



Su-un and His World of Symbols

The Founder of Korea's First Indigenous Religion

Paul Beirne

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Su-un and His World of Symbol S

Su-un and His World of Symbols explores the image which Choe Che-u (Su-un), the founder of Donghak (Eastern Learning) Korea's first indigenous religion, had of himself as a religious leader and human being. Su-un gave his life so that he could share his symbols, his scriptures and the foundational principals of his religion with all people, regardless of their status, gender, age or education. His egalitarian creed challenged the major religious traditions in Korea, and Korean society as a whole, to reflect on the innate dignity of each individual, and to reform their social, ethical and religious practices to accord with the reality of the divine presence in the 'sacred refuge' that lies within.

Exploring the two symbols which Su-un created and used to disseminate his religion, and the two books of Scripture which he composed, this book breaks new ground by presenting the only major work in English which attempts to ascertain the image Su-un had of himself as the prototype of a new kind of religious leader in Korea, and by extension, East Asia.

For Anna, Sarah and Sean

Su-un and His World of Symbols

The founder of Korea's first indigenous religion

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ASHGATE

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in the golden age of a sia
Korea was one of its lamp bearers.
and that lamp is waiting
To be lighted once again
for the illumination of the East.

r abindranath Tagore

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Preface

Search for a Symbol

In December 1999, after fifteen years of work, study, and research in South Korea, i left the country to take up a position at the melbourne College of d ivinity in a ustralia. The move entailed a physical separation for six months from my wife a nna, who was a teacher, and from our children Sarah and Sean, while they completed the northern hemisphere school year. i returned to Seoul for a week in July 2000, to be reunited with my family and to make final arrangements for them to travel with me to melbourne.

At that time I was nearing the completion of a first draft of my doctoral thesis on Choe Su-un and the foundation of the d onghak religion. my supervisor, a ssociate Professor r od bucknell from the School of History, Philosophy, r eligion and Classics at the u niversity of Queensland, was reasonably pleased with the progress i was making – with one exception. r od consistently posed the following question in relation to the two symbols which formed the foundation of Su-un’s religion: ‘We know what the Jumun [the Sacred incantation] consists of, as there are five examples of it in Donghak scripture. But what does Su-un’s Yeongbu [the mystical Talisman] look like?’ my standard, if somewhat lame, response was: ‘n obody knows what it looks like. it is lost to history; destroyed together with all of Su-un’s other works following his execution.’

Rod was not as easily satisfied or convinced.

One can find various impressions of what the Su-un’s mystical symbol might have looked like. (a n example of one of these is reproduced in Chapter 4, on page 75) b ut, as to the original form of the yeongbu—i just did not think it possible to access this kind of information almost 150 years after Su-un’s death. n o books or documents that i had read, or was aware of, made claim to having access to such an invaluable historical artefact, and my contacts within the Cheondo-gyo organization were as skeptical about locating one as i was myself. This was because the yeongbu had, for over a century, ceased being part of the standard Cheondo-gyo ritual (for reasons which will be explained in the main body of this book). a dditionally, the fact that the original yeongbu ritual involved burning the talisman, mixing the ashes with pure water and consuming the mixture militated against the survival of a yeongbu from Su-un’s era, even in the short term.

it was an off-hand remark by r od just before i left for Seoul in July 2000 that set the search in motion. ‘i wonder what was recorded at Su-un’s trial?’ he asked, and just left it at that. During the flight I decided to try to make time, in the midst of the packing and farewells, to follow up r od’s seemingly random question.

Despite my best efforts, by our final day in South Korea I had no success in locating an account of Su-un's trial, let alone a yeongbu. I had visited the national library several times, as well as other research libraries in Seoul, to no avail. Keenly aware that time had all but run out, I decided to visit one more library—a small government institution on the outskirts of the city, where somebody had hinted that a relevant mid-nineteenth-century document might be located. It wasn't. Guessing at my frustration and sense of failure, the librarian said, 'There is an archival collection located at Seoul national university called the Gyujuanggak archives. The Gyujuanggak was established by King Jeongjo [1776–1800] as an archive of official documents of the Joseon Dynasty. It might be worthwhile checking there.'

I immediately caught a bus to Seoul national university and located the Gyujuanggak building ninety minutes before it was scheduled to close.

I explained to the person at the front desk about the documents I was searching for, and was escorted to a room which contained the great archival record *Ilseong-nok* [*Records of (the King's) Daily Reflection*]. *Ilseong-nok* comprises various records and reflections compiled during the Joseon dynasty (CE 1392–1910). The journals containing *Ilseong-nok* filled the bookshelves which lined the four walls of the room. The archives were classified according to the lunar calendar; their titles, dates and contents were hand-written in classical Chinese characters. To make matters more complicated, individual journals were dated by citing the year of the current king's reign and the corresponding year of the sexagenary cycle in which the events recorded in the journal occurred. An account of Su-un's trial might be located somewhere in these scores and scores of historical journals, but finding the right one, let alone the correct section, seemed an impossible task. With time running out, I knew that my chances of finding the account of Su-un's trial, if indeed it still existed, were infinitesimally small.

With fifteen minutes to go before closing time, I found myself frantically leafing through an archive which was dated to the first year of the reign of King Kojong: namely to Kapja, the first year of the sexagenary cycle. I made a quick calculation and decided that this had to be 1864, the year of Su-un's death. I felt a frisson of electricity jolting through me.

Just as a bell rang to signal the closing of the building, I opened a page dated to the end of the second lunar month. Su-un had been executed on 10th day of the third month of 1864. Suddenly, before my eyes the characters 呪文 ('Jumun') appeared, with several Jumun listed; and then, even more amazing, even more profoundly exciting, there were the characters 弓弓: *gung gung*, and 二, signifying the yeongbu—and something more, which I didn't have time to think about. All I knew at that point was that I had indeed found the official government account of Su-un's trial.

Grasping the archive, I raced down the corridor to the front desk. There was nobody there. I punched a desktop bell and a young man with an assistant librarian tag on his shirt pocket emerged slowly and reluctantly from a back room. He began shaking his head, but before he could speak I held up the archive and pleaded with

him to let me photocopy three pages. *Just three!* if he didn't see the desperation in my eyes, he certainly heard it in my voice. He took the document from me carefully, cradled it in both hands, and we ran to the nearest photocopier. With great care he copied the relevant section and handed the copies to me. He would not accept payment. He just said 'i will return the archive to its place for you.'

i bowed, thanked him profusely, placed the precious pages into my briefcase and left the Gyujanggak as its doors were being locked. i clutched the briefcase to my chest all the way back on the bus to my family. Early next morning we left for australia. n ot once did i let the briefcase out of my sight.

Working on the document later, i discovered that, thanks to r od, i had indeed taken a road less traveled—'and that made all the difference' (with apologies to r obert f rost). a nd as well as to r od, somewhere in Seoul there is an assistant librarian to whom i am eternally grateful.

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There are many people to thank for their generous assistance in helping me to complete this project. Two people, in particular, immediately come to mind, one in South Korea, and one in australia.

i am greatly indebted to mr Choe Chong-dae for a number of reasons. He and i have worked together with d r f rank Tedesco for quite a few years, to produce an English translation of Choe Su-un's scriptures, *Donggyeong Daejeon* and *Yongdam Yusa*. This has not been easy, particularly since 2000 on, when we have been located on three different continents. in addition to our work on the translation, mr Choe has been an enormous help in advising me on d onghak/Cheondo-gyo religion and history, and on many occasions he has put me in contact with scholars and Cheondo-gyo members who, like him, have shared their time and knowledge freely and with great generosity. b ut most of all Choe Chong-dae has inspired me for over fifteen years by his own commitment to Cheondo-gyo and to its religious and social heritage, of which he is an enduring example. i am honoured to call this descendant of Haewol and of Su-un a friend as well as a mentor on all things relating to Cheondo-gyo.

a ssociate Professor r od bucknell, mentioned above, was initially the supervisor of my doctoral thesis at the u niversity of Queensland. o nce this project was completed, r od encouraged me to have my thesis published, and he continued to assist me patiently, generously and astutely in transforming it into this book. a s a b uddhist scholar, r od has an intimate knowledge and understanding of the eastern way of thinking, and on occasions too numerous to mention shed a scholarly light on various aspects of d onghak's Eastern l earning which have been a revelation to me. it has been a great privilege to work with him and to learn from him over the past ten years.

i also wish to express my gratitude to mr Choe Chong-day's brother mr Choe Chong-pyo for being such a gracious host and knowledgeable guide during my several visits to Gyeongju and yongdam, mt Gumi.

i owe a debt of gratitude to Honorable master Park nam Seong and his wife Kim Jeong-ja, who administer the Cheondo-gyo Spiritual Practice Centre at Yongdam, Mt Gumi. The time I spent with them was of deep spiritual significance to me. They allowed me complete freedom to sit for hours in yongdam Pavilion, the place where Su-un's ecstatic experience took place, as well as giving me the opportunity to wander at leisure through the forests and glades or beside the streams and waterfalls of the extraordinarily beautiful and mystical mt Gumi. our conversations—or, more accurately, our spiritual reflections—over the evening meal were the perfect end to many enlightening days.

i wish to thank the current leader of Cheondo-gyo, the Venerable Kim donghwan, both for his gracious welcome and for the advice he gave me about Su-un and donghak/Cheondo-gyo during my two visits to the Cheondo-gyo Central Headquarters in Seoul in September 2007.

most of all, i wish to thank my wife, a nna, from the bottom of my heart for her patience and encouragement during a sixteen-year quest to understand Su-un, his symbols, scriptures, and his life. Su-un has been a constant companion throughout all of our married life, as I first became interested in him in 1991, when i was a graduate student at yonsei university's Graduate School of international Studies in Seoul. much more than i, a nna has a deep understanding of the eastern and Korean way of thinking. She was a fulbright scholar to South Korea, she is bi-lingual in English and Korean, and on many occasions she has been not only supportive, but insightful and helpful in assisting me to understand Su-un and Eastern Learning. i also wish to thank our wonderful children, Sarah and Sean, for allowing me the space and time to complete this project.

