

# Values in the Global Age and the Life Spiritualism of Donghak

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## Abstract

*This article examines the life spiritualism of Donghak, one of the representative Korean national religions, to establish the relevance of Donghak in the search for metaphysical references for a new value system in the global age. The current reign of multinational corporations and recent leaps in information technology have turned the whole world into a single mega society that defies the traditional world order characterized by blocks of nation states. This change—in the way the different parts of the world are connected—presents a new challenge for humanity: the need to establish a global community governed by the idea of peace and a respect for life. The road map to this new community begins with a step, and this step consolidates a value system that helps to supersede the refuse of the old world order such as war, materialism, alienation, racial, and sexual discrimination, and environmental destruction. Donghak ideals can be of great help in this venture towards a new global community, and thus, this study on Donghak's life spiritualism suggests a way of utilizing one of the most traditional Korean value systems in trailblazing a path towards a new value system—much needed in the emerging global order.*

**Keywords:** globalization, global community, Donghak, life and peace, cosmic community, world view, neo-humanism, value systems

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## Introduction

The 21st century will be recorded as the era of globalization.<sup>1</sup> Commercial enterprise overflows national borders, while information technologies reshuffle entire industries, precipitating the reshuffling of the entire world order. Out of a series of socio-technical changes, a new kind of community is emerging over the surface of the globe: a mega society that comprises the whole array of nation states as individual members. Along with the emergence of this new global community, the domestic sectors of individual nation states (e.g. military/political/environmental/cultural sectors) become connected with their counterparts in other nation states, forming new alignments of interconnectedness among them. The new community bases itself not on individual nation states, but on transnational relationships. It has now become an aspect of everyday life for most of the world's inhabitants to *live locally but think globally*.

Along the path to globalization, a new culture and a new world order bloom abundantly. As the whole world takes up this path, it finds itself pondering a major question: will globalization lead to a new civilization that transcends the world order of nation states, or will it be the same as of old days when life was punctuated with world wars and environmental disasters? Those who believe the former posit that with the help of newly established transnational communication networks, transnational civil organizations and politicians will find ways to bring under control most of the problems engendered through conflicts among nation states (e.g. environmental devastation, the stockpiling of weapons of mass destruction, global hunger and poverty, and human rights violations). For those who predict the latter outcome, the post nation state world order will be characterized by a prolonged chaos and an extended spread of neo-liberalism since the control of the nation states over different interest groups will have collapsed.

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1. Harvey distinguishes the word "globalization" from "internationalization." According to him, the former is used to refer to the historical process through which the world community acquires a new character, whereas the latter simply refers to the increasing volume of commercial and cultural transactions between modern nation states. For details, see Harvey (1990, 328).

The drastic difference between these two outlooks on globalization comes from contradicting assessments of the historical phenomenon of globalization. The two opposing views, however, share one element: both are based upon a negative critique of the consequences of the modern nation state world order, and both attempt—by criticizing the modern world order—to overcome the negative aspects of modernity.<sup>2</sup> Thus, even though the two opposing views assess the future outcome of globalization differently, they share the same view in characterizing it as a world historical change in the human effort, in order to push the modernization process beyond its initial stage. This is why some historians, like Ulrich Beck, focusing on this common assessment of globalization as a remedial stage of modernization, dubbed it a “second modernization process” (Beck 2000, 26).

To bridge the two opposing sides and channel human effort into a collective endeavor to manage the second modernization process successfully, it is necessary to come up with a desirable and effective methodology to help humanity respond properly to fast unfolding globalization and its ramifications. Therefore, the primary aim of this methodology should be to make available a global consciousness that will enable humanity to reflect on the modern nation state world order, so that human beings can pursue such development as allows life in a sustainable ecology and fosters a stable peace. In the search for the new logic of life in the era of globalization, the traditional Korean value system of Donghak 東學, with its life spiritualism and other value-laden concepts, can provide much needed insights into reorienting the way human beings consider their relationships with the rest of the world. A kind of established religious and value system, Donghak emerged on the Korean Peninsula in the late 19th century as the Joseon Dynasty struggled against invasive Western powers. The Donghak movement recruited a large segment of the Joseon population, because it

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2. Some of the most significant characteristics on the rise of modern nation states are identified as the accumulation and centralization of oppressive powers, the completion of central systems of control, the reinforcement of economic control, and the aggressive application of cultural control. See Tilly (1990, 17-28, 96-99).

was accepted as a creative option for promoting solidarity among people who found themselves overwhelmed by the superiority of Western material and cultural forces.

As the term Donghak originally refers to the “learning of the country in the east (i.e. Korea),”<sup>3</sup> its value system was an independent expression of the collective *modern* desire of Joseon people to overcome the national crisis befallen them as the encroachments of Western powers—with their modern weaponry, capitalist economies, scientific technologies, and nation state politics—created havoc in their country (Park 2014, 115-121). However, Donghak transcends the boundaries of the Korean nation in that it is based upon a monistic and organic world view, constituting it as an alternative to the Western dualistic and mechanical metaphysics. Donghak sets up the perimeter of human consciousness, not within a closed local community but in an open and cosmic community (i.e. the entire universe). In this universalism, all that exists is closely interrelated, and the sustenance of any part inevitably depends upon the wellbeing of all the others. Donghak’s universal life spiritualism finds its best expression in the concepts of *sicheonju* 侍天主 (I serve Heaven within me) and *hucheon gaebyeok* 後天開闢 (literally, “post-cosmic creation”): the former propagates the belief that all beings are serving Heaven within themselves, while the latter serves as a practical methodology for the former since it is based upon the view that the age of chaos will eventually pass and a change of great magnitude shall bring about a totally new civilization in which life will be guided only by the light of *mugeuk daedo* 無極大道 (the great cosmic way). Donghak preaches two main concepts. The first is the *sanctification of life*, through which—by recognizing Heaven within all living things—individuals can serve other humans along with all life forms in the world as if they were Heaven itself. Donghak’s second preaching, the *sanctification of society*, extends this first one to the social dimension by encouraging all

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3. Korea was traditionally referred to as “Dongguk 東國” (country in the east); hence other referents like “dongsa 東史” (history of the country in the east, i.e. Korea), “dongui 東醫” (medicine of the country in the east) and so forth. Thus, “Donghak” refers not only to “Eastern Learning”—a study set up as an antithesis to Western Learning—but more specifically, the “learning of the country in the east (Korea).” See Y. H. Kim (2012, 10).

human beings to serve society (as a congregation of all human beings) as Heaven. This is founded upon the notion of *sallim* (rearing life). In this light, Donghak is not just an ordinary established religious system, but a movement of *sallim* guided by the idea of serving others.<sup>4</sup> Because of its unique organismic view on the relationship among all living things, Donghak can be reinterpreted as a viable alternative to the binary Western metaphysics as a new global consciousness for the 21st century. Fast paced modernization attuned to the norms of Western civilization has had many tragic results at both personal and global levels, mainly because development has required the loss of individual identity and environmental devastation. Any viable remedy to this trouble should come in the form of a life-integrating, organicist, and self-sustainable philosophy of mutual love; it is because the current worldwide crisis was precipitated by rapid material development achieved through the sacrifice of life in the name of the dictatorship of instrumental reason, and the exploitation of life forces in the forms of mechanical reductionism. With the strong emphasis on life and spiritualism enhanced by its unique cosmic world views, Donghak may come to rescue humanity from its current crisis.

