extraction Program in Occupied Korea

After the Meiji Restoration, young reformers of Japan found that capital and technology were most urgently needed for Japan’s economic growth. Securing capital was made possible first by tapping domestic savings. More capital was collected from landlords and peasantry, mostly coming in the form of a heavy land tax. This process in turn caused many small landowners to give up their land and turn to tenant farming (Ouchi 1962; Tsuchiya 1968; Allen 1980; Ishii 1991, 114-23; Miwa 1993, 78). In the shadow of the industrialization, a further consequence of this extraction was that many of the Japanese farmers became so impoverished that they were forced to send their daughters to the cities as factory laborers. The daughters of peasant families served as a low-wage labor force in the textile industry, notably in the cotton and silk spinning factories, as well as in other light, labor-intensive industries (Patrick 1976; Ishii 1991, 151-66). Thanks to the low cost of labor, cheaply produced Japanese textile goods could out-sell those of competitors in the international market (Nam 1999, 300-301). It worked as a blessing for Japan, suffering from chronic trade deficit.

This heavy concentration of investment in the manufacturing sector during the period of “planting industry and encouraging business (*shokusan kougyou*, 殖産興業),” however, resulted in the structural problem of stagnant productivity in the primary sector (Nakamura 1971; Ohkawa and Rosovsky 1973). The consequence of these industrial policies was the creation of a “dual economy,” which meant that the growth rate differed between farming and manufacturing. Large numbers of Japanese farmers began to raise more profitable silkworms instead of farming rice. This in turn caused a further shortage of rice for the expanding urban working force. The slow increase of crop-production in the agricultural sector could not catch up with the needs of the rapidly expanding labor force in the cities.

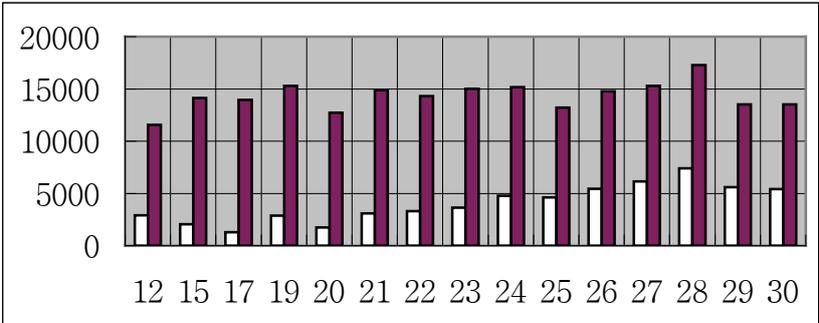
The growing disparity between the two sectors turned out to be a structural defect, which could inhibit Japan from further industrial growth. Coinciding with shrinking overseas demand for Japanese exports after the end of the First World War, a crisis hit the Japanese economy hard. Consequently, the nationwide Rice Riot broke out in 1918. Housewives and urban workers came out into the streets of Japan fiercely demanding cheaper rice. The Rice Riot was so threatening that the Prime Minister resigned and the government proclaimed martial law throughout the nation. The Japanese government had to devise a way to cool off domestic dissent stemming from the aggravating problems of this “dual economy problem” (Nam 1999, 301). The solution to the problem, the Japanese government leaders found, was to expand its agricultural sector into its colonies. Importation of more rice from the overseas territories was expected to lower the price of rice and to resolve the subsistence crisis of urban workers in Japan, and thus to keep the dual economy running.

Accordingly, the Japanese colonial Governments-General in Korea and Formosa (Taiwan), respectively, set about their massive rice extraction from the two territories in 1920. Through their 10-year-long land survey conducted from 1910 to 1920 in Korea, the occupation authorities attempted to find and secure unclaimed land. The process sometimes encroached on Korean farmers’ land, as they were poorly instructed regarding the survey and therefore did not register their ownership. In contrast, literate and wealthy Korean landlords could protect their land and with the accumulated capital opened modern businesses (Eckert 1991). The Japanese Government-General then provided incoming Japanese farmers and big businesses with cheaper and undeveloped lands in Korea, notably those in Jeolla Province. Those Japanese big businesses (*zaibatsu*) including Mitsui, the Oriental Colonization

Company (*Toyoutakushokukaisha*) and other individual investors were beneficiaries of this survey project.

The official gazette of the Government-General, *Record of 25 Year-long Administration* (施政 25 年史) recorded the dire situation in Japan and the subsequent policymaking in Korea. It noted that in 1918 nationwide rice riots erupted in Japan due to the shortage of rice supply and the prospects for an increase in Japan’s agricultural production was bleak, which prompted the implementation of a massive agricultural development project on Korean farms (Pak 1986, 223).