List of abbreviations

Canon of Su-un's Scripture

<i>DGDJ</i>	<i>Donggyeong Daejeon</i> [<i>The Great Collection of Eastern Scriptures</i>] consisting of the following books:
<i>PDM</i>	<i>Podeok-mun</i> [<i>On Propagating Virtue</i>]
<i>NHM</i>	<i>Nonhak-mun</i> [<i>Discussion on Learning</i>]
<i>SDM</i>	<i>Sudeok-mun</i> [<i>On Cultivating Virtue</i>]
<i>BYGY</i>	<i>Bulyeon Giyeon</i> [<i>The Common and the Ultimate (Truth)</i>]
<i>JM</i>	<i>Jumun</i> [<i>Sacred Incantation</i>]
<i>ICS</i>	<i>Ipchun-si</i> [<i>Verse of the Vernal Equinox</i>]
<i>PB</i>	<i>Pilbeop</i> [<i>The Way of the Brush Stroke</i>]
<i>YDYS</i>	<i>Yongdam Yusa</i> [<i>Reflections of the Dragon Pool</i>] consisting of the following books:
<i>GHG</i>	<i>Gyohun-ga</i> [<i>Song of Instruction</i>]
<i>ASG</i>	<i>Ansim-ga</i> [<i>Song of Comfort</i>]
<i>YDG</i>	<i>Yongdam-ga</i> [<i>Songs of the Dragon Pool</i>]
<i>MJNSMDG</i>	<i>Mongjung Noso Mundap-ga</i> [<i>Dialogue between the Old and the Young in a Dream</i>]
<i>DSS</i>	<i>Dosu-sa</i> [<i>Song of Cultivating the Way</i>]
<i>GG</i>	<i>Geom-Gyeol</i> : [<i>Song of the Sword</i>]

Choe Haewol's Writings

<i>HWSSBS</i>	<i>Haewol Sinsa Bopseol</i> [<i>The Divine Teacher Haewol's Sermons on the Law</i>]
<i>DK</i>	<i>Do Kyeol</i> [<i>The Secret Way</i>]
<i>YBJM</i>	<i>Yeongbu Jumun</i>
<i>CJPM</i>	<i>Cheonji Pumo</i> [<i>Heaven, Earth, Father, Mother</i>]
<i>DICM</i>	<i>Daein Cheopmul</i> [<i>The Interacting Principle Between People and Things</i>]
<i>SDP</i>	<i>Sudo Peop</i> [<i>The Practice of Asceticism</i>]
<i>NSDM</i>	<i>Nae Sudo-mun</i> [<i>Cultivation of the Family</i>]

Other Main Resources

- CGGJ* *Cheondo-gyo Gyeongjeon* [*Compilation of official Donghak/
Cheondo-gyo Scriptures*]
- ISN* *Ilseong-nok* [*Records of (the King's) Daily Reflection*]
- JGN* *Jeonggam-nok* [*Record of Jeonggam*]
- DHJGNJ* *Donghak Heokmyeong 100 Junyeon Ginyeom Non Jong* [*Collection
of Treatises on the Hundredth Anniversary of the Donghak
Rebellion*]

author's note on Transcription

in the book i have followed the revised romanization of Korean System – the official Korean Romanization language program developed by the National Academy of Korean Language and put into effect throughout the nation on 4 July 2004. The revised System replaced the McCune-Reischauer romanization System, which had been in effect since 1984.

many of the quotations in the book follow the McCune-Reischauer romanization System and some follow other systems, which had been in use in Korea for a significant period of time prior to the adoption of the Revised romanization of Korean System. Consequently, some differences occur between the body of the text and quotations. These differences are easily identified and just as easily understood. They generally refer to place names, book titles, individuals' names and the like, and do not alter the meaning of the quotations in which they occur.

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Chronological Table

Chronology of Su-un's life

28th day, 10th month, 1824 (Solar Calendar: 18 december 1824)	Su-un is born to Choe o k and madam Han. n ame at birth: Choe Je-seon. a lso known as Choe b ok-sul. ¹
1829	Su-un's mother dies.
1836	in obedience to his father's command, Su-un marries miss Pak of u lsan.
1840	Su-un's father dies.
1843	Su-un begins his peripatetic lifestyle.
1854	Su-un ceases his wandering and settles down with his family in u lsan.
Summer 1856	Su-un travels to n aewon-sa, a b uddhist monastery, where he begins a 49-day retreat. He is forced to abandon the retreat on the 47th day, when his uncle dies unexpectedly.
1857	Su-un travels to a more secluded location, to Cheok-myeol (n irvana) cave, and completes a 49-day retreat. n o spiritual transformation occurs.
1859	Su-un relocates his family at his father's retreat at yongdam, mt Gumi. He changes his name from Je-seon to Che-u and enters an extended, intense period of prayer. He composes the poem <i>Ipchun</i> [<i>Vernal Equinox</i>].
5th day, 4th month, 1860 (25 may 1860)	Su-un has an ecstatic encounter with the l ord of Heaven. Su-un subsequently composes several books of <i>Yongdam Yusa</i> .
1861	Su-un meets with visiting scholars to discuss the d onghak Way and begins composition of <i>Donggyeong Daejeon</i> . He is forced to journey south, to Jolla Province, to evade capture by government authorities.
10th month, 1863 (11 n ovember–10 december 1863)	Su-un is arrested and imprisoned. He accompanies his captors willingly.
29th day, 2nd month, 1864 (5 a pril 1864)	Su-un is tried, convicted of heresy, and sentenced to death.
10th day, 3rd month, 1864 (15 a pril 1864)	Su-un is executed by beheading. Persecution of the d onghak faithful begins.

¹ Su-un was referred to as b ok-sul at his trial, which indicates that this may have been the name by which he was registered at birth.

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introduction

in the spring of 1894, a disparate band of peasant farmers, religious devotees and disenfranchised landed gentry assembled under the leadership of Confucian scholar-turned-general Jeon bong-jun and, inspired by an emerging native creed and fueled by deep-seated grievances which had been ignored by Korean authorities at all levels of government for decades, they inflicted a succession of heavy defeats on the Joseon dynasty military. by 31 may 1894, the donghaks¹—as they were known—had captured Jeonju, the capital of Jeolla Province, just 200 kilometers south of Seoul. They resisted all counterattacks by government forces under the leadership of General Hong Kyae-hun and seemed entirely capable of marching on the capital and of toppling what they considered to be a corrupt and immoral administration.

The peasant army, which had grown in size and confidence as it marched north, halted at Jeonju of its own volition. its leaders, out of deference to King Kojong, if not for the bickering, manipulative officials who surrounded him, agreed to meet with General Hong. With the king's approval, the general offered a temporary peace settlement to the rebels as a delaying ploy, while the monarch urgently petitioned China for military assistance. China responded by sending troops to Korea on 5 June 1894. Japan, which had developed its own plans for the Korean peninsula, not wishing to be outmaneuvered by China in an escalating game of brinkmanship, immediately dispatched troops to Korea as well. Quite suddenly, Korea became the potential flashpoint of a regional conflict with major international implications.

Where and how did this peasant rebellion—which hovered on the brink of toppling the centuries-old Joseon dynasty and of bringing the region's dominant powers to war—begin? What ideals, vision, and creed inspired and directed a large section of the populace which, to this point in history, had had difficulty in organizing and sustaining even local rebellions for any length of time? in whose mind did the seeds of this movement germinate? and what particular circumstances nurtured them to fruition?

To answer these questions one must journey back almost half a century, to a mountain retreat near the ancient Silla dynasty capital of Gyeongju, and even further back, into the life of a man who sought a new 'Way' to lead him and his followers through the tumultuous times into which they were born. He sought a healing path. That his teachings and his vision inspired a revolution which had a

¹ The name means 'Eastern Learning'. The name of was changed to 'Cheondo-gyo' ('the religion of the Heavenly Way') by the third leader of the religion, Son byeong-hi, in 1905.

formative effect in changing the geo-political structures of northeast Asia would no doubt have astonished him. He was a peaceful man.