Globalization, in its most typical development, unfolds in the form of globalization of locality in which the local comes to interact intensely with the global. With the rapid development of telecommunications and increasing human mobility, local cultures often become highly symbolized and transported to almost everywhere on the surface of the earth. Donghak, a Korean traditional religious value system, can also partake in this globalization of the local, shedding light on the path towards a practical value system for the era of globalization. In order to examine the potential of Donghak as global consciousness, this article investigates the characteristics of globalization and the universality of Donghak's life spiritualism by focusing on the analogous natures of the neo-humanistic Donghak and the socially conscious values of a future global consciousness.

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4. This reinterpretation of *sicheonju* and *hucheon gaebyeok* with the notion of serving and *sallim* is one of the central concerns in Yong-hui Kim's work. For details, see Y. H. Kim (2012, 111).

## Theorization of Globalization and the Call for a New Value System

Globalization has been experienced, most of all, as a re-rendering of space and time. The rapid development of capitalism and information technology has contracted distances between localities, nation states, and even continents, resulting in a new world order and a new way of life along with it. This worldwide transformation of reality has drawn the attention of scholars in various disciplines, most of whom have reached the similar conclusion that globalization is an inevitable stage, wherein the way modernization has been carried out is corrected in a radical fashion. Among so many theories of globalization, the following are noteworthy in that each represents, respectively, the theoretical analysis of the economic, cultural, and world order aspects of globalization.

Firstly, Immanuel Wallerstein focuses on the economic upheaval with his “world systems theory,” which has been praised as a trailblazing attempt to theorize globalization.<sup>5</sup> According to this theory, globalization is not a fresh phenomenon; it has been going on ever since Western capitalists transgressed regional boundaries and flooded the globe with the globalization of capital. In the 1970s, American hegemony began to retreat, opening up the period of transition from a monocentric to multicentric world order. This new multipolar world order initiated a new struggle for hegemony that ultimately led to a “world economy” or “world system.” In this system, the world economy is now a complex network of economic exchanges. Individual nation states are now performing as units in a global division of labor.<sup>6</sup> In Wallerstein’s world systems theory, the hierarchy and inequality among different nation states becomes structuralized and reproduced worldwide under the principle of maximum profits. The entire globe is now under the control of a capitalist economic system

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5. For example, Yun-tae Kim argues that Wallerstein’s theory of world systems provided a frame of reference that enabled later scholars to look into world matters through the concept of “one world,” opening the horizon for studies on globalization in the field of social sciences. See Y. T. Kim (1999, 212).

6. Among Wallerstein’s many books—a helpful explanatory analysis of the “world system” and with an emphasis on economic factors—can be found in Wallerstein (1996).

(Beck 2000, 71). Since this world system produces not only huge wealth but dire poverty, the individual nation states are thrown into never ending contradictory relationships with other nation states. Thus, it can be said that Wallerstein's overall judgment on globalization is somewhat negative.

Secondly, the cultural realm is also transformed by globalization. The theory of cultural globalization refers to the overflowing of a central culture into marginal cultural spheres through technological revolutions in transportation, information, and communications. The direction of the cultural flow in the globalized era, however, is not just unilateral and totalitarian. Thanks to developments in media technology, local cultures also find ways to the center of world culture. The theory of global culture, therefore, is characterized by its multilateralism between the dominant world culture and local cultures.

Arjun Appadurai observes how the reciprocity of influence between the dominant and local cultures constitutes the fundamental character of culture in the global age, as a global regional culture is always reshaping itself through interactions between the world and regional cultures. Appadurai classifies the different causes and media of global culture in five "scapes": 1) ethnoscaples composed of immigrants, refugees, and foreign laborers; 2) technoscapes caused by multinational businesses, direct investment, and technology dissemination; 3) financescapes created by the global financial industry of currency and stock markets and through which monetary values are rapidly transferred; 4) mediascapes made up of images and information generated and promulgated through newspapers, broadcasts, TV, and films; and 5) ideoscapes conjured by the ideologies of pro- or anti-state movements guided by Enlightenment world views (Appadurai 1990). Appadurai's observation implies that the global cultural scene is not a monotonous one but a very dynamic one in which the topology is constantly shifting due to the transnational transference of lifestyles and the everchanging interrelationship between the global and local cultures.<sup>7</sup>

Thirdly, societies of individual nation states are morphed into a "world

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7. For a deeper analysis of the way global culture and local cultures interact, see Waters (1995, 126).

society.” The theory of world society emphasizes the argument that individual nation states pursue a common model of a universal world culture. The universality of this cultural model comes from the fact that it promotes values (e.g. citizenship, human rights, education, and socio-economic development) the whole world can agree with. According to John W. Meyer and others, what is considered important in world society theory, therefore, is the need to spread and apply the universal culture model throughout the globe (Meyer et al. 1997, 146-148). The proponents of the theory of world society pay attention to the enhancement and improvement of common standards like constitutions, educational systems, sexual equality, human rights, and universal health care. They believe that these advancements have been precipitated by progress in globalization. Put in other words, the theory has brought under close scrutiny the significance of the universal culture model at the institutional levels of individual nation states to confirm the emergence of one universal world society.

Thus far, our brief examination of the several attempts to theorize globalization suggests that the concept “globalization” primarily refers to the new order and lifestyle that is dominant across the globe, weakening the boundaries of individual nation states. As suggested in Wallerstein’s world system theory, the dwarfing of nation states can cause havoc in the world and create a dog-eat-dog, law-of-the-jungle environment; because it can be utilized by the world finance market as an opportunity to impose a hierarchical structure on nation states that will eventually serve for the domination and dictatorship of the market, turning the whole world into a market geared only to promote the logic, principle, and value of profit. The result will be disastrous: rampaging discriminations and widening inequalities in wealth distribution. This commercialization of the entire society can thrive where social reason fails. When this happens, everything except for market efficiency through self-valorization of capital is put aside as low in exchange value, with rational and critical mind on top of the list of valueless items in the market (Doh 2008, 133-145). The brave new world erected upon the logic of the market can be called a totalitarian market society in which, through the magic of market totalitarianism, life is transformed into machine, existence into possession, knowledge into skill, and value

into price. It is a dystopia, a paradise turned upside down. Therefore, the globalization of capital may endanger civilization and transform it into a scene of slaughter for all life forms and all the values cherished for their life sustaining significances.