<Graph 1> Rice Production in Korea and Export (white bar) to Japan since 1912⁴



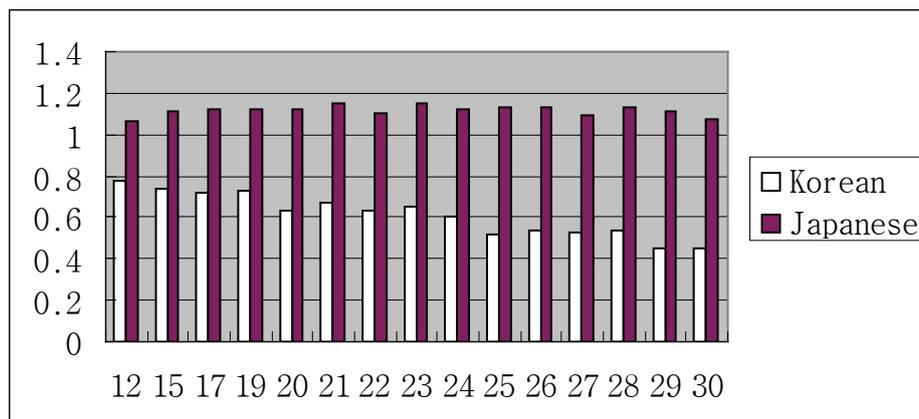
The Government-General was clever and innovative enough not to simply extract rice from the same amount of production in Korea; instead it adopted policies of increasing agricultural production in the colony in order to meet the rising demand for rice in Japan. <Graph 1> shows the gradual increase of rice-production in Korea. The incremental improvement was made possible by the introduction of a modern irrigation system and fertilizers to Korean farms. It however went with sharper increases of rice exports to Japan since 1921 as the <Graph 1> clearly reveals. The sharper increase of rice exports to Japan relative to the gradual productivity increase in Korea could proceed only by exploiting Korean tenant farmers. An agricultural economist of Jeonbuk University notes that Korean tenants often had to pay between 50 and 80 percent of their crops as rent to their Korean or

⁴ Rice production unit in the figure is 1,000 seok; Data taken from Pak (1986, 236). See also concurring statistics introduced by Nagano (2008, 38-43). For more detailed and comprehensive statistics, see Gyujin Song (2002, 195-232).

Japanese landlords (So 2006, 270-277). Perhaps because of the impoverishment of the peasantry, from 1916 to 1930 the number of tenant farmers increased from 48.6 to 80.1 percent of the total farming households in Jeongeup County (So 2006, 277). A Korean economic historian, Jong-hwan Ju (1967), has brought this unfortunate situation to light saying that half of all Korean farming households lived below the subsistence level during this massive rice extraction process.

<Graph 2> reveals the true objective of the rice production in Korea (Pak 1986, 236). Despite the gradual crop increase on Korean farms, Koreans had less to eat due to the massive export of rice to Japan; to feed Japanese workers in their industrial cities at the expense of under-consumption of rice in Korea. A local economic historian calculated that 84 percent of the total crop in North Jeolla province was exported to Japan in 1928, resulting in chronic malnutrition in the region (So 2006, 275).

<Graph 2> Annual Rice Consumption per Capita since 1912 (Unit: seok)



Japan's importation of raw and manufactured foodstuffs increased sharply during the period of 1920-1929. In 1930, Japan's importation of food from Korea and Formosa comprised 64 percent of Japan's total import of foreign foodstuffs (Lockwood 1968, 383). More colonial rice in the market allowed the Japanese industrialists to hold wage increases. By oppressing "internal colonies," Japanese state and big businesses expected its growth engine to keep running without being disturbed by the chronic problems of food shortages. Thus, "Korea and Taiwan were integrated with Japan proper, becoming integral parts of the latter's economy and major contributors to Japan's industrial growth" (Nam 1999, 305).

In Korea, however, the consequence was increasing tenancy and impoverishment in the largest farming land, namely, Jeolla Province (Nagano 2008, 38, Hong 2006, 57-88). Tenant farmers of Jeongeup (near Gobu), Buan, Gimje, Okgu and Iksan counties in North Jeolla Province, which were regarded as the most fertile areas in Korea, suffered most from onerous rent-seeking of such Japanese big colonists as Toutaku Co., Yamazaki, Ukon, Taki, Sato, Hosokawa and Akamoto and their Korean landlords (North Jeolla Provincial Government 1991, 1001-1037; Nagano 2008, 43). Gochang Kim family rapidly expanded its Japanese-favored business with the capital accumulation made possible from the onerous rent seeking practices in Jeolla province (Eckert 1991). In 1927, the number of Korean tenant farming households under Japanese landlords in Gimje and Okku counties reached 55 percent and 61.5 percent respectively (North Jeolla Provincial Government 1989, 1037).