This man is known to history as Choe Che-u. As the name Choe recurs frequently in this work as the surname of a number of individuals, Choe Che-u will subsequently be referred to simply as Su-un,² a name bestowed on him by his followers.

The present book will attempt to discern the very essence of this man Su-un. That is, of the manner in which he envisioned himself as he sought a solution, or more accurately a 'Way' which would give hope and sustenance to the Korean people as they faced impending invasion by colonizing forces and, particularly, to the masses at the bottom of the societal pyramid, which were subjected to increasing and systemic governmental negligence and abuse.

Why is an attempt to define Su-un's self-image an important task?

Firstly, it is important because Su-un was a religious innovator and the founder of Korea's first indigenous religion—that is, the first of a large number of syncretic religions and sects which flourished in the oppressive times marking the end of the Jeosun dynasty and of the Japanese occupation of the Korean peninsula. Many of these religions survive today.

As a religious innovator, Su-un became the prototype for the founders of Korea's many new religions and religious movements. It has been stated that 'all new religions in Korea are consciously or unconsciously patterned after *donghak*'.³ Consequently it is of considerable importance, from the perspective of religious leadership in general and in East Asia and Korea in particular, that Su-un's self-image as a religious leader should be determined as accurately as possible. For, as Su-un's concept of himself as a religious leader evolved, so too did the image of a new style of religious leadership which, in time, would cast its influence on the leaders of the new religious movements who followed him. This study is important because of its religious relevance to Korea and northeast Asia.

Secondly, Su-un was born into a time when Korea was embroiled in the most dire social and political turmoil, both internally and externally. Internecine struggles for power among the ruling classes blinded them to catastrophic events unfolding in the neighbouring countries of China and Japan, which foreshadowed similar occurrences in Korea. Endemic corruption, characteristic of a dynasty in decay, caused unrest to ferment among the underprivileged and disenfranchised

² meaning 'Watercloud'.

³ Cho Hung-yun, 'New Religions', in *Religions in Korea* (Seoul: Korea Overseas Information Service 1986), p. 108. *Donghak* is described by Benjamin B. Weems as 'the oldest of Korea's "new" religions' ('Chondo-gyo Enters its Second Century', *Transactions* (Royal Asiatic Society, Korea Branch), vol. 43, 1968 p. 92); and by James Huntley Grayson as Korea's 'first syncretic religion' (*Korea: A Religious History*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989, p. 234). Byron Earhart describes *donghak*/Cheondo-gyo as 'the major pioneer of new religious movements' ('The New Religions of Korea: a Preliminary Interpretation', *Transactions*, vol. 49, 1974, p. 19).

lower classes and brought the country to the brink of widespread rebellion. All of these forces influenced Su-un and helped shape his destiny—a destiny which would not only change the lives of his followers, but would also impact on the lives of his fellow countrymen: one way or another, all would be affected by Donghak and by the rebellion it inspired. Su-un's Way and the rebellion which, inadvertently or otherwise, sprang from it had a formative effect on the reshaping of the geo-political structure of the area. Thus this study is important for its social and political relevance to Northeast Asia.

The third reason for attempting to define Su-un's self-image is that a textual study of Su-un's concept of himself, based on his scriptures and on the two symbols he used to proclaim and propagate his religion, has not been attempted. This book aims to fill this lacuna in the religious history of Korea.

Su-un was a visionary, a charismatic individual whose eclectic and counter-cultural religious principles had a transforming effect on society and politics within, and also well beyond, the boundaries of his own country. This book, however, does not attempt to cover at any depth historical, societal and political events which followed Su-un's death, and registers those which preceded his ecstatic experience on Mt Gumi in the spring of 1860 inasmuch as they had a direct bearing on Su-un, his family and his lineage. My primary goal here is to examine Su-un's scriptures and symbols in order to postulate a self-image of Su-un in the final days of his life. In doing so, I attempt to lay a sound foundation for understanding not only Su-un and the religion he founded, but the reasons for the growth of this religion and for the flowering of other new religious movements which followed Donghak. A sound foundation is, after all, a necessary, if not an essential, part of any viable structure.

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When I arrived in Seoul in August 1984, an expatriate who had lived and worked in South Korea for over twenty-five years offered me the following advice:

if you wish to learn about Korea, its people, history, language, culture, society, religions and traditions, don't just read books about them. Rather pick one person or one event, and study this person or event in as much depth as possible. By doing so you will accumulate knowledge not only about this person or event, but about the way Koreans think and act and live. Your knowledge will be like a tiny snowball that rolls from the top to the bottom of a steep hill, growing all the time.

and, most importantly, live with the people and learn from them.

My wish is that, having followed his advice to the best of my ability, I should now be able to accompany the readers of this book on a journey across time and cultures, to meet and to attempt to understand one fascinating and complex individual who lived in a fascinating and complex land, at a crucial time in that land's history. In

my opinion, it is a project worth undertaking, as the journey leads not only into Korea, the land, the people, and their culture but into the heart and mind of one person who resides within all these.

The journey may not end there. it may very well lead also into the depths of one's own heart and mind. and, as with Su-un, who knows what mysteries await discovery there?

Chapter 1

materials and method

Choe Su-un was born on 18 december 1824 in what is now Kajeong-ni, Hyeongmyeon, Weolseong County, north Gyeongsan Province, South Korea.¹ Su-un was known by several names and titles. His name given at birth, perhaps in anticipation of his later role in life, was Je-seon ('save and proclaim').² He was also known in childhood as bok-sul ('transmitting or narrating happiness/good luck').³ Following the establishment of his new religion, Su-un is generally referred to in donghak/Cheondo-gyo sources by the honorific title Daesinsa ('Great Divine Teacher').

The name by which Su-un is most frequently referred is the one which he chose for himself prior to his revelation on mt Gumi, namely Che-u ('saviour of the ignorant').⁴ As mentioned in the introduction, his followers gave him the name Su-un ('Watercloud'),⁵ evocative perhaps of an ability to bring sustenance and relief across human boundaries.

Su-un's public ministry lasted a little over three years. Following his arrest and trial, he was put to death on 15 april 1864. As his sentence, *Hyosu Gyeongjung*, stipulated, his head was severed from his body, placed on a stick and publicly displayed.⁶ After Su-un's execution many of his followers fled and hid in the mountains.⁷

This inauspicious beginning might have relegated the donghak religion to a footnote in Korean history, had it not been for the organizational ability and

¹ Choe dong-hui, 'The Life and Thought of Ch'oe Che-u', *Korea Journal*, vol. 11, no. 9, 1971, p. 25.

² Choe dong-hui, 'Su-un-eui Saengae' ['Life of Su-un'], in Ko mun-hae (ed.), *Donghak Heokmyeong 100 Junyeon Ginyeom Non Jong* [Collection of Treatises on the Hundredth Anniversary of the Donghak Rebellion; henceforth *DHJGNJ*], vol. 1, Seoul: Taekwang munhwasa, 1994, p. 144.

³ Yu byeong-deok (ed.), 'Tonghak Chondogyo', in *Korean Religious Research*, vol. 6, 2nd rev. edn., Iksan-si, Jeollabuk-do: Korean Religious Affairs Institute, Wongwang University, 1993, p. 54.

⁴ The circumstances surrounding this change of name and its significance will be examined in Chs 2 and 6.

⁵ Choe dong-hui, 'Su-un-eui Saengae', in *DHJGNJ* (above, n. 2), vol. 2, p. 144.

⁶ Choe dong-hui, 'Hanguk Kundaehwa-wa donghak undong' ['Korean modernization and the donghak rebellion'], *Nara Sarang* [Patriotism], vol. 15, no. 4, 1974, p. 32.

⁷ Lee Ki-baik, *A New History of Korea*, trans. Edgar W. Wagner, Cambridge, ma: Harvard University Press, 1984, p. 259.

dynamism of its second leader, Choe Si-hyeong, whose writings will be the subject of examination in subsequent chapters.

Primary Sources

As explained in the introduction, the aim of the present study is to determine as accurately as possible Su-un's final self-image through an exegetical examination of the two symbols he used to disseminate the Donghak Way, specifically the yeongbu and the Jumun. This examination will take place in the context of Su-un's canon of scripture and of other relevant primary and secondary source materials. My study will follow the historical development of the Donghak religion only to the extent that it relates to this primary objective.