The global culture will also suffer from multinational media industries' attempts to hijack the way cultures are purveyed and to lead the way to a totalitarian and uniform culture. In some sense, therefore, all these gloomy scenarios contain the possibility that the current globalization will become a process towards a global empire that will suppress diversity, open trade, and local identities.

To guard against such a gloomy future, it is necessary that we formulate a new value system to guide humanity through the period of great changes by providing help in overcoming the limitations of modern nation states and securing the conditions for the sustainable development of life at the same time. For this, all the advantageous aspects of today's global information, communications, and economic networks must be aggressively utilized, as the theory of "world society" suggests,<sup>8</sup> so that the local can interact with the global, generating ideal conditions for the free, crosscultural interactions through which a future global value system and a global cultural model might be found. At this juncture, Korean society can offer significant help: it has the tradition of Donghak as an alternative to the modern consciousness. Indeed, Donghak began as a critical effort to overcome through its life spiritualism the shortcomings of Western modernity.<sup>9</sup>

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8. These days, the media of choice are the new media that, unlike traditional media that transmit information in only one direction, purvey information through bilateral channels, which contributes greatly to the rising of the culture of global convergence. See Jenkins (2006, 16).

9. As a matter of fact, this positioning of Donghak as an alternative to modernism can be found in the "*Donghak hakhoe balgi chwijimun*" (Manifesto of the Donghak Society). The manifesto states that Donghak can serve as inspiration in an attempt to overcome the anthropocentrism and its detrimental environmental effects latent in Western modernism. For details, see J. U. Kim (1999, 271).

## Donghak's Idea of *Sicheonju* and the Global Consciousness in the 21st Century

Donghak is a religious system founded on April 4, 1860, by Suun<sup>10</sup> Choe Je-u (1824-1864), who claimed to receive it as a divine revelation from *hanullim* (Heaven). The name Donghak (“Eastern Learning,” or “learning of the country in the east [Korea],” i.e. *our own* knowledge) gained popularity due to its potential to serve as an antonym to *Seohak* (literally “Western Learning”; i.e. foreign knowledge). The main tenets of Donghak were recorded by Choe Je-u himself in two scriptures: *Donggyeong daejeon* 東經大全 (Great Scripture of Eastern Learning) and *Yongdam yusa* 龍潭遺詞 (Hymns of Dragon Pool).<sup>11</sup> The doctrine of Donghak as recorded in these two scriptures presents radically new views on human beings, nature, history, and the universe. Choe Je-u’s doctrine, in turn, was interpreted into a lifestyle and applied to a compatible social movement in the hands of his successor Choe Si-hyeong, the second leader of Donghak. Also, the movement’s third leader Son Byeong-hui overhauled the religious system into an established religion called Cheondogyo 天道教 (Religion of the Heavenly Way). Under the leadership of Son, Cheondogyo surfaced as a significant national force as its followers collectively participated in the March First Independence Movement (also called “*Samil* Independence Movement”), in the period of Japanese occupation, and it still remains an influential national religion and practical philosophy in Korea.

To examine the potential of Donghak—as an alternative global consciousness—requires a close investigation of its main doctrine. This doctrine can be summarized by two concepts: *sicheonju* and *hucheon gaebye*. Both concepts represent Donghak’s primary intention to recreate the world by carrying out revolutionary change. However, *gaebyeok* (“creation”) in Donghak goes beyond a mere revolution in a given society or

10. Choe Je-u used “Suun” as his pen name.

11. Donghak Scriptures are an explanation of the mysterious revelation the Founder received from Heaven. Choe Je-u published this explanation in the form of two books: *Donggyeong daejeon* was written in Chinese characters while *Yongdam yusa* was written in Hangeul (the native Korean alphabet).

particular historical time. It refers to change of a drastic pace and on a cosmic scale: Donghak's conceptualization of *gaebyeok* requires humanity to revisit the point of origin of its very civilization and to begin anew. It transcends the level of a particular society; it comprises the whole universe.<sup>12</sup> Choe Je-u, in *Yongdam yusa*, argues for the need of recreation:

Worry not and back you go to meet the time of the cycle of life.  
 The misfortunes of the twelve empires must be the sign of recreation.  
 Come it will the period of returning great peace and prosperity.  
 Put aside your worries and find peace in your mind.  
 The old age has passed, and the new age is to come.  
 The world will be presided over then by the Great Way.  
 As you are still young, you will witness millions of people  
 Singing songs of great peace and prosperity, drumming their full belly.  
 Is it not the Great Way that is omniscience and omnipresent?<sup>13</sup>

“Recreation” here denotes the recommencement of a new world, and it comes after the end of the first beginning of the world: a post cosmic creation. At the end period of the first beginning of the world, the world is a chaos full of disease and suffering. The recreation initiates a new era free from the previous one's misfortunes. Choe Je-u defines the present time as the “old age,” predicting the coming of the “new age.” In other words, to Choe, the late Joseon period was the right time for recreation. Since his present era was characterized by the “misfortunes” of sickness and pain, it would soon be replaced with a new era. This new era would be one in which everything turns out for the better, because it is truth itself that will govern everything—a notion expressed here as “the great peace and prosperity.”<sup>14</sup> The shedding point between the creation of the cosmos and the

12. For the differentiation of *gaebyeok* from ordinary political revolution, see Park (2014, 131).

13. Choe je-u., *Mongjung noso mundappa* 夢中老少門答歌 (Dialogue between the Old and the Young in a Dream), *Yongdam yusa* (Hymns of Dragon Pool). Translated by Yoon Suk-san. Seoul:Donghaksa (1999, 93).

14. This interpretation is a recapitulation of the interpretative supplement written by Yoon Suk-san. See J. Choe (1999, 93).

post cosmic creation was the *gyeongsin* year 庚申年 (1860).<sup>15</sup> Choe Je-u observed that people in the world are self-centered and swayed by selfish desire, lost in the path of life,<sup>16</sup> which he believed would bring an end to the current times and open the door to the post cosmic creation. The new era—the post cosmic era called *sangwongap* 上元甲—will replace *hawongap* 下元甲, the era characterized by old age, disease, and various contradictions and conflicts.<sup>17</sup>

Although the history of humanity unfolds in cycles of a diminishing force followed by a rising force, it calls for a deliberate intervention of human beings to take advantage of the changing tide and accomplish the change of times successfully. What is required for human beings in this effort is self-recognition and practice of *mugeuk daedo* 無極大道 (The Great Cosmic Way). Only then will “millions of people” sing “songs of great peace and prosperity, drumming their full belly.” As the Way that is incommensurable with anything else (Park 2014, 124), *mugeuk daedo* is referred to by Choe Je-u in his teachings as the guiding principle of a new utopian world that would allow every human being to flourish as a host of Heaven within him/herself, and to enjoy the respect of others. Thus, unlike any call for a new society through revolution, *hucheon gaebyeok* in Donghak requires no heroic martyr or great scholar. All human beings have Heaven within them. Only by observing the nature of oneself, without help from the outside, can everyone come together in sequence to *doseongdungnip* 道成德立 (achieve morality and erect virtue) and achieve the state of *dong-*

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15. Choe Je-u himself verifies this point in the two lines of “Ansimga” in *Yongdam yusa*: “Upon beginning the nation, issuing a thick book full of all the words, discarding all the twelve empires, good fortune comes to our nation.”