The Governors-General developed the harbor facilities of Gunsan port and Honam Railway in order to efficiently transport rice to Japan from such interior farms as Gimje and Jeongeup (So 2006, 272). A unique view of Japan's imperialism based on an indigenous conflict and peace theory, which will be introduced in the next section was preached first to the people living near Gobu, the birthplace of the *Tonghak* Revolt. Most of his students who later founded numerous religious denominations attracting millions of frustrated Koreans were from this North Jeolla Province.

III. Spreading the Idea of “Cosmic Change and Eternal Peace” in Japanese Occupied Korea

1. A young philanthropist's attitude toward the *Tonghak* Revolt

A preacher whose scholarly name was Jeungsan was born in a small rural village, called Gaekmangri, in Gobu County of North Jeolla Province in 1871 (North Jeolla Provincial Government 1991, 885-926). His hometown was located at the center of the *Tonghak* revolt when he was in his early 20s (Choi 2006, 248). Records of his life tell that he kept preaching in favor of the poor, the weak, women, and the Korean quasi-slaves (*meoseum*). More precisely, however, his activities in his 30s, seem to indicate his compassion for human beings in general. Japanese studies recorded that he left many successful stories

demonstrating his esoteric ability to heal patients with herbal medicine or spiritual healing methods (Murayama 1935, 294; North Jeolla Provincial Government 1991, 885-926; Isomae and Yun 2013, 148-149). His clinic in Donggol (Guri village) near Geumsan Maitreya Buddha Temple of North Jeolla Province was therefore known at one time as a spiritual center of meditation, healing, and recovery. Thus, he later gained a noticeable reputation nationwide among Koreans, surviving the skepticism and suspicion of some traditional Korean scholars (North Jeolla Provincial Government 1991, 885-926). It was not only because of his esoteric ability to cure patients, but also for his efforts to provide the frustrated peasantry with an optimistic vision of a new world. His unique view of conflict is first documented when he encountered the massive peasant uprising during the *Tonghak* Revolt.

He was 24 years old when the historic peasant uprising took place in his home county, Gobu. In nationalistic efforts to fend off the foreign encroachment, Bong-jun Jeon led the uprising against both the foreign powers and the tyrannical local governor with the slogan, “Defending the Nation and Securing People’s Livelihood (保國安民).” The young philanthropist was allegedly concerned about the impending failure and defeat of the *Tonghak* forces. Responding to Jeon’s earlier request at his place to help the armed uprising, he had already attempted to persuade the revolutionary to stop the armed uprising. Foreseeing a disastrous ending, he again allegedly implored Jeon at his base camp, saying, “You will only end up killing many innocent people for nothing (Rhee 2007, 340; Dojeon Publication Association [hereafter DPA] 1995, 58).” Records tell that Jeon however refused to take his advice and began to launch a campaign against the local authorities.

There were important *Tonghak* fighters who contacted him at this time and later became his enthusiastic followers, firmly believing him as Jade Shangti (*Okhwangsangjenim*). Pil-seong An, who had listened to him and then left the peasant forces, witnessed his influential activities as a friend when the meditator-teacher set about preaching his unique peace theory since 1902. During his observation of Revolt, the young philanthropist also advised Hyeongyeol Kim of Suryu township of Geumgu County to immediately leave the peasant forces. Kim had already heard about his reputation as a respected scholar and took his advice to leave the peasant forces. Kim later joined the study group at Guri village and won the position of leader follower in the school.⁵ Remaining records do not clearly explain why he opposed the violent

⁵ He later married Ho-yeon Kim who accompanied him on his lecture tours as a close witness of his performances of so-called spiritual healing of the world. According to the Jeungsando HQ, Ho-yeon Kim

methods of the *Tonghak* followers. Examining his view of conflict would help explain his stance toward the revolt, which is the subject of the following sections.

2. Idea of “cosmic change” and “mutual life-giving (*sangsaeng*)”

His view of conflict is closely related to the two notions of “cosmic transformation” and “spiritual explosive (*wonhan and cheoksin*).” This section will not go into great detail about the esoteric but then popular cosmological theory propagated by Il-bu Kim and on the inevitability of the “cosmic transformation (*hucheon gaebyeok*).” Instead, it intends to introduce the connection between the young philanthropist’s idea of a new world order and Kim’s thesis of “Right Cosmic Change.”

He once alluded to Kim’s I-ching theory in explaining his idea of “cosmic change.” It is recorded that he met with Kim during his intensive study of traditional Asian thought (Murayama 1935, 294; DPA 1995, 67). Kim wrote a book called *Right Change* between the years of 1884-1885. “Right change (正易, *jeongyeok*)” referred to the inevitable course that the universe would take toward correcting the distorted direction of Heaven and Earth (Chang-yeol Yun 1991; Ju-seong Kim 1999). Referring to Shaoyang’s cosmology,⁶ Kim argued that the unbalanced universe would move in the right direction at the time of the fundamental transformation in the long-term cycle of the cosmic progress.