The Donghak Scriptures

Following his awakening (*Kaepyeok*) on Mt Gumi on 25 May 1860, Su-un wrote about this experience and about his life leading up to it, about his conversation with scholars after it and about the basic tenets of his new religion, in a number of essays and poems. These essays and poems were reportedly destroyed by fire following his death. But, according to Cheondo-gyo sources, they had been committed to memory by Choe Si-hyeong (Haewol⁸) before their destruction.⁹

As part of his restructuring of Donghak, Haewol organized the promulgation of the founder's writings. He established publishing houses in Inje, Gangwon province and in Danyang, Chungcheong province and had copies of *Donggyeong Daejeon*¹⁰ published from a wood-block engraving on 15 July 1880 in Inje. In July 1881, *Yongdam Yusa*¹¹ was published in Danyang in a similar way.¹² Haewol established a third publishing house in February 1883 in Mokchon, Chungcheong province and published 1000 copies of *Donggyeong Daejeon*, which he distributed to various locations.¹³ Thus Su-un's writings, divided into two books, were initially published sixteen, seventeen and nineteen years respectively after his death.

The primary text which will be used for the present study is the official compilation of Cheondo-gyo scripture, *Cheondo-gyo Gyeongjeon*, printed and

⁸ 'moon over the ocean'. For the sake of clarity, Choe Si-hyeong will subsequently be referred to as Haewol.

⁹ Susan S. Shin, 'The Tonghak movement: from Enlightenment to revolution', *Korean Studies Forum*, 5, Winter/Spring 1978-9, pp. 30 and 35.

¹⁰ *The Great Collection of Eastern Scriptures*.

¹¹ *Reflections of the Dragon Pool*.

¹² Ko Mun-hae, 'Cheondo-gyo yeonbu' ['Chronology of Cheondo-gyo History'], in *dHJGn J* (above, n. 2), vol. 2, p. 725.

¹³ Shin Yong-ha, 'Conjunction of Tonghak and the Peasant War of 1894', *Korea Journal*, vol. 34, no. 4, Winter 1994, p. 67.

published by the Cheondo-gyo organization.¹⁴ This text will be used in conjunction with two of the earliest extant copies of Donghak scripture, imprinted from wood-block engravings: *Donggyeong Daejeon*: mid-Summer, 1883: Gyeongju re-issue; and *Yongdam Yusa*: mid-autumn, 1883: northern unit new issue.

Donggyeong Daejeon and *Yongdam Yusa* are distinguished by the script in which they are written. *Donggyeong Daejeon* is written in classic Chinese characters, whereas *yongdam yusa* is written in Korean script, hangul.¹⁵ Consequently, the sections of the community for which these books are written can be easily deduced. *Donggyeong Daejeon* was written for a scholarly, well-educated audience, while *Yongdam Yusa* addresses the common people.

Yongdam Yusa

The Donghak/Cheondo-gyo scholar Choeng Jae-ho divides *Yongdam Yusa* into two categories of four and five books respectively. Four books, namely *Yongdam-ga* [*Songs of the Dragon Pool*], *Ansim-ga* [*Song of Comfort*], *Gyohun-ga* [*Song of Instruction*] and *Mongjung Noso Mundap-ga Dialogue between the Young and the Old in a Dream*], he terms *Naepyeon* (the ‘inside’ books), and the remaining five he designates *Waepyeon* (the ‘outside’ books).

The ‘inside’ books derive from Su-un’s ecstatic experience at *yongdam Pavilion* on Mt Gumi on 25 May 1860 and are oriented towards women, their families and the people of Su-un’s neighbourhood. These books were the first of the Donghak scriptures to be composed.¹⁶ The subsequent five ‘outside’ books relate to people outside Su-un’s immediate circle of acquaintances, for example his disciples or people who were interested in his new ‘Way’. The four ‘inside’ books relate to Su-un’s personal life. The ‘outside’ books are more in the form of lectures to his disciples regarding the practice of the Way and the ethical system which supports it.¹⁷

Yongdam Yusa is written in *Kasa* verse, a lyrical repetitive–narrative verse form which facilitates memorization. This form of poetry originated in song lyrics, with their stress on description and exposition. The subject matter of *Kasa* verse is the daily life of women and men of the middle and lower classes.¹⁸

¹⁴ *Cheondo-gyo Gyeongjeon* [*Cheondo-gyo Scriptures*], Seoul: Cheondo-gyo Central Headquarters, 1993. This is the entire compilation of the Cheondo-gyo scriptures.

¹⁵ *Hangul*, the Korean alphabet, was created under the patronage of King Sejong (1418–50) and promulgated in 1446 (Lee Ki-baik, *A New History of Korea* (above, n. 7), pp. 192–3). This enabled the language of everyday speech to be written and read by a general populace unskilled in the use of the Chinese writing system which, to that time, had been the sole means of written communication.

¹⁶ refer to the section ‘dating of the Texts’ below.

¹⁷ Cheong Jae-ho, ‘*yongdam yusa-eui Gukmun Hakjeok Kochal*’ [‘a literary study of *yongdam yusa*’], *Hanguk Sasang* [*Korean Thought*], vol. 12, 1974, p. 131.

¹⁸ Peter H. Lee, *Anthology of Korean Poetry*, Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1982, p. 199.

as an appreciation of *Kasa* poetry is essential to understanding why Su-un chose to use it to communicate his experience and his message, a brief examination of it will be undertaken here.

Kasa, as a new genre of vernacular verse, appeared around the middle of the fifteenth century and gained predominance in the times of kings Yeongjo and Jeongjo (1725–1800), when it became a popular form of poetry among women and the common people. In subject matter, *Kasa* poetry focused on daily life; it was mostly written by women, particularly in the south-eastern section of the Korean peninsula.¹⁹ Easily memorized because of its classic 4.4.4.4 rhythmic pattern,²⁰ *Kasa* poetry facilitated dramatization and was considered by its female creators as the most important part of a woman's education; women knew by heart the texts and tunes of several dozen poems.²¹

It does not appear coincidental that the Donghak religion began and spread first in the south-eastern part of the country, where *Kasa* poetry was most prevalent. Nor does it appear coincidental that Su-un chose women as his first audience and entrusted them to be the initial disseminators of his embryonic creed.

Donggyeong Daejeon

Unlike *Kasa* verse, the literary form of *Donggyeong Daejeon* has little influence on the message being communicated. Chinese characters are arranged vertically, in columns of twenty, with no discernible breaks for the beginning and end of verse or chapter. If anything, this form facilitates an academic rather than a dramatic reading. Worth noting, however, is that the texts of *Donggyeong Daejeon* were interpreted in a system called *hyangchal*, in which the Chinese characters were expressed by Korean nouns having the same meaning, while verb stems, inflections and other grammatical characteristics were communicated through the use of Chinese characters chosen to express the desired pronunciation. Consequently a Chinese scholar, while able to understand the written text of *Donggyeong Daejeon*, would not understand it if it were read aloud according to the *hyangchal* system, whereas a Korean who lacked formal education and could not read the text could understand it when it was read aloud.²²

In addition to the writings of Su-un contained in the *Cheondo-gyo Gyeongjeon*, this book of Cheondo-gyo scriptures also contains the writings of Choe Si-hyeong (Haewol) and Son Byeong-hi (Uiam), respectively the second and third leaders of Donghak/Cheondo-gyo. The writings of Haewol in particular will be drawn upon

¹⁹ Peter H. Lee, *Korean Literature: Topics and Themes*, 2nd edn, Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1965, pp. 51 and 59–60.

²⁰ Choeng Jae-ho, 'Yongdam yusa-eui Gukmun Hakjeok Kochal' (above, n. 17), p. 129.

²¹ Lee, *Korean Literature* (above, n. 19), p. 60.

²² Lee Ki-baik, *A New History of Korea* (above, n. 7), p. 57.

in later chapters in reference to the early development of the yeongbu, the Jumun and key principles of the donghak religion.

Dating of the Texts

before undertaking an analysis and comparison of the texts of the donghak scriptures, in particular the three accounts of Su-un's revelatory experience, it is important to establish as accurately as possible the sequence in which the books were written. if a sequence can be established, it will be possible to observe whether developments took place in Su-un's thinking and to determine what effect the earliest accounts may have had on subsequent ones.

dating the various books of the donghak scriptures is not a simple task, primarily because, as noted earlier, all of Su-un's writings were destroyed following his death. Thus what is currently available to Cheondo-gyo believers and scholars of religion is, at best, an approximation of the original compositions of the founder.

This point is made convincingly by Cheong Jae-ho in his critical examination of the books of *Yongdam Yusa*. Cheong makes an important distinction between the time when a book was created and the time when it was written down.²³ The importance of this distinction relates particularly to *Yeongdam Yusa* which, as noted, was composed in *Kasa* verse form and was meant to be transmitted orally. Thus an oral version may have predated the written version by some time. Cheong points out that the form in which *Yongdam Yusa* was finally published in 1881 undoubtedly differs from the original version.²⁴ This theory also applies to the books of *Donggyeong Daejeon*, which are likely to have undergone changes, as they were written down from memory by Haewol. Cheong draws on five sources in order to date the books of *Yongdam Yusa*.²⁵

Other scholars who have addressed the problem of dating the donghak texts are Pak Chang-geon²⁶ and Kim Ki-seon in his commentary on *Yongdam Yusa*.²⁷ These two scholars, together with Cheong Jae-ho and the five scholars to whom he refers, are all in agreement concerning the fact that the three central texts of

²³ Cheong Jae-ho, 'yongdam yusa-eui Gukmun Hakjeok Kochal' (above, n. 17), p. 117.