16. Choe Je-u depicts this observation in “Podeongmun” in the *Yongdam yusa*: “All the people in the world look after their own interest. Not listening to Heaven’s principles and teachings. Their mind is always upset because they know not which way to go.”

17. The Chinese scholar of the Song Dynasty Shao Kangjie 邵康節 systemized this belief. According to Shao, one cosmic year, or *won* 元 (*yuan* in Chinese), has 129,600 human years in it and all of history is divided into three stages, or *gap* 甲 (*jia* in Chinese): *hawongap* for the first 50,000 years, *sangwongap* for the later 50,000 years, and a *gap* hiatus between them of an ice age of 29,600 years. For further explanation on the concept of *gap*, see J. Choe (2009, 31).

*guiilche* 同歸一體 (coming back together as one).<sup>18</sup>

The doctrine of Donghak that will preside over this new world is found symbolically inscribed in its main incantation: *Sicheonju johwajeong yeongse bulmang mansaji* 侍天主造化定 永世不忘萬事知 (meaning in English). Choe Je-u himself explains the meaning of the incantation character by character in the *Nonangmun* 論學文 (On Learning Truth) chapter of *Dongyeong daejeon* as follows:

The character *si* 侍 *having the Divine Spirit within* and expressing the vital force in life. People should realize this and keep it in their hearts without change. *Ju* 主 refers to a certain being whom is revered like one's parents. *Johwa* 造化 means there is no artificial intention and everything is done naturally. The character *jeong* 定 means you set up your mind as it fits to the principle of *johwa*. The characters *yeongse* 永世 refer to a human being's lifelong period, and *bulmang* 不忘 means that no thoughts are forgotten. The characters *mansa* 萬事 refer to the limitlessness of the number of things. The character *ji* 知 means an action through which one acquires knowledge of the Way. Thus, anyone that respects the Way and never ceases to think about it will acquire sainthood.<sup>19</sup>

The most important phrase in the main incantation of Donghak is *sicheonju*. A deeper understanding of the meaning of the phrase, therefore, would lead to a better understanding on the main doctrine of Donghak. The most immediate meaning of *sicheonju* is “having Heaven enshrined inside oneself, which again can be interpreted as Heaven has come into oneself and is living and breathing within oneself.” Anyone who has Heaven inside him/herself becomes Heaven itself. The first revelation Choe Je-u received when experiencing the spiritual uplift in contact with the Spirit of Heaven was *osim jeuk yeosim* 吾心即汝心 (“my mind is your mind and vice versa”). As

18. *Donggwi ilche* 同歸一體 means one comes back to Heaven's mind by overcoming *gakjawisim* 各自爲心 (self-centeredness) and considering Heaven's will as one's own. It can also refer to the community of the earthly saints. See Yoon (2004, 63).

19. Interestingly enough, here Choe Je-u does not bother to explain the character *cheon* 天. Perhaps, this is because the concept of *cheon* was self-evident among the Korean population at that time.

one recognizes this, one becomes one with Heaven; one becomes Heaven. Choe Je-u once again explains the teaching of *sicheonju* in the “Gyohunga” chapter of *Yongdam yusa* with the lines, “I trust nothing other than Heaven. Why *sageun chwiwon* 捨近取遠<sup>20</sup> then?” Human beings have Heaven within themselves, so it is not necessary to reject things in one’s reach but try to take things further away. To Choe Je-u, Heaven is not a transcendental being that resides only in Heaven and whom no human can reach; it resides nowhere else than within oneself. Thus, all human beings become equal in the sense that all without exception have Heaven within themselves. Human beings are not below the angels; they are saints walking on the surface of the earth.<sup>21</sup> Although Choe Si-hyeong used the expression *yangcheon* 養天 (culturing Heaven), and Son Byeong-hui used yet another phrase, *innaecheon* 人乃天 (Man is Heaven), they all refer to the same idea as Choe Je-u’s *sicheonju*.

However, the meaning of *sicheonju* explained by Choe Je-u himself in the above quote is not sufficient for grasping the significance of the main incantation in understanding the doctrine of Donghak. Again, Choe Je-u’s explanation needs to be reinterpreted. The explanation on the first character *si* 恃, *sillyeong* 神靈 refers to inherent nature, *gihwa* 氣化 refers to the original relationship with others in the world, and *buri* 不移 means without movement or change. Thus, the explanation of this part could read, “internally one should be in harmony with Heaven, and externally one should not divert from *gi* 氣 that connects oneself with all other human beings and nature, and that this principle of one’s existence should be practiced without any change.” The connection of this mantra with the overall Donghak doctrine surfaces when the explanation thus far is compared with some of the teachings of the leaders. First, since *nae* 內 of *naeyu sillyeong* 內有神靈 refers to the internal nature of humans, the whole phrase means *having the*

20. *Sageun chwiwon* refers to the act of renouncing what is near but pursuing what is further away, hence, implies prioritizing the order of one’s assignment over the other.

21. The idea of *sicheonju* contributed to consolidating the idea of equality in mid-19th century Joseon. It acquired practical force through the effort of Choe Si-hyeong and eventually helped in raising the reform drive among the Joseon common people and which erupted in the 1894 Donghak Peasant Uprising. See J. Choe (2009, 126).

*Divine Spirit within.* This echoes a part of the revelation Choe Je-u received in 1860: *osim jeuk yeosim*. Choe Si-hyeong repeated this message with the phrase, *sain yeocheon* 事人如天 (respect the others as you respect Heaven). Donghak, thus, emphasizes the importance of awareness of the existence of the godhead inside all humans. Since there is nothing to be acquired or imported from without, the best way of living is to keep one's own nature. Choe Je-u teaches, "the virtues of morality, justice, ethics, and knowledge are the given from the ancestors, and *susim jeonggi* 守心正氣 is what I revised" (J. Choe 2009, 16). *Susim jeonggi* means "keeping the good mind and having the right spiritual force." *Susim* refers to individual practice, while *jeonggi* refers to the practice of the public, the original sameness of all human beings (Oh 1996, 102). Here, Choe Je-u differs from the Classical sages in that they argued for the need to acquire those virtues through study and experience, while Choe Je-u himself only recommend staying the same, retaining the godhead that has always been inside oneself without being dictated by the environment. Choe Je-u also expressed the message in a song: "Trust nothing but Heaven. You have *him* inside you, so you will not throw away what you have near and try to grasp what is far away from you. All I want to trust is Heaven" (J. Choe 1999, 24). What Choe Je-u recommends is to be one with oneself, then everything is carried out in the principle of *muwi ihwa* 無爲而化, which does not mean there is no need to try to do anything, but rather that everything must be carried out in accordance with universal laws.