According to Kim’s model, every being in the current universe exists in the form of a combination between the two opposite and unbalanced elements, *Yin* (contracting energy) and *Yang* (expansive energy). Kim boldly stated that cosmic change would happen when the expansive movement of wood and fire energy of the Five Movements (五行) of the universe reaches its limit and turns into a contraction process of metal and water energy.⁷ At the time of the cosmic change, the imbalance between smaller *Yin* and greater *Yang* would be corrected, resulting in a balanced relationship between Heaven and Earth.⁸ In accordance with the changing order of the universe, Kim held that a Utopian, harmonious society would

who died in 1992 delivered invaluable and previously untold stories about his activities and teachings to their historical record collection team [Hereinafter interview a]).

⁶ Shaoyang (邵雍, A.D. 1011-1077) was the leading Taoist theorist on numerology and cosmology during China’s Sung Dynasty who influenced later neo-Confucian scholars such as Chu Hsi.

⁷ For a detailed explanation of this cosmology based on Asian medical science, see Han (1966).

⁸ For detailed ontological and cosmological discussions regarding the concept of cosmic change, see Chang-ryeol Yun (1992) and Yong-uk Kim (1992).

embrace humanity. The universal principle of human relations would be mutually life-giving rather than mutually competitive, as commonly found in the current world (Chang-yeol Yun 1991; Ju-seong Kim 1999).

Concurring Kim's mega-discourse, he said that the current world is the world of oppressed *Yin* (Earth or female energy) and revered *Yang* (Heaven or male energy) because of the inherent discord between the two forces (DPA 1995, 76-146). Interpreting ancient mathematical models (*Hado and Nakseo*), Kim had similarly stressed that the force of *Yang* was structured to be greater than that of *Yin*, which has caused inequality, coercion, oppression, and conflict between the powerful and the weak (Han 1966). Continuing conflicts between the bigger and the smaller have kept the current world in a state of being plagued by wars, occupations, and exploitation.

The relative deprivation, or sense of alienation, accumulates in the spiritual dimension of the world, turning them into spiritually destructive and revengeful energy, or a "spiritual explosive." A typical example of "spiritual explosive (gunpowder)" would be frustration, bitterness, grief and grudges shared by the defeated, suppressed, and captured peasant soldiers of the *Tonghak* revolt. A U.S.-based Korean historian interpreted his teachings, saying "The energy of this bitterness and grief has accumulated and compounded over time and has reached lethal proportions." (Rhee 2007, 343) Employing a new concept of spiritually lethal energy, he laid down his thesis on how the inherently competitive nature of the world has demanded of humanity a march of hardship. He stated that the principle of mutual conflict and competition has governed human affairs, generating technological and societal progress out of the desperate need for adaptation and survival. Against this backdrop, harmful grudges and grief have been accumulated, flooding the spiritual realm of universe. The lethal energy has said to be materialized in the world, causing horrible wars coupled with endless arms races. Interestingly, portraying a bomb capable of demolishing a whole city, he sternly warned his students that humanity would be exterminated unless the revengeful energy proliferating destructive weapons is put under control (interviews with Hyeonsik Kim and others⁹ [hereinafter interview b]). He concluded that only when all the spiritual explosives

⁹ Hyeonsik Kim interviewed on Aug. 14, 2008 next to his place is a grandson of Hyongyol Kim who was the chief student of the school. Other direct interview films with offspring of Naeseong An, Hoyeon Kim, Gongsin Mun, Pilseong An, Gongu Bak, and Kyeongseok Cha were provided many times at various memorial meetings of the Jeungsando Center in Daejeon until 2013.

that have been accumulated from tragic human history were resolved (*haewon*), would eternal peace be realized (Rhee 2007, 335-352; DPA 1995, 97-109; Choi 2006, 252).

He also stressed that his methods for achieving structural and therefore eternal peace involved combining the enlightenment of individuals, not a use of force in revolutions of the oppressed, especially in the time of the cosmic change and upheaval. Man whose mode of conduct is readjusted and tuned in accordance with the upcoming harmonious cosmic order is seen as the fruit and ultimate goal of the long-term progress of the man-participating universe. He was confident that when every individual attained enlightenment (*dharma*) and thus mentally synchronized with the eternally life-generating mind of the universe there would be no more conflict among individuals and among nation states. Acts of revenge, according to him, do not resolve or dismantle the accumulated “spiritual explosive,” but only serve to amplify and fortify the destructive, revengeful fire energy (DPA 1995, 76-147; interview b). Followers were systematically taught to refrain from use of violence in resolving any kind of personal or collective problems. These sorts of pacifist thought and peace identity were internalized among followers through nine-year-long intensive indoctrination from 1901 through 1909. Bocheongyo and other denominations all inherited the conflict-avoiding norms, which could influence their collective response and attitude toward the onerous squeezing of the tenants.