²⁴ *ibid.*, p. 122.

²⁵ *ibid.*, p. 118. The books referred to for this comparison are: *Su-un Haeng-nok*, [A Biography of Su-un]; *Cheondo-gyo Seo* [Cheondo-gyo History Textbook]; *Cheondo-gyo Changgeon-sa* [Cheondo-gyo Foundation History]; *Cheondo-gyo Sa* [Cheondo-gyo History]; and *Cheondo-gyo Gyeongjeon* [Cheondo-gyo Scriptures]. The author gives his personal assessment in a final column.

²⁶ Pak Chang-geon, *Su-un Sasang-kwa Cheondo-gyo* [Su-un's Thought and Cheondo-gyo], Seoul: Cheondo-gyo Central Headquarters Publishing, 1971, pp. 113–53.

²⁷ Kim Ki-seon, *Yongdam Yusa: Chuhae Haeseol* [Commentary on the Legacy of the Dragon Pool], Seoul: donghak research institute, 1991.

Yongdam Yusa, namely *Yongdam-ga*, *Ansim-ga*, and *Gyohun-ga*, were the first books of the donghak scriptures to be composed by Su-un.

The donghak scholar Choe Dong-hui, however, is of a different opinion. Choe writes that Su-un escaped to the south of the peninsula between June 1861 and March 1862, as he was facing arrest on account of rumors that he was a believer in *Seohak* (Catholicism). Choe states that Su-un composed four books of *Yongdam Yusa* during this southern sojourn.²⁸ Although Choe does not specify which four books Su-un wrote during the period in question, it would be logical to deduce that the three main texts of *Yongdam Yusa*—that is, *Yongdam-ga*, *Ansim-ga*, and *Gyohun-ga*—were among them. This implies a later date of composition than the one suggested by the scholars referred to above.²⁹

According to Susan Shin, at the end of 1861 Su-un reached the town of Namwon in South Jeolla province and lived there in a Buddhist temple.³⁰ Shin writes that it was during this period of residency that Su-un wrote *Nonhak-mun*. In her translation of several books of *Donggyeong Daejeon*, Shin posits their time of authorship as follows: *Podeok-mun*, spring 1861; *Nonhak-mun*, December 1861; *Sudeok-mun*, sixth lunar month 1862.³¹

Finally, in the *Cheondo-gyo Undong-sa*, a semi-official publication of the Cheondo-gyo organization, the author Hong Jang-hwa states that *Yongdam-ga*, *Ansim-ga*, and *Geom-Gyeol* were written in 1860; *Podeok-mun*, *Nonhak-mun*, *Gyohun-ga*, *Mongjung Noso Mundap-ga* and *Dosu-sa* were written in 1861; and *Dodeok-ga* and *Heungbi-ga* were written in 1863.³²

Conclusions from the Dating Procedures

One conclusion that can be drawn from the theories stated above is that total agreement regarding the exact dating of the books of the Cheondo-gyo scriptures does not exist among scholars, either inside or outside the Cheondo-gyo organization. Yet certain conclusions, by way of a limited consensus, can still be drawn from the academic speculations presented above.

First, the five sources quoted in Cheong Jae-ho's article, together with his own assessment as well as with that of Pak Chang-geon and Kim Ki-seon, date the composition of *Yongdam-ga* to 1860, with Cheong specifying a date between the

²⁸ Choe Dong-hui, 'The Life and Thought of Ch'oe Che-u' (above, n. 1), p. 26.

²⁹ Like Choe Dong-hui, Pak Chang-geon (p. 122) states that Su-un's escape south took place in 1861.

³⁰ Susan S. Shin, 'The Tonghak movement: from Enlightenment to revolution' (above, n. 9), p. 12.

³¹ *ibid.*, pp. 61–70. Sixth lunar month in 1862 corresponds to the period 27 June–26 July 1862 according to the Solar Calendar.

³² Hong Jang-hwa, *Cheondo-gyo Undong-sa [History of Cheondogyo]*, Seoul: Cheondo-gyo Central Headquarters Publishing, 1990, pp. 20 and 24.

fourth and the tenth month of that year. All these authors indicate that *Yongdam-ga* was the first book of the Donghak scriptures to be written.

Second, by most accounts there was an interval of between six months and a year before the next book of the Donghak scriptures was composed, although there is a lack of consensus regarding which book followed *Yongdam-ga* and the exact length of this interval.

Third, it appears that the core texts of *Yongdam Yusa* were composed before those of *Donggyeong Daejeon*, with the possible exception of *Podeok-mun*, which may have been written between 27 July 1861 and 17 February 1862.³³

The following Table³⁴ offers a chronological sequencing of the main texts of *Yongdam Yusa* and *Donggyeong Daejeon*, on the basis of the majority of scholarly opinion outlined above:

Table 1.1 Dating of the texts

Book	Date	Scriptural Collection
<i>Yongdam-ga</i>	1860	<i>Yongdam Yusa</i>
<i>Ansim-ga</i>	1860	<i>Yongdam Yusa</i>
<i>Gyohun-ga</i>	1860	<i>Yongdam Yusa</i>
<i>Jumun</i>	1860–61	<i>Donggyeong Daejeon</i>
<i>Podeok-mun</i>	1861	<i>Donggyeong Daejeon</i>
<i>Nonhak-mun</i>	1861	<i>Donggyeong Daejeon</i>
<i>Dosu-sa</i>	1861	<i>Yongdam Yusa</i>
<i>Mongjung Noso Mundap-ga</i>	1862	<i>Yongdam Yusa</i>
<i>Sudeok-mun</i>	1862	<i>Donggyeong Daejeon</i>
<i>Bulyeon Giyeon</i>	1863	<i>Donggyeong Daejeon</i>

Consequently, in relation to the dating of the Donghak scriptures, it can be deduced that narration in the form of oral compositions (*Kasa* verse) preceded rationalization in the form of carefully worded academic discussions. The chronological pre-eminence of *Yongdam Yusa* indicates that Su-un's initial intention

³³ Lunar calendar: between the seventh and the twelfth month of 1861.

³⁴ The Table refers to the books of Su-un's scriptures composed after his epiphany on Mt Kumi. Su-un actually composed a poem in early 1860 which predated *Yongdam-ga*; this poem is entitled *Ipchun-si* [*Verse of the Vernal Equinox*] and is included in *Donggyeong Daejeon*. The circumstances surrounding the writing of this poem are described in Ch. 2 ('Su-un's Religious Quest: Su-un's Change of Name').

was to proselytize a less well-educated populace before turning his attention to a more scholarly audience. The selection of his preferred audience is also indicative of his concept of himself as a religious leader, particularly at the earliest stages of his proselytization.

Ilseong-nok and *Jeonggam-nok*

Two additional primary sources will be consulted to determine the nature and importance of Su-un's two key symbols, the yeongbu and the Jumun.

The first is a document which sets out the evidence used against Su-un during his trial, evidence that led to his conviction on charges of heresy and subversion. This document is a section of the great archival record *Ilseong-nok* [*Records of (the King's) Daily Reflection*]. *Ilseong-nok* comprises various records and reflections compiled during the Joseon dynasty (CE 1392–1910).³⁵

The section that will be examined is a report to the throne by the governor of Gyeongsang province, dated to the end of the second lunar month of 1864.³⁶ This report describes the practices of Su-un and his followers, largely on the basis of their oral testimony at his trial. The document contains essential material relating to the composition of the yeongbu and to the development of the Jumun, material which has, for some reason, been accorded little attention by scholars to date.

The second document is *Jeonggam-nok* [*Record of Jeonggam*], an enigmatic book of prophecy of indeterminate age.³⁷ The book refers to the apocalyptic ending of the Joseon dynasty and to the coming of a heroic figure called *Jin-in* ('True man'), who will save the people from catastrophe.³⁸ A n examination of selected passages of *Jeonggam-nok* will be undertaken in order to determine how they may have influenced Su-un in the creation of the Yeongbu and how he adopted and adapted the symbolism of these passages to communicate core principles of his new religion.

³⁵ These archives are preserved in the Gyujaenggak (Palace Library) located at Seoul National University. The Gyujaenggak is a research library established by King Jeongjo (1776–1800); See Lee Ki-baik, *New History of Korea* (above, n. 7), p. 238.

³⁶ Section 5, Gojong 1st year (*kapja*), 2nd month, 29th day: Gyujaenggak archives, vol. 65, 1995: pp. 158–62. The statement about the document's author and intent follows Susan Shin ('The Tonghak movement: from Enlightenment to revolution' (above, n. 9), p. 20), as it had direct access only to the section under consideration here.