The next part in the explanation of the main incantation is *oeyu gihwa* 外有氣化. As *naeyu sillyeong* is the internal nature of all life forms, *oeyu gihwa* refers to the external expression of it. The world is full of "gihwa," which means that the whole universe is the stage for all different forms fluctuating in one and the same current of *gi*. *Oeyu gihwa*, thus, stands for the universal openness and internal uniformity of all the relationships between human beings and between human beings and nature.

Born as an individual, a human being cannot survive by himself. When he is born, he is always born into relationships with other human beings and with nature. Therefore, a human being should be good at maintain-

ing *gihwa*. Since disturbances in the mind is the sign that the person's *gihwa* is interrupted, and family troubles also point to a disrupted flow of *gihwa*, *gihwa* is the mysterious law in the whole universe, and at the same time it is the great principle of harmony among people in a society. Anyone who would like to study the Way should be conversant with this law of *gihwa*.<sup>22</sup>

According to the concept of *oeyu gihwa* all existing things retain cosmic existence. Thus, for an individual human being, living is a way of participating in the cosmic order of circularity, contiguity, and universality. Since *gihwa* presupposes a public and social nature on a cosmic scale, a human being in *gihwa* with the outside world is an independent individual and at the same time one with the universe. This rather oxymoronic nature of the relationship between the particular and the universal implies that any human being that successfully maintains harmony with *gihwa* can also maintain its existence in the circular relationship with all others in terms of its spiritual, ecological, and mental wellbeing. In short, the *One*, or *hanullim* in Donghak, is a transcendental being that also partakes in every form in the world as an inner order.<sup>23</sup>

Meanwhile, *gakji buri* 各知不移 refers to the human effort to practice the nature of godhead as depicted in *naeyu sillyeong* and *oeyu gihwa*. In the immediately preceding phrase *ilse jiin* 一世之人, *ilse* can be interpreted as a particular period of time and a particular society. So, the whole phrase *ilse jiin gakji buri* would literally mean that every human being in any particular society and period of time, because of his or her own knowledge, never tries to change nature. This means that regardless of time and place, the nature of life and the reason for its existence must not be violated or encroached upon. In other words, *gakji buri* refers to the right way of putting into practice the truth found in *naeyu sillyeong* and *oeyu gihwa*. When

22. Yi, Don-hwa. 1924. *Suun simbeop gangui* (Lectures on Suun's Concept of the Dynamics of Mind). Seoul: Cheondogyo Jungang Chongbu.

23. Donghak teaches "do not kill any life form because doing so is actually hurting *hanullim*." Scholars who study ecological wellbeing like Shin Il-chul find this attitude in Donghak eco-friendly. For more details on this, see Shin (1995, 112).

observed correctly, this practice principle guarantees that no one will drift off the course of the circular order of life in the whole universe. To Choe Je-u, therefore, progress in human history meant human nature's approaching closer to the godhead, while regression meant retreating from it. In reality, Choe's thought implies that the actualization of human nature and social advancement is achieved not through the extension of individual human freedom or the accomplishment of any social group's own interest, but only through the realization of the public nature of the universe.

In this explanation of the concept of *gakji buri*, what should be most emphasized with the viability of Donghak teachings in mind is its potential as an inspiration to resist the reality distorted by the negative features of modernity identified in the previous chapter. To risk a slight extension of logic, *gakji buri*—as the people's awakening and refusal to be swayed by external and disintegrating forces—can be reinterpreted as both a warning against any effort to distort human nature and a practical strategy for guarding against those forces that would work against human nature. An aggressive approach towards *huri* may add persuasive power to this kind of reinterpretation: since “not moving” in *gakji buri* means not avoiding the Great Way, Heaven, or the original public nature of the universe, “moving” here may refer to “staying with or being one with anything that is not Heaven or the Great Way.” In fact, Donghak began as a “*huri* movement” in the late Joseon period; at that time, the ruling class tried to impose Confucian values on the people so as to secure their interests, and the invasive Western powers tried to maximize their influence on the peninsula to exploit the indigenous people. Donghak was intended to frustrate the oppressive Confucian aristocracy and to thwart imperialistic foreign power. Thus, *huri* in Donghak refers to a forceful resistance to all anti-life forces in late Joseon society. As history records, Joseon society in the late 19th century witnessed many popular uprisings, with the Donghak Peasant Uprising 東學農民運動 among them. These active challenges from below to the ruling aristocratic class helped Donghak philosophy widen its audience as an alternative vision to the present system.

To remain on the course of interpretation presented thus far regarding *gakji buri* as a warning against complying with life threatening forces, it

would be safe to conclude that *naeyu sillyeong* is the principle of individual life forms, *oeyu gihwa* is the principle of the cosmic interconnectedness of all life forms, and *gakji buri* is the self-recognition and practice of these principles. Put in other words, the teaching of *sicheonju* based upon these three principles is none other than an ethical guideline for those, who want to rediscover the sacredness of life and to stick with the organicist and universal relationship of the cosmic sphere of life.

To help the followers practice the teachings in the main incantation, Donghak has a practical guideline called *simmucheon* 十毋天 (literally “ten not-to commandments”).

- You shall not cheat *hanullim*.
- You shall not despise *hanullim*.
- You shall not hurt *hanullim*.
- You shall not disrupt *hanullim*.
- You shall not kill *hanullim*.
- You shall not foul *hanullim*.
- You shall not starve *hanullim*.
- You shall not destroy *hanullim*.
- You shall not hate *hanullim*.
- You shall not put down *hanullim*.<sup>24</sup>

*Hanullim* here refers to all existing things in the universe, including human beings, for all life forms in the universe enshrine *hanul* within them. In that they all contain *hanul*, all life forms in the universe are equal. Choe Si-hyeong is explaining this truth when he said, “Human beings are *hanul*, and hence there is no difference among human beings. Thus, when people try to discriminate against each other through artificial contrivances, they are actually going against Heaven’s will. You disciples must dedicate yourselves to the effort of abolishing all discriminatory schemes, so that you ensure you are observing our Founder’s intentions” (Yi 1933, 7). In this quote, Choe Si-hyeong is actually instigating a rebellion against

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24. Yi, Don-hwa. 1933. *Cheondogyo changgeonsa* (History of the Foundation of Cheondogyo). Seoul: Cheondogyo Jungang Jongniwon.