Considering this kind of view of the universe, it would come as no surprise that he delivered to his followers a totally different vision of Korea’s liberation from Japan’s relentless exploitation. He saw Koreans’ suffering as a symbolic and representative expression of mutual conflict in an unharmonious world. In this regard, it merits examining his view of Japanese imperialism that was widely shared among his followers.

IV. Views of Japanese Imperialism and the US among his Followers

1. Tactical retreat and ‘spiritual preparation’

The followers’ views of Japan’s imperialism were two-fold. First, their master held that Japan’s imperialistic greed, and that of nineteenth-century Europe as well, stem from the

unharmonious and expansive cosmic energy. They were told that Japan's imperialism was morally wrong and only reflected old and doomed cosmic conflict. As *Tonghak* teachings had contained a Korean millenarianism (Rhee 2007), his teachings at Guri Village were full of confident promise of eventual victory over Japan (interview a). Second, the harsh demonstration of Japan's industrial power to Koreans would foster a strong desire among frustrated and envious Korean intellectuals for their own modernization. Governors-General in Korea in fact needed to develop such economic infrastructure as railroads in order to efficiently extract rice and other natural resources from Korea. He pointed this out by saying, "Korea will learn new technologies from Japan because, for the past 300 years, the Japanese have successfully studied the art of gaining wealth and power (DPA 1995, 325-326)." He has also noted that Japan, like a servant, would "diligently" engage in introducing modern industrial technology to the occupied Korea in order to fulfill its greedy goal of expanding its Empire.

The fact that he had mentioned even before Japan annexed Korea in 1910 a harsh demonstration effect from Japan's coercive industrial integration is an intriguing example of his insight demonstrated to his followers. An introduction of the extraction infrastructure can be found in the noticeable expansion of Korea's railways under Japan's occupation. The length of railway owned by the Government-General increased four-fold between 1910 and 1940.¹⁰ As the crop increase program of the 1920s was intended to increase production for the onerous rice extraction, the industrial expansion was likewise aimed at transforming Korea to serve Japan's territorial ambitions over the continent. The Japanese decided to make Korea serve as a secure logistical base for their planned invasion of Siberia and China. Various social and economic development projects were undertaken both in Korea and extensively in Manchuria (Cumings 1987). The supply of electricity, for example, also rapidly expanded after 1930 in the occupied Korea under Japan's extensive promotion of munitions industries, mostly in the northern part of the peninsula (Kwang-tiek Kim 1974, 142). However, he has noted that the Japanese introduction of modern technologies would not be popular among Koreans due to the lack of mercy of the alien rulers (interview b).

He was confident that the Japanese Empire would not last that long, hinting that Japan's endless attempts to expand its Empire were destined to fail (Isomae and Yun 2013, 148-154;

¹⁰ Data was taken from Chosen Sotokufu, *Tokei Nempo- 1906-1949*, cited by Kwang-tiek Kim (1974, 138).

interview a). Descendants of his followers recall that even prior to the formal annexation in 1910, their master stated that the Japanese Empire would eventually collapse owing to its “spiritual betrayal” (interview b). He said that learning scientific technology from the Western people, such as the Dutch and Americans, who helped Japan learn modern sciences, and then turning around to use that technology against them, is like betraying one’s own ‘teacher.’ In regard to Japan’s reckless decision to go to war with the United States, he once told that Japan would end up being utterly ruined by superior U.S military power (Lee 1963, 343; DPA 1995, 315, interview b). Multiple records¹¹ and testimonies tell that the followers were told in 1906:

“Joseon(Chosun) was once a teacher nation that imparted teachings upon Japan. Since the realm of the spirits does not tolerate betrayals of benevolence, Japan’s supremacy will not be everlasting, merely momentary. Learning vast knowledge from the Western people and then attacking them is a betrayal of benevolence. The Japanese war against America will be a retribution for all who betray their teacher, and the Japanese will hence suffer utter ruination.”

The leading Korean religion analyst, Yiheum Yun, has discovered interesting investigation reports. According to the Japanese Police reports in 1935, Bocheongyo followers believed that a U.S.-Japan war would break out soon and Korea would win independence after Japan’s defeat (Yun 2007, 323-328). The first compilation volume of their religious history was published in 1926, and the revised version was printed in 1947, then including what had been previously deleted for fear of Japanese investigation. In the 1963’s reprinted version, it was recorded that their master had told the followers in 1908 that when American intervened in the Korean affairs, Japan would disappear.” (Lee Sangho 1963, 135). Cha’s master and Cha himself therefore even advised his followers not to wage an anti-Japanese struggle until the United States was involved in the war against the Japanese Empire (DPA 1995, 377; interview b). Instead, he told his followers to meditate upon the *Taeulju* mantra to gain enlightenment in order to be mentally mature for a new universe in the time of the upcoming cosmic change (*huncheon gaebyeok*). This indoctrination may partly explain why, unlike the Communists in Northern Korea, South Koreans in general wholeheartedly welcomed American Forces who