³⁷ James H. Grayson, *Korea: A Religious History*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989, pp. 242–3 states: 'the book also contains purported prophecies of the Silla monk Tosŏn (827–98), the Koryŏ-Chosŏn monk Muhak and the Chosŏn-period seers T'ojŏng (Yi Jiham, 1517–78) and Kyŏgam. Said to date from the 16th century, there is no firm evidence for its existence prior to 1785 when the first copy was "discovered".'

³⁸ Choi Joon-sik, 'New Religions', in *Religious Culture in Korea*, Seoul: Ministry of Culture and Sports, General Religious Affairs Division, 1996, p. 106.

Secondary Sources

Secondary sources, both historical and contemporary, will also be accessed in this study. I have found that, among some non-Korean scholars writing on the d onghak/Cheondo-gyo religion, there is a tendency not to undertake research of original source material or documents, but to rely rather on secondary sources written in these scholars' native language which do not always portray the religion or its founder accurately and objectively. As a consequence, mistakes can be repeated several times over, until they are accepted as fact. Therefore the following test of authenticity will be adhered to in examining secondary sources:

1. in their study of the d onghak religion, researchers must have taken full account of the contents of the d onghak scriptures and, in particular, of Sun's two books of scripture, *Donggyeong Daejeon* and *Yongdam Yusa*.
2. due consideration must have been given to the two symbols of d onghak belief, the y eongbu and the Jumun, on which the religion is based and from which its central principles evolved.

if scholars have followed these guidelines, their work will be given serious consideration. However, if scholars have relied primarily on secondary sources and perpetuate mistakes contained in them, such as, for example, confusing the nature and the roles of the y eongbu and the Jumun or, more seriously, completely neglecting to mention these symbols, their work and their conclusions will be treated with caution, if referred to at all.

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Chapter 2

Su-un's Life and Times

The Historical Situation Preceding Su-un's Birth

For the major part of the eighteenth century Korea prospered under the lengthy reign of two enlightened monarchs, King Yeongjo (1724–76), and King Jeongjo (1776–1800). The reigns of these kings coincided with, and were largely responsible for, a flowering of creativity in the sciences and the arts to the extent that the whole period can be considered a Korean renaissance. It was during the stable reign of these two kings that the School of Practical Learning (*Silhak*) flourished.

With the death of King Jeongjo in 1800, the stability which had lasted on the Korean peninsula for seventy-five years came to an abrupt end. Four kings occupied the royal throne in Korea in the nineteenth century, and their age at accession dictated a shift in the locus of power away from the monarch and into the hands of the aristocratic family which controlled him.

Specifically, King Sunjo (1800–34) assumed the throne when he was ten; King Heonjong (1834–49), when he was six; King Jeoljong (1849–63), when he was sixteen; and King Kojong (1864–1907) when he was thirteen years old. The young ages at which these kings were chosen for office resulted in three characteristics which dominated the Korean political scene for over a century: (1) a weak monarchy (2) a strong aristocracy and (3) constant factional strife.¹

In the first half of the nineteenth century, two powerful aristocratic clans, the Andong Kim clan and the Buryang Jeo clan,² alternately ruled the country from behind the throne. This politics of royal in-law families (*sedo jeongchi*) focused exclusively on two alternative concerns: how to stay in power or how to get back into power. Once an aristocratic clan was in power, it brooked no criticism. Dissent, even within the royal house, resulted in banishment or execution for treason.³ Political debate and a viable opposition, the signs of a healthy government, were entirely absent.

The constant intrigue and maneuvering which the acquiring and maintaining of power necessitated diverted the energy of those in power away from the task of efficiently governing the country. As a direct consequence of the internecine politics of *sedo jeongchi*, the traditional means of accessing power, the civil service examination (*kwago*), became totally corrupt. A *ll* that was required in order to

¹ Lee Ki-baik, *A New History of Korea*, trans. Edgar W. Wagner, Cambridge, ma : Harvard University Press, 1984, pp. 246 and 394.

² Their seats of power were Andong and Buryang respectively.

³ Lee Ki-baik, *A New History of Korea* (above, n. 1), pp. 247–8.

pass the examination was to have the right connections with the ruling clan. Thus the top echelons of government were gradually filled, not with Korea's most able and intelligent bureaucrats, but with cronies of the governing clan.

Ultimately it was the lower classes that were most affected by government corruption. Large sums offered in bribes by governing clans to remain in office had to be recovered by taxes levied on the peasantry, which they were unable to meet. The lives of peasants, who did not own their land, were characterized by systemic and constant poverty. Thousands died of hunger in times of famine or poor harvest, and many were forced to abandon their villages in search of food or work.⁴

The oppressive conditions were further compounded by a series of natural disasters in the form of droughts and floods, which alternated regularly in the first half of the nineteenth century. These adverse natural conditions, combined with the lamentable social situation, resulted in a series of agrarian revolts aimed at wiping out the ruling class. The Peasants' War of 1812 led by Hong Kyeong-nae is a representative example of these revolts.⁵

Hong, a member of the aristocratic class who had fallen from power, plotted with fellow *yangbans* (aristocrats), merchants and tradesmen to overthrow the corrupt ruling class in the depressed byeongan province where he lived. Because of the severe famine conditions in the area and owing to the higher than average number of landless wanderers, Hong's call to arms found a willing audience. Although enjoying initial success, the rebellion was finally put down by government troops in the town of Jeongju. Hong was killed in that final battle.⁶

Hong Kyeong-nae's defeat, far from extinguishing the spark of rebellion in the disaffected classes, merely fueled their desire for reform. Uprisings on a smaller scale continued to occur on a regular basis throughout the country.⁷

With the ruling classes engaged in intense internecine struggles to win or maintain power, and with a sizable, disaffected proportion of the remaining population on the brink of rebellion, it is little wonder that attention was not being paid to seminal events happening to Korea's neighbours, events which would impact on the Korean peninsula in the immediate future.

China, with which Korea had lived in a benevolent relationship for centuries and to which it had always looked for guidance, both political and ethical, was in the process of being divided among foreign powers which had little respect for neo-Confucian rites, bureaucracy or tradition. The thirteen articles of the Treaty of Nanjing, signed by Britain and China aboard the *Cornwallis* on 29 August 1842, signaled the end of the opium War and the opening of the vast commercial riches

⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 248–54.

⁵ Sohn Pow-key, Kim Chol-choon and Hong Yi-sup, *The History of Korea*, Seoul: Kwangmyeong Printing Co., 1970, p. 188.

⁶ Lee Ki-baik *A New History of Korea* (above, n. 1), p. 254.

⁷ *ibid.*

of China to foreign powers. Treaties with the United States, France and Russia followed in quick succession.⁸

The implications for Korea of this demise of their traditional protector were as obvious as they were frightening—to all, it would appear, except those who had the most to lose, that is, the ruling classes. The threat to Korea's future did not take long to materialize. As early as 1832, an English merchant ship appeared off the coast of Chungcheong province. In 1845 an English warship appeared in Korean waters and carried out a survey of Korea's southern coast. It was followed by three French warships in 1846. In 1854, two heavily armed Russian vessels appeared along the Hamgyeong coast and killed a number of Koreans in violent skirmishes.⁹

Su-un describes this dire situation as follows:

The Westerners are always victorious in battle. There is nothing they cannot accomplish. I could not but be concerned that if the whole (Eastern) world was conquered, Korea would fall as well. How shall we find a way to protect the nation and secure peace?¹⁰

By the middle of the nineteenth century Japan, too, was undergoing a period of radical change and turmoil. The arrival of Commodore Perry's black ships at the mouth of Edo Bay, Yokohama, in July 1853, which effectively signaled the end of the Tokugawa era, should have sent an unmistakable signal to Korea's Joseon dynasty rulers, who were in a not dissimilar situation. Yet, preoccupied with their own power struggles, they chose to ignore the storm clouds gathering on the horizon.

The Religious Climate Preceding Su-un's Birth

In addition to the perilous national and international political situation, Cho Kil-myung lists three religious factors which fueled the search for meaning, purpose and hope amongst the Korean masses. These three factors should be framed in the context of the official state 'religion', a once respected neo-Confucian philosophy

⁸ Hsu, Immanuel C. Y., *The Rise of Modern China*, 4th edn, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1990, pp. 189–93.

⁹ Lee Ki-baik, *A New History of Korea* (above, n. 1), pp. 262–3.

¹⁰ *Podeok-mun [On Propagating Virtue]*, Ch. 8. The final phrase in this quotation, 'Poguk anmin' ('protect the nation and secure peace'), became a rallying cry in the Donghak Peasant Rebellion. Lee Ki-baik notes that the leader of the Donghaks, General Jeon Bong-jun, had this saying inscribed on his banner (*A New History of Korea* (above, n. 1), p. 285). All quotations from the Donghak/Cheondo-gyo scriptures are taken from a translation currently in progress, undertaken by a three-member team consisting of Mr Choe Chong-dae (from the Cheondo-gyo church), Dr Frank Tedesco (a Buddhist scholar) and myself.

and ethics to which the ruling classes paid lip service and which the rest of the Korean people viewed as vapid, corrupt and irrelevant. One factor has been mentioned already in Chapter 1: the enigmatic book of prophecy, *Jeonggam-nok* [*Record of Jeonggam*], which spoke of a Daoist-like saviour, of the collapse of the Joseon dynasty, and of a new society and social order based on justice, equity and the aspirations of the common people.