Joseon's feudal caste system. This is why the rise of Donghak, even though it had begun as a religion, came to be considered a revolutionary social movement that threatened the Joseon social order.

Donghak's emphasis on equality is further strengthened as the concept is transformed into a basis for mutual respect in Choe Si-hyeong's reinterpretation of it. Choe Si-hyeong conceived the idea of *samgyeong* 三敬 (three respects): *gyeongcheon* 敬天 (respect for Heaven), *gyeongin* 敬人 (respect for human beings), and *gyeongmul* 敬物 (respect for things). Choe Si-hyeong explains his theory of *samgyeong* with a phrase *ino dongpo muro dongpo* 人吾同胞 物吾同胞 (all the other humans and all things are brothers and sisters of mine).<sup>25</sup> In this sense, *samgyeong* is a radical view in which every life form is respected as an equal member of the whole universe, and differs greatly from the traditional modern world view in which either the god-head or human beings alone occupy the center of the universe. Oh Moonhwan points out this difference by calling the worldview of Donghak "the sense of Heavenly or Spiritual Equality that are differentiated from Western idea of Equality that is based upon rationality" (Oh 1996, 197). Choe Si-hyeong's dedication to transforming the teachings of *sicheonju* into a practical ethical program did not stop at the "three respects."

His conceptualization of *yangcheonju* 養天主 signals the completion of the transformation of *sicheonju* philosophy into a full-fledged ethical guideline for daily life. In explaining *yangcheonju*, Choe Si-hyeong preached as follows:

Only those who know how to rear Heaven know how to serve Heaven. Since the way Heaven presides within me is exactly like the way life presides within a seed, sowing the seed in the soil and rearing its life is the same as rearing Heaven observing the way (S. Choe 1993, 23).

According to this explication through analogy, *yangcheonju* to Choe Si-

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25. In Donghak, the idea of *sicheonju* is applied to not just to human beings but to everything in the world, as Choe Si-hyeong says, "Nothing in the universe is not *sicheonju*." Chun Sung Kim finds this extensive application of the idea a clear cut ecological worldview. See C. Kim (2000, 125-126).

hyeong is the practice of *sicheonju* in everyday life. What is more emphasized in the transformative process is the concept of *yang* 養, rearing or breeding. To rear something inevitably involves a procedure with a certain duration, which again requires a particular methodology or practical knowhow regarding the management of the whole procedure. *Yangcheonju* in this sense is none other than a how-to manual for the practice of cultivating life within all life forms. “Rearing” or “breeding” has an end, where the results of the practice of the ethical how-to are verified. A procedure of rearing life ends with the completion of the life in full-fledged form. When this very procedure is completed in human relationships, there emerges an embodiment of *sain yeocheon*. If the practice is extended across all human relationships and with all nonlife forms in the entire universe, *yangcheonju*’s transformation into a practical ethics for all existence ends with the principle of *gyeongmul*.<sup>26</sup>

Applied to contemporary societies, Donghak’s idea of *sicheonju* could be used as the logic for a critical reassessment on such life-destroying forces of modernity as alienation, reification, environmental terrorism, loss of life values, and exploitation of third world people. Thus, the idea of *sicheonju* becomes significant as a future value system to assist humanity in reviving a consciousness of global life values and the identity of human beings as benefactors for all living things.

### Neo-humanism of Donghak and Its Global Practicability

Globalization is a process through which a transnational order and social relationships are created. In this process, it is necessary to find a new value system for a sustainable global community, and this system can be found in various cultural heritages in local communities. Through highly developed communications technology, these candidates can then be transplanted throughout the globe as a global model for a universal culture. In this sense, Korea can contribute to taming globalization for the benefit of

26. For a review of Donghak as a system of life ethics, see Lee (2008, 172).

humanity by rediscovering the potential of Donghak spiritualism and developing it into an alternative philosophy for the coming era.

The problem yet to be solved, then, is the agency and methodology of this alternative philosophy. Again, Donghak itself provides the answers, since the idea of *sicheonju* in the main incantation is in itself based upon a neo-humanistic foundation that emphasizes the public nature and responsibility of human beings in the universe. Neo-humanism is different from traditional Western anthropocentrism in that it involves an inherently altruistic ethical attitude with which human beings care for all existence, including other human beings and all nonhuman existences. What enables the human being to take care of all nonhuman beings in the universe is his or her faculty of reflection, which is the end result of the age-old process of evolution as a life form. The neo-humanistic character of Donghak's *sicheonju* philosophy is crystallized in the final phrase of *gakji buri* as explained in the previous section. The practice of *gakji buri* based on the understanding of *oeyu gihwa* and *naeyu sillyeong* can never happen to any human being unless one becomes aware of one's own inherent self-reflective faculty. Thus, Yi Don-hwa, one of the theoreticians who developed Donghak into the modern religious system of Cheondogyo, argues that "human beings are the center of the universe and the supreme being among all the beings just because they are the life form where consciousness finds its best expression" (Y. H. Kim 2012, 76-77).

The neo-humanistic character of Donghak spiritualism may be elucidated with a comparison with de Chardin's synthetic model of evolution as presented in his book *The Phenomenon of Man*. De Chardin, in explaining the cosmic evolution by combining paleontology and the theory of evolution, closely echoes how *si* in *sicheonju* is explained in Donghak.

De Chardin's synthetic model of evolution negates Darwin's idea of natural selection and the survival of the fittest in that it suggests, instead, that all life forms have the internal function of self-organization and self-regulation. Just like the process of life development, historical advance in Donghak philosophy is a double process: inwardly, it takes the direction towards the recovery of universal nature, and outwardly, towards the extension of this universal nature to the level of universal public nature. *Buri*,

therefore, is a command to stand up against anything that thwarts, blocks, harms, and divides the actualization of the nature of human beings and at the same time nature itself. The actualization of universal nature is possible only when human beings realize that all others in the outer world are the conditions for one's own existence, and this dependency is reciprocal. In this sense, the main incantation of Donghak manifests a neo-humanism that separates itself from modern humanism by denying anthropocentrism. Yi Don-hwa summarizes this principle: "By respecting only other human beings no one can reach the ultimate Way; by respecting *things* also only can one be one with the *virtue*" (Yi 1933, 79). To respect nonhuman beings means to utilize them in such a way as their nature is rightfully actualized, so that the harmonious relationship between human beings and things can be completed. While modern anthropocentrism has justified the conquest of and domination over nature as an advancement of civilization, neo-humanism teaches humanity to respect other human beings and at the same time all the natural things to help themselves and others in achieving the acme of their respective godhead. As epitomized in Donghak's "three respects," it is the essence of Donghak spiritualism to urge its followers to realize and assume their responsibility of pursuing the universal public nature (Oh 1996, 79).