¹¹ Sources are also found in Sangho Lee, *Daesun Jeongyeong* (Gimje: Dongdogyo HQ, 1963), p. 343 [A careful observer like Prof. Yun of SNU would tell that DSJ organization which taps Lee’s work has nothing to do with the pan-Bocheongyo group]; The text was drawn from DPA, *Dojeon* (Daejeon: Sangsaeng Publisher, 2015), p. 513.

landed in Seoul in 1945. In other words, an embryonic identity of American forces as a liberator and a future alliance partner (*gantaehapdeok*: 艮兌合德) among South Koreans had been instilled through the popular, doctrinal education of Bocheongyo since the 1920s. There is a more explicit evidence supporting this observation. When their master and the followers traveled to Gunsan in 1905, a follower, Byeong-seon Kim, was told to recite:

“When Geon(乾, heaven) and Gon(坤, earth) assume their proper positions, the flower of eternal peace shall bloom. When Gan(艮: Korea) and Tae(兌: America) assume their proper positions, radiance shall suffuse all lands.”¹²

Among 8 diagrams, Gan(艮) was repeatedly told to signify Korea while Tae(兌) was referring to the U.S. in the Bocheongyo organization. To Bocheongyo followers, the fateful partnership between Korea and the U.S. meant liberation from Japanese occupation with American assistance, and continuing joint contribution to global peace. This also can explain partly how pro-American identity survived the high tide of Communist propaganda since the liberation through the onset of the Korean War.

Interestingly, there was another concept referring to Korea’s future relations with America among Bocheongyo leaders and followers. Referring to I-ching diagrams, they propagated a fateful partnership between Korea and America with the term of *gantae hapdeop* (艮兌合德) or *gantaegung*(艮兌宮), meaning that Korea was meant to be the security partner of America both before and after the great civilizational transformation. Korea would represent the the Eastern spiritual civilization while the US would represent material element of human civilization, thus mutually complementing the more balanced governance of the coming world. When Cha and other followers kept company their master in 1908 during a visit to Seoul, they were told.

“He asked Gongu Pak whether rice follows an iron pot (Korean traditional rice cooking caldron) or an iron pot follows rice. Pak answered, “Of course, rice goes into an iron pot.” He said, “Your answer is very correct. Rice means the U.S. and iron pot means Korea. In order to prepare rice meal, rice should be put inside an iron pot. After Japan leaves Korea, the western culture will prevail in

¹² For detailed source, see Sangho Lee, *Daesun Jeongyeong* (Gimje: Dongdogyo HQ, 1963), p. 195; Nakwon Kim, *Yonghwajeongyeong* (Gimje: Odongjeong Chulpan, 1972), p. 50; Jungseong Lee, *Cheonjigaebyeokgyeong* (Jeonju: Yongbong Chulpan, 1992), p. 47.

Korea before the harmonious cosmic order comes to humanity.¹³

Another evidence of Bocheongyo's pro-alliance identity formation is found in the works of a revered Buddhist Monk. Tanheo, who once served as Dean of Dongguk University's Graduate School, was the second son of the Bocheongyo leader, Honggyu Kim. When Tanheo was young, he went through an intensive education program inside the Bocheongyo dormitory. He later converted to Buddhism, but his interpretation of *Jeongyeok* (Right Change) carried on Bocheongyo's teachings. It reads that South Korea would ascend to a robust ally of America after the Korean War, and the two would amplify their common geostrategic interests. Tanheo even interpreted another 8 Diagram of King Wen (founder of Zhou Dynasty in ancient China) that when US-China rivalry escalates in the last phase of the expansive cosmos South Korea wisely sides with its ally, U.S. (Tanheo 2012). He implied that even after the harmonious world finally comes to humanity, Korea and America would keep helping each other rebuilding a totally new Asia-Pacific world order (Tanheo 2012). What matters here is not whether Bocheongyo's unique theory of Korea-US relations is internally and empirically valid or not. The important thing is that their view of America as a fateful ally was secretly disseminated and widely shared among a large populace of Koreans under Japan's occupation.

According to path dependency theory, the first image or identity as to America introduced or planted among the grassroots Korean people can work as embryonic origins of pro-American identity shared in the post-liberation Korean society. The American intervention and joint struggle fighting the Communist penetration during the Korean War could have amplified the pro-American identity, especially among those who witnessed the bellicism and ruthless treatment of human dignity under the short Communist rule.