The second factor was Catholicism, whose supreme being, the Lord of Heaven, offered hope in this world and relief from suffering in the next and which preached freedom and equality for all. The third factor was a maitreyan millenarian movement: a movement which held that maitreya, a Buddhist messiah, would appear and create a utopian state when the human realm fell into disorder—a situation which the Korean populace of the early to mid-nineteenth century saw occurring all around them¹¹ These factors should not be viewed in isolation, as they shared many common principles, the most important perhaps being that each promised an alternative to a world fraught with suffering, hopelessness and spreading anomie.

It was into this world of peasant rebellion, social disarray, endemic corruption, imminent threats from abroad and religious and spiritual yearning that Su-un was born.

Su-un's Early Years

Su-un's Parentage

Su-un's father, Choe Ok, also known by the pen name Gun-am, was, according to his son, a scholar who devoted himself to learning. Su-un says of him:

Although the royal virtue of our king declined during the imjin [Japanese] and byeonja [manchu] invasions, some hidden virtue remained in the nation and flowed like water to my father at birth. His name became famous throughout Korea and every scholar was aware of his reputation...

As for my father's scholarly life passed like a dream of spring. Having studied until he was forty, his knowledge was as ephemeral as old clothes discarded beside a bamboo hedge. He had no desire to obtain high office. He composed a poem about returning to rural life and renouncing government service and he recited moral poems which distinguished good from evil. Bearing a staff and wearing straw shoes, he looked like a hermit, or the aesthetic scholar T'ao yuan-ming.¹²

¹¹ Cho Kil-myung, 'New Religions and Social Change in Modern Korean History', *The Review of Korean Studies*, vol. 5, no. 1 (June 2002), pp. 35–8.

¹² *Sudeok-mun* [*On Cultivating Virtue*], Chs 2 and 3.

in actuality, Su-un's father was one of a large number of *molak* ('fallen') *yangbans* who had little or no access to public office, as their clans were not in favor with the current powers behind the throne. Cheondo-gyo sources describe the elder Choe as having an innate intellectual ability, which he cultivated by studying philosophy and writing learned essays. Yet he lacked status and official recognition.¹³

Exacerbating Choe o k's unfortunate condition was the fact that he, a committed and learned neo-Confucian scholar, had no son to whom he could pass on the family name and inheritance until Su-un's birth. by the age of sixty he had been married twice, but his hopes of producing male progeny had not been realized. a son by his first wife, Madame Jeong, died soon after birth, and she herself died at the age of forty-one. Choe o k then married a madame Seo at the age of forty-three, but she, too, died within fourteen years and there were no children from this union.¹⁴ in desperation, Choe o k adopted the son of his younger brother in order to preserve the family lineage.¹⁵ His adopted son and his students urged Choe o k to marry again.¹⁶ Heeding their requests, he married a widow, madame Han, when he was sixty-three. Su-un was born out of this union.

Su-un's Position in Society at Birth

Choe o k's joy at the belated birth of a son of his own must have been tempered by the knowledge that, as the child of a remarried widow, his son faced a life of ambiguity and ostracism in the neo-Confucian society into which he was born. Korean society at the time was strictly hierarchical. at the top of the societal pyramid was the aristocratic elite, which monopolized power and from the ranks of which the monarch was chosen. below its members were the *chungin* (middle strata) which comprised professionals such as doctors, lawyers and translators. These were followed by the *sangmin*, a group consisting of farmers, artisans, and merchants. below them were the *chil chon*, which comprised the seven lowest official occupations, namely guards, official messengers, sailors, watchmen, torch guards, oarsmen and post couriers. at the base of the pyramid were the *bal ban*, the eight socially degraded groups, made up of official slaves, private slaves,

¹³ Choe d ong-hui, 'Su-un-eui Saengae' ['Life of Su-un'], in Ko mun-hae (ed.), *Donghak Heokmyeong 100 Junyeon Ginyeom Non Jong* [Collection of Treatises on the Hundredth Anniversary of the Donghak Rebellion], vol. 1, Seoul: Taekwang munhwasa, 1994, p. 146.

¹⁴ Kim Gwang-il, 'Choe Su-un-eui Chonggyo Cheheom' ['The Religious Experience of Choe Su-un'], *Hanguk Sasang* [Korean Thought], vol. 12, 1974, p. 66.

¹⁵ Choe d ong-hui, 'The Life and Thought of Ch'oe Che-u', *Korea Journal*, vol. 11, no. 9, 1971, p. 25.

¹⁶ yu b yeong-deok, 'Tonghak Chondo-gyo', in *Korean Religious Research*, vol. 6, 2nd rev. edn, Iksan-si, Jeollabuk-do: Korean Religious Affairs Research Institute, Wongwang University, 1993, p. 55.

professional entertainers, fortune tellers, sorcerers and sorceresses, butchers, bakers and skilled craftsmen, artisans and acrobats, and buddhist clergy.¹⁷

Where exactly was Su-un placed in this hierarchical pyramid? The following comment by martina d euchler indicates Su-un's social status, or lack thereof:

The revised edition of the *Kyongguk taejon* of 1485 stipulated that sons and grandsons of adulteresses and remarried women would not be eligible for civil or military office, and together with the descendants of secondary marriages, they were not allowed to compete in the lower and higher civil service examinations. r emarriage as such was not outlawed, but the ideological and legal implications for the immediate descendants of a remarried woman made it impossible for a widow to enter a second husband's house and function as a primary wife.¹⁸

Consequent upon Su-un's father's marriage to a widow, Su-un's social position was that of a *seoja*¹⁹ (a person of illegitimate descent). *Seojas* were a dispossessed subgroup which moved through society like a shadow, comprised of individuals with no social standing or status whatsoever. as a *seoja*, Su-un did not register on the social pyramid and could expect to play no significant role in Joseon dynasty society.

Su-un's Pre-Revelation Experience

Formative Years

Despite the disadvantages of his birth, Su-un is recorded as being a gifted and well-rounded child by comparison with his peers.²⁰ Su-un's father, a strict disciplinarian, arranged for his son to study Korean and then Chinese characters from an early age.²¹

The following description of this period in Su-un's life is taken from the book *Mongjung Noso Mundap-ga* in *Yongdam Yusa*:

¹⁷ Seoul Taehak Kuksa Yŏn'gu Sil [Korean History Research Centre, Seoul National University], *Kuksa Kaesŏl* [Outline of Korean History], Seoul: Hongmungwan, 1952, pp. 293–4, quoted in benjamin b. Weems, *Reform, Rebellion and the Heavenly Way*, Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1964, p. 4.

¹⁸ d euchler, martina, 'The Tradition: Women during the y i d ynasty: Widowhood and r emarriage', in Sandra mattielli (ed.), *Virtues in Conflict*, Seoul: r oyal a siatic Society, 1977, p. 39.

¹⁹ y u b yeong-deok, 'Tonghak Chondo-gyo' (above, n. 16), p. 55.

²⁰ Kim Gwang-il, 'Choe Su-un-eui Chonggyo Cheheom' (above, n. 14), p. 66.

²¹ y u b yeong-deok, 'Tonghak Chondo-gyo' (above, n. 16), p. 55.

behold, he was a very handsome child. His face shone like a jewel, his appearance like that of Tu muchih [a handsome Chinese scholar]. He reached the age of six and then at the age of eight he entered school. He read thousands of books and understood them all. indeed he knew even without learning. at the age of ten he was as wise as Shih K'uang [an ancient Chinese philosopher] ... His wisdom was extraordinary, his talents surpassed all others.²²

an early set-back which Su-un experienced was the untimely death of his mother when he was six years old²³ yet Su-un's troubles in life were just beginning. at the age of thirteen he entered an arranged marriage, reportedly against his will.²⁴ Three years later, Su-un's father and the mainstay in his life died, and his situation in life changed radically.²⁵ Su-un describes this period in the following words:

There was no way to stop the flow of time or the feelings of loneliness when my father passed away one morning. i was sixteen. little more than a child, i knew precious little about anything. Then the lifetime work of my father was lost in an instant, totally consumed by fire.²⁶ i grieved because i could do nothing worthwhile to honor his memory.

i wanted to support my family, but i was not familiar with farming. i had little education, so i could not expect to gain a high government position. as the family fortune declined, i feared for our future. as i grew older i became even more troubled. i worried about starving.²⁷

The sentence, 'i had little education, so i could not expect to gain a high government position' is an understatement, considering that Su-un was a *seoja*. during this period in his life, which lasted until he was thirty-six years old, Su-un was filled with a mixture of feelings which he enumerates in the following quotation. intensifying these feelings was the knowledge that his father, whom he worshipped as a mentor and idolized as a scholar, died without status, unfulfilled and scorned by society.²⁸ Su-un writes:

²² *Mongjung Noso Mundap-ga* [*Dialogue Between the Young and the Old in a Dream*], Ch. 3. The fact that this passage is written in the third person and extols the virtues of young Su-un in language that borders on adulation indicates that it is a later addition to the *donghak* Scriptures.