The potential of Donghak in its practicability in the age of globalization can be more clearly displayed when it is considered in the context of ecological approaches. In ecology, what is most critical is human intervention: the function of humanity as the healer of the disturbed eco system. Donghak suggests the possibility of resurrecting humanity, even though humanity is responsible for the disruption, as the agent of the reconstruction of eco system.

"Deep ecology," the latest field of ecological studies, differs from social ecology in that it focuses on the horizontal relationships between human beings and nature, whereas social ecology acknowledges the unique function of human beings by characterizing them as independent cultural factor in relationships. Deep ecology comes short in acknowledging human agency, while social ecology denies the organic connection between humanity and nature. What is needed for both studies is a bridge between

the two with agency given to humanity. Then, the new ecological consciousness can help humanity construct a social principle that allows the pursuit of a common good for both human beings and nonhuman beings (Jung 1979, 55). Since Donghak spiritualism believes in the godhead's presence in all beings and bestows to humanity a calling to take care of all others, considering Donghak spiritualism as the methodology of neo-humanistic endeavor for constructing a global society might produce meaningful results.

A similar insight to Donghak's idea of life community can also be found in de Chardin's argument on neo-humanism. He proclaims that "man is the axis of evolution and the pinnacle of revolution." His differentiation of human beings from other life forms is based upon the fact that human beings are endowed with a consciousness of reflection.

From our experimental point of view, reflection is, as the word indicates, the power acquired by a consciousness to turn in upon itself, to take possession of itself as of an object endowed with its own particular consistence and value: no longer merely to know, but to know oneself; no longer merely to know, but to know that one knows. By this individualization of himself in the depths of himself, the living element, which heretofore had been spread out and divided over a diffuse circle of perceptions and activities, was constituted for the first time as a *center* in the form of a point at which all the impression and experiences knit themselves together and fuse into a unity that is conscious of its own organization.<sup>27</sup>

Reflection means awareness of being aware of something, which again means to be aware of oneself. A man of reflection is a man beyond the stage of just a being of instincts: he is a thinking life form that has completed the leap from instinct to reflection. De Chardin explains this leap by calling it a "dimensional change in essence" that refers to "a totally new

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27. De Chardin, Pierre Teilhard. 2007. *Ingan hyeonsang* (The Phenomenon of Man). Translated by Yang Myeong-soo. Seoul: Hangilsa. Originally published as *Le Phénomène Humain* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1955)

event that marks not a change in degree but in nature acquired through a critical change in the rising process of a consciousness” (De Chardin 2007, 161). By putting human beings on the pedestal of reflective consciousness, de Chardin distinguishes himself from the followers of the materialistic evolution theory that defines human beings as a kind of byproduct of the same evolutionary process that all other life forms partake in. Even though de Chardin acknowledges an initiative in human beings, he never misses the responsibility of human beings for the wellbeing of all life forms, including humans themselves.

And now, as a germination of planetary dimensions, comes the thinking layer which over its full extent develops and intertwines its fibers, not to confuse and neutralize them but to reinforce them in the living unity of a single tissue. . . . Ever more complexity and thus ever more consciousness. If that is what really happens, what more do we need to convince ourselves of the vital error hidden in the depths of any doctrine of isolation? The egocentric ideal of a future reserved for those who have managed to attain egoistically the extremity of “everyone for himself” is false and against nature. No element could move and grow except with and by all the others with itself. Also false and against nature is the racial ideal of one branch draining off for itself alone all the sap of the tree and rising over the death of other branches. To reach the sun nothing less is required than the combined growth of the entire foliage. The outcome of the world, the gates of the future, the entry into the superhuman—these are not thrown open to a few of the privileged nor to one chosen people to the exclusion of all others. They will open only to an advance of *all together*, in a direction in which *all together* can join and find completion in a spiritual renovation of the earth.<sup>28</sup>

In this quote, de Chardin is arguing that human beings as “thinking beings” should be aware of the organic relationship between them and nature, so that they can push forward the collective effort to renovate the earth. This is an expression of de Chardin’s belief that humanity should recognize the need for a universal community consciousness and their ethical duty to

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28. De Chardin 1959, 244-245.

put this consciousness into practice.

In this sense, de Chardin is confirming the practicability of Donghak's neo-humanistic spiritualism that can again be elucidated through a review of the meaning of Choe Si-hyeong's *samgyeong*, consisting of *gyeongcheon*, *gyeongin*, and *gyeongmul*. *Gyeongcheon* means "not paying respect to the presider over Heaven by looking up at the sky, but respecting my own mind." Since I am Heaven like anyone else in the universe (*sicheonju*), I serve and take care of all others just as I do myself. *Gyeongin* means to respect a particular human being or the whole of humanity. Choe Je-u preached, "What is the use of respecting the ghost of the dead and disrespecting the living human being? It is as if you serve your dead parents while you treat your living parents coldly" (Yi 1933, 78). *Gyeongmul* means to respect nonhuman beings. *Gyeongmul* may be identified as a definitive expression of Donghak's neo-human characteristic since it teaches to respect all nonhuman things, including inanimate ones, as one respects Heaven. As recorded in *Cheondogyo changgeonsa* 天道教創建史, Choe Si-hyeong propagates this teaching when he says, "Man cannot achieve the Way by simply serving other men; only by going further and respecting even things shall he become one with Way" (Yi 1933, 78). A proper practice of this teaching will surely require a total reshaping of the current way human beings engage with nonhuman beings in the age of modernity (Oh 2003, 184).

Respecting things means utilizing things in a way to actualize their latent potential. This becomes possible only when a human being strikes up a relationship with other nonhuman beings that aims to achieve a harmonious state of being between oneself and the whole universe. Considering the way modern, Western anthropocentrism has justified the oppression and conquest of nature in the name of progress, Donghak's neo-humanism as exemplified in *samgyeong* ethics preaches an opposite attitude towards all beings, to include even nonhuman objects, so that both parties might achieve the actualization of the seed of sacredness locked inside their respective bodies. This serving oneself by serving others is the spirit delivered through Choe Je-u's maxim *ino dongpo muro dongpo* (Oh 2003, 185).

As comparison with the latest scientific discourses has shown, Donghak has the potential to transcend its genealogy as one of the Korean peo-

ple's national ideas and religions, and become the source of inspiration for humanity in need of a practical and rational methodology in the age of globalization.<sup>29</sup> As clearly stated in *ilse jin gakji buri*, what is most important is each other's will to put the principles into action. The ingredients are in Donghak spiritualism in the form of pieces of rare material: the idea that human beings should rediscover their universal public nature, the belief that no one can exist properly without connection with others, the concept that the principles become meaningful only when they are practiced in reality and so forth. What remains for transforming Donghak spiritualism into a much needed consciousness for a global community is to put the pieces together and build a Donghak-based universal cultural model in the way that ensures Donghak contributes not just to the Korean people but to all humanity.