2. Covert financing for the independence movement

This was the vision and message that his followers such as Gyeong-seok Cha's Bocheongyo, Hyeong-yeol Kim's Maitreya Buddhism, Gong-u Bak's Taeulgyo and Chi-bok

¹³ This story was testified by a son of Gongu Park's chief follower, Cheonsu Kim, seven times total at his residence in Hwigyeong-dong of Seoul and Jeungsado HQ. (Interviews by DPA conducted on Feb. 1, 2002; Jul. 27, 2002; Oct. 12, 2002; May 29, 2003; Nov. 28, 2003; Dec. 2, 2003; Feb. 14, 2003).

Lee's Jehwagyo, all headquartered in North Jeolla Province, carried and delivered up until Japan's defeat in WWII (Jeongeup County Public Relations Office 1983, 119-122; North Jeolla Provincial Government 1991, 885-926). Maitreya Buddhism¹⁴ (Moak mountain), Taulgyo (Taein), Jehwagyo (Geumgu), and many others all headquartered in North Jeolla Province. Choi (2006, 249-254) of Korean religion studies held that North Jeolla, especially Jeongeup, was home to numerous Guri Village group denominations. Among them, Cha's Bocheongyo near Jeongeup one time reportedly had six to seven million followers nationwide in Korea, drawing acute attention from the Japanese authorities (Bocheongyo Junganghyeopjeongwon 1961; Yi 1992; Yun 2007, 221-353; Isomae and Yun 2013, 148-154).¹⁵ Murayama (1935, 305), a Japanese anthropologist hired by the Government-General, reluctantly recognized the Police Bureau's assessment that in its heyday of the 1920s the number of Bocheongyo followers numbered at least a million nationwide. To our astonishment, American Consul-General Miller also reported to Washington in 1925 that Bocheongyo followers possibly numbered six million of Koreans in its brief heyday.¹⁶ An assessment by a Korean religion specialist, Choi (2006, 248) of Ewha Womans University that at one time the number reached around three million is still surprising. Japanese Methodist Christian missionary hired by Japanese Government General reported that around 1920, for example, in Busan, a half of Busan citizens were Bocheongyo followers and Korean villages were full of spell chanting sound (Yoshikawa 1921, 358-360).

Converting to the Guri Village meditation student from a militant participant and a son of *Tonghak* revolt leader, Cha shrewdly and successfully gathered later the largest number of religious followers among similar denominations since 1916. His organization championed indigenous religious movement in all provinces of Korea. Cha's egocentric interpretation of

¹⁴ According to records, Hyeong-yeol Kim and his wife firmly believed that their master was the incarnated Maitreya Buddha after numerous spiritual experiences.

¹⁵ According to Yun (2007), Emeritus Professor of the Seoul National University, Cha championed the indigenous religion in Korea until the mid-1930s; Another interview of the author with the village chief, Yeongcheol Hwang of Daeheungri (former-Headquarters of Bocheongyo) of North Jeolla Province made on July 30 in 2011, confirmed that in the early 1920s North Jeolla area was dominated by Bocheongyo followers.

¹⁶ Miller wrote that "For a time, it [Pocheonkyo or Hoomchikyo] enjoyed great popularity among the ignorant and superstitious (it is said to number some 6,000,000) but is now on the wane." Ransford S. Miller, "Political and Social Conditions and Organizations in Chosen: the Public Safe Act," American Consul-General's Report to the State Department submitted on May 29, 1925. Copies (document number: 3-004541-025-0056) are available at the history data base of the Independence Hall of Korea. <http://search.i815.or.kr/OrgData/OrgList.jsp?tid>. (Accessed on November 27, 2015).

the doctrine and bizarre events of enthroning himself as a religious Emperor however left a negative impression among ordinary Koreans. Other alumni of the private school criticized that Cha used the influence and authority of his master's wife, who was designated as the official successor of the organization. Some fellow Koreans misunderstood Cha of his ostensibly accommodative attitude toward Japan's occupation – some events conspired by Japanese ill-minded propaganda team – labeling him as pro-Japanese collaborator. His influence nevertheless was strong enough to cause growing concerns among Governors-General. In 1926, Governor-General Makoto Saito met the ambitious Korean religious leader in person to investigate and curb his unwelcome influence (Yun 2007, 307-312).

Recently, it has been found that Cha's nationwide organizations were engaged in raising funds to be covertly delivered to Korea's Government in Exile in Shanghai, China (Bak 2002, 142). Bocheongyo was also documented to have attempted to provide military funding for anti-Japanese fighters in Manchuria.¹⁷ Bocheongyo collected large amount of donations from farmers and sometimes from sympathetic Korean big landlords. Considering the large organization and mounting evidences revealing their hidden independence agenda, Bocheongyo could be the leading financial supporter for Korea's overseas independence leaders in the 1920s and 1930s (Bak 2002, 142; Yun 2007, 221-353; Kim 2010, 187-197). For example, a key figure of Bocheongyo, Hongkyu Kim, was recently officially awarded the independence movement honor by the Korean government for his secret service in delivering independence funds overseas (Choi 2006, 254).