The potential of Donghak as a future paradigm in the global age, however, can be greatly strengthened through a collective effort by scholars to open up the discussion to the international community. In transforming Donghak, a Korean national religious system, into a full-fledged, practicable alternative philosophy for the sustainable world system, the Korean scholastic community may encounter difficulties because of its parochial disposition. A more objective and outside-the-box approach to Donghak's potential can be added to what the Korean community has accumulated in this area. In this respect, what some of the Anglo-American Donghak researchers have discussed regarding Donghak can be of great use in equipping Donghak philosophy with a powerful tool to boost its practicability.

Among foreign researchers of Donghak, Benjamin Weems has been considered the first international scholar to take up Donghak as a proper subject of scholastic research. Starting from the socio-historical background of the Donghak movement, Weems traced the whole trajectory of the Donghak Peasant Uprising, its collision with the foreign powers, its

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29. To some Donghak scholars like Yoon Suk-san, Donghak philosophy was, from its inception, a religious system that could encompass not only humanity on earth but the whole universe in that it is founded upon the belief that all beings in the universe are sacred. See Yoon (2003).

ultimate transformation into a religious system called Cheondogyo, and its development after the division of the Korean nation into separate states.<sup>30</sup>

Carl Young also discusses Donghak history in the period from 1895-1910, starting from Choe Je-u up to Son Byeong-hui.<sup>31</sup> Young's study particularly analyzes how Son urged the Korean people to participate with passion in the modernization of Korean society, emphasizing the dynamics of Donghak as a force for social change (Young 2002, 64-65). Another researcher who sees a forceful practicability of the dynamics of social change in Donghak is George Kallander. Based upon his analysis of *Donggyeong daejeon* and *Yongdam yusa*, Kallander concludes that Donghak stands as a practical social movement and possesses the character of an alternative religious system (Kallander 2006, 3-6).<sup>32</sup>

Even though Paul Beirne (2009) approaches Donghak as a mystical religious system and discusses many cases of miracles performed by Choe Je-u and the idea of Heaven in Donghak, Kirsten Bell balances Beirne's approach with a view of the potential of Donghak as a powerful tool for social change. Kirsten, focusing on how the two drastically different Koreas have tried to appropriate the Donghak legacy in an attempt to justify their respective sovereignty as the only legitimate state in the post liberation period.<sup>33</sup>

Another work on Donghak that has drawn the attention of scholars

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30. Weems (1964) analyzes the development of Donghak focusing on the dialectical relationship between Donghak and contemporary socio-historical factors, and emphasizes with a remarkable coherence that Donghak has greatly contributed to the consolidation of Korean nationalism and the overall development of Korean society.

31. Young's study in 2004 focuses on the background to Choe Je-u's Donghak, as a set of ideas that was transformed into Cheondogyo—an established religious system.

32. For example, Kallander argues that Donghak functioned as an alternative religion for the Korean people in the period of the anti-Catholic persecutions, and that even after the repression of the Donghak Peasant Uprising, Donghak ideas continued to inspire the Korean people in the 20th century to transform and modernize their society. For details, see Kallander (2006).

33. Bell (2000) argues that in South Korea the Donghak Peasant Uprising has been reinterpreted as a revolutionary movement of Korean nationalists to modernize their society and consolidate the overall nationalist movement, while in North Korea, this movement has been reappraised as a germinal communist movement and the birth of Korean nationalism and democratic ideology.

endeavoring to capture the potential of Donghak as a feasible future paradigm for humanity came from Don Baker in 2008. His book, *Korean Spirituality*, while discussing many folk pseudo religions, emphasizes that Donghak is a rare breed of religion because its germination and development originated in the people themselves, unlike others religions that often develop in a top-down process (Baker 2008). Further, what is more noteworthy in this work is the author's suggestion of the potential of Donghak as a future paradigm in the global age, arguing that in Donghak the Godhead is not a supernatural being but a spiritual force within all human beings. Hence, he argues that in Donghak it is the human being, not god that deserves reverence. Baker also mentions that such a conceptualization of Godhead in Donghak is explained as the dynamic power of creation that helps to strike the perfect balance between all beings in the universe and all events happening in the universe (Baker 2008, 178-179). This perspective may be highly appreciated in any consideration of the potential of Donghak as a paradigm for humanity in the 21st century.

As briefly reviewed thus far, Donghak studies in the Anglo-American world have already produced results that command Korean researchers' attention. And this trend can be greatly strengthened with the corps of young Korean scholars who are joining the international Donghak study community from research institutions abroad.<sup>34</sup> The growing international community of researchers on Donghak will eventually blaze a path towards a time when Donghak spiritualism is utilized as an alternative value system that will eventually sublimate the shortcomings and negative effects of Western modernity. More joint research project wherein Korean scholars work alongside their international colleagues will surely quicken the process of the actualization of Donghak's potential as a future global paradigm.

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34. Some noticeable research results produced by Korean students studying abroad include D. Kim (1994) and Y. B. Kim (1976).

## Conclusion

Globalization is an inevitable historical event, and all humanity awaits a practical strategy that will help to avert the coming of a global society replete with dangers for humanity and instead to construct a global community founded upon eternal peace and ecological sustainability. Making this strategy available for humanity requires reflecting upon how to overcome all the undesirable consequences of modernization, such as war, alienation, reification, discrimination, and environmental exploitation and degradation. In this quest for an alternative consciousness, the life spiritualism of Donghak presents itself as a valuable paradigm for a universal value system for humanity in the 21st century.

The idea of *sicheonju* represents Donghak's spiritualism. Choe Je-u, the founder of the religious system, explains this concept as regardless of species, every existing being is the sacred subject of a universal life force that connects all beings together with the logic of contiguity and circularity. Choe Je-u also emphasizes the need to practice these teachings in reality, so as to reinstate the universe in accordance with its true nature. In Choe Je-u's explanation, what is most emphasized is the sublimity and urgency of the duty resting upon the shoulders of human beings in times of great change. Human beings are the bearers of this neo-humanistic burden to spread the ethics of universal public nature and secure it in a world endangered by the negative consequences of the anthropocentric modernization process. Where Choe Je-u emphasizes human ethics as the deliverer of the whole community of living things, he sounds much like de Chardin, who has argued for the agency of humanity in a field of science called evolution theory.

The retreat of nation states from the stage of world politics and the advance of globalization prompts humanity to act quickly in constructing a global community of life. Donghak can respond to this calling with its heritage of life spiritualism that can be of use in promoting neo-humanistic values regarding the preservation of life in all human activities in order to rebuild an improved world order. By utilizing already available information technologies and the increased mobility of human beings, humanity

may have a chance to truly triumph in its efforts to build a model for the globalization of the local.

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