The nationwide peaceful independence demonstrations in 1919 were probably more fueled by popular beliefs of mantra meditators in the predestined victory and by their self-esteem as masters of the post-upheaval world. Even though Cha ordered his followers to refrain from violent protesting, their underground network might have also facilitated nationwide communication in calling for joint uprising. It is noteworthy herein that the U.S.-led Cairo Declaration which enabled Korea's liberation to be inspired by the resolute chorus of the Korean people in 1919 against the occupation. Notably, it was President Syngman Rhee who persistently requested Korea's independence clause in the Cairo Declaration through President Roosevelt's assistant. Late President Rhee interestingly declared in 1946 his determination to install a South Korean government, making his official visit to Jeongeup,

¹⁷ Records of independence movement activities in which Bocheongyo followers were involved are available at <<http://search.i815.or.kr/OrgData/OrgList.jsp?tid=ms>> (Accessed on November 27, 2015).

which was the center of Bocheongyo movement during Japan's occupation.

Compared to major religions including Christianity (five times) and Buddhism (three times), such indigenous Korean religions as the Pan-Guri Village meditation group (22 times) and Cheondogyo (17 times) were more frequently reported by a leading newspaper to have been involved in waging anti-Japanese activities during the 1920-1940 period (Chosun Ilbosa 1986, 552-55). Bocheongyo leaders and followers refrained from waging organized and violent armed struggle. Those numerous newspaper reports tell of their financial support for exiled leaders or sharing forbidden documents related to their beliefs in Korea's eventual liberation.

A rigorous empirical study is required in order to fully appreciate Bocheongyo's contribution to the independence movement. However, the fact that the Government-General was hostile to Bocheongyo attests to untold, secretive involvement of the religious organization in the anti-Japanese movement. Notably, the Government-General finally decided to forcefully dismantle Bocheongyo organizations since 1936 (Chosun Ilbosa 1986, 552; Choi 2006, 254). A leading specialist in Korean religion studies has claimed that Bocheongyo followers did support the independence movement, for which it faced harsh repression and finally collapsed in 1936 (Yun 2007, 221-354).

V. An Irony and the Significance of their Beliefs

This author has attempted to introduce a Korean view of conflict and peace by tracing two ironically incompatible developments in Japan's economic penetration into Korean society. The formerly militant *Tonghak* followers in the late-nineteenth-century Korea appeared to accommodate the alien rule, while their relative living conditions ironically continued to deteriorate. The political economic interaction behind the growth of the idea of "cosmic change" was introduced first in this paper in an attempt to contrast the irony and thus demonstrate the influence of their ideas and beliefs.

Compounded by frustration over the failed uprising and loss of their homeland, the teachings of the Guri Village meditation school spread rapidly among the former *Tonghak* followers. His teachings were not about violence and struggle. It was more about a "spiritual" departure from the fundamental shackles of conflict and oppression structured in this world. The doctrine seems to have coincided with the desperate needs for a Utopian promise among

the nationalistic Korean farmers. It attracted those Korean farmers of North Jeolla Province who fell prey to Japan's exorbitant rice extraction program. The level of indoctrination was the deepest in Jeolla Province since most of the denominations were headquartered in the same region.

Among many explanations for their changed behavior in the 1920s, this study has shown that their beliefs and new identities, views of imperialism, and conviction in the eventual liberation need to be included. In other words, the teachings could be one of the factors, if not the main factor, influencing their new identity and behaviors among many other explanatory variables.

Recent findings tell us of another twist of history. Their ostensibly compliant attitude seemed to be tactical and temporary. Disturbing to Japanese occupation authorities, Bocheongyo attracted the largest number of followers in the 1920s through presenting Koreans a vision of eventual liberation (Choi 2006, 248; Yun 2007). Newly discovered documents and studies reveal that they boldly risked financing exiled Korean leaders in Shanghai (Bak 2002; Choi 2006, 252-255).

The comparative studies of previously untold indigenous Korean religions in the 1920s show the significance of the non-violence idea among peasants in North Jeolla province in the early part of 20th-century Korea.¹⁸ Without a proper understanding of the influential ideas shared among the farmers, contemporary Korean studies would miss an important part of the Korean society in the 1920s and the embryonic origins of pro-American identity planted among Koreans under Japan's occupation.

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¹⁸ "Seong-lin Lee and a few others attempting to wage an independence movement with the prospect of Emperor Cha are indicted," *Donga Daily*, June 22, 1921; For other evidences, see also Cheong Lee (2007, 464-465) and Jeongsin Munhwa Yeonguwon (1992, 873-74).

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