²³ Kim Gwang-il, 'Choe Su-un-eui Chonggyo Cheheom' (above, n. 14), p. 67.

²⁴ *ibid.*, p. 68.

²⁵ *ibid.*

²⁶ This refers to the destruction of his father's library.

²⁷ *SDM*, Chs. 4–5.

²⁸ Choe dong-hui, 'Su-un-eui Saengae' (above, n. 13), pp. 150–51, and Kim Gwang-il, 'Choe Su-un-eui Chonggyo Cheheom' (above, n. 14), p. 56, refer to the elder Choe's rejection by society.

Wonderful and lofty is mt Gumi. is not this a mountain full of virtue and good fortune for the Choe lineage? o ur ancestors were born here. They knew the fortune of mountains and rivers. They served their country with distinction.

it is a pity that my father did not obtain a government position, despite the mountain and its streams, although he studied diligently and cultivated virtue at the wonderful pavilion on mt Gumi. my father named the building on mt Gumi the yongdam [d ragon Pool] Pavilion. He spent his life as a scholar secluded in this forest. Pitiful indeed is the fate of my family. i, too, lacking worldly success, feel guilty before my ancestors. I am full of regret because I have not fulfilled my filial duty....

When i returned to yongdam on mt Gumi, i was greeted by the sound of flowing water and the lofty mountains. When I looked at the mountains and the rivers surrounding me, they were unchanged. The trees and grass approached me like friends.

But I was sorrowful because I had not fulfilled my duty. The crows overhead seemed to mock me. The pine trees were tall and green and always loyal. i continually remembered my filial duty and my heart overflowed with sorrow and regret. i remembered my father, who deserved glory and honor for the virtuous life he lived.²⁹

a part from the expression of shame at his own situation and regret that his father died without the recognition which was due to him, Su-un is clearly making subtle use of allegorical language to express other emotions in this passage. The position of mt Gumi as the central, formative locus in his spirituality, together with the anthropomorphic qualities he attributes to its rivers, trees, and grass, will be examined subsequently. Suffice it to say here that this place, both in its symbolic and in its physical form, would become the foundation on which Su-un was to build his new religion and the location at which he was to create his new theocratic society.

Su-un's Years of Wandering

With government positions denied him and with no skill at farming, Su-un spent some time teaching village children, but soon began to hate this common-place existence. He tried his hand at a number of trades, including operating a linen shop,³⁰ but none of these proved successful.³¹ in desperation, he was forced to take to the road as an itinerant labourer in order to support his family.³² Consumed with

²⁹ *Yongdam-ga*, 'Songs of the d ragon Pool', Ch. 2.

³⁰ Shin yong-ha, 'Conjunction of Tonghak and the Peasant War of 1894', *Korea Journal*, vol. 34, no. 4, 1994, p. 61.

³¹ Choe d ong-hui, 'The l ife and Thought of Ch'oe Che-u' (above, n. 15), p. 25.

³² *Su-un Haengnok [A Biography of Su-un]*, anon., trans. Kim Sang-gi, in *Donghak-kwa Donghak-ran [Donghak and the Donghak Movement]*, Seoul: Hankuk ilbo Sa, 1975;

frustration at his own inadequacy and at the societal structure which caused it, he also became aware of the desperate state of the land through which he traveled, and that of its people,³³ who were subject to much the same injustices he was experiencing.

Some of the misery which Su-un witnessed could be attributed to natural disasters. Severe flooding blighted the land in 1846 and 1851; epidemics frequently ravaged the population; and an earthquake in 1846 left many people homeless.³⁴ yet more severe than these natural disasters and aggravating the lot of the peasants to the point of rebellion was a series of taxes, the most severe of which was the one termed the Three Administrations: that is, taxes levied by government departments supervising land, military service, and the state granary system.³⁵

it was the third of these taxes, which involved a system of grain loans termed *hwan'gok*, that inflicted the greatest suffering on the peasant farmers. In this system, loans were made to poor peasants from government stores during spring, when grain was scarce, and were scheduled for repayment at harvest time, with a surcharge of 10 per cent. forcing peasants to borrow more than they needed, unscrupulous magistrates falsified reports and doubled the apparent quantities of borrowed rice by mixing husks with the grain, with the result that the farmers and their families had much less than they needed to survive.³⁶ in times of poor harvests thousands died of hunger and multitudes of famine-stricken peasants abandoned their villages and took up lives of vagrant wandering. Lawlessness increased, as many peasants turned to brigandage to survive, and groups of armed robbers roamed the countryside creating fear and havoc.³⁷

it was in this climate of social dissolution that Su-un traveled, trying to scrape together a living. frustrated, demeaned and impoverished, with little prospect for his family's future and his own, he saw his life becoming a metaphor for the disintegration of the social fabric he witnessed around him. The situation was exacerbated by impending threats from abroad, about which Su-un must have heard as he roamed the country and which were even more disturbing than the chaos which surrounded him.

quoted in Susan Shin, 'The Tonghak movement: from Enlightenment to revolution', *Korean Studies Forum*, no. 5 (Winter/Spring, 1978-9), p. 7.

³³ yu byeong-deok, 'Tonghak Chondo-gyo' (above, n. 16), p. 57.

³⁴ Choe dong-hui, 'Su-un-eui Saengae' (above, n. 13), p. 151.

³⁵ lee Ki-baik, *A New History of Korea* (above, n. 1), p. 249.

³⁶ *ibid.*

³⁷ *ibid.*, p. 253.

Seohak: Western Learning

in his wanderings, Su-un undoubtedly came in contact with a religious organization and belief system which had spread to most of Korea at the time, after its introduction by Lee Seung-hun in 1784: Christianity in the form of Catholicism.³⁸

The introduction of the Catholic church to Korea was unique in the history of evangelism in that it was achieved not by foreign evangelists but by the Koreans themselves. Books on Catholicism had been brought back to Korea by emissaries to the Chinese court, and in 1783 Lee, a young nobleman, accompanied his father, a chancellor of the envoy's group, to Beijing. Lee was baptized there and returned to Korea and helped to found the Korean Catholic church.³⁹

The new faith, in its promotion of equality for all people under heaven and through the universal nature of its membership, soon came into direct conflict with the ruling neo-Confucian system of patriarchal ethics, which held loyalty to country, king and parents to be of supreme importance. The focal point of opposition to the new creed was the practice of ancestor rites, which in the strict neo-Confucian society were a practical expression of loyalty and filial duty. Not to practice the rites meant, in effect, to reject the entire social order. When the Catholic hierarchy prohibited the members of its church from practicing these rites, the Korean government acted swiftly to preserve the existing social structure. Catholicism was proscribed and its members were hunted down and persecuted. The persecutions continued for one hundred years, but were most severe in 1801, 1839, 1846 and 1866. Approximately 10,000 Catholics lost their lives in these persecutions.⁴⁰

Su-un may have viewed with approval the egalitarianism of the new creed; one of the names he used for the heavenly being was 'Cheonju', a name which Catholics consistently used. However, there is no doubt that he considered Catholic teaching to be dangerous and saw it as a threat to national security. But the threat he envisaged had nothing to do with the rites controversy. Rather he saw Catholicism as a powerful and destructive force, the spiritual engine which propelled the colonizing powers as they carved up China and began looking further afield. This view is expressed in the following passages:

in 1860 i heard that people from the West were attacking and seizing the world, and were building churches and spreading their religion, proclaiming the will of the Western god. They did not seek wealth and honor. Their only desire was to convert the world. i asked myself how could this be, how could such things happen?⁴¹

³⁸ Seong youm, 'Catholicism', in *Religious Culture in Korea*, Seoul: Jeong moon Sa munhwa Co., 1996, p. 69.

³⁹ Kim Chang-seok and Choe Seok-u, *Lives of the 103 Martyrs Saints of Korea*, Seoul: St Joseph Publishing Co., 1984, pp. 5-6.

⁴⁰ Seong youm, 'Catholicism' (above, n. 38), p. 70.

⁴¹ *PDM*, Ch. 5.

in the fourth month, 1860 the whole world was in turmoil. People's minds were disturbed and they did not know what to do. a strange rumor spread through the land that Westerners had discovered the truth and that there was nothing that they could not do. nothing could stand before their military power. Even China was being destroyed. Will our country too suffer the same fate? Their Way is called Western Learning, the religion of Cheonju,⁴² their doctrine, the Holy Teaching. is it possible that they know the Heavenly order and have received the Heavenly mandate?⁴³

despite the danger Su-un saw in the advent of foreign powers and of their powerful religion, his attitude towards Catholicism was ambivalent. Choe Dong-hui states that Su-un recognized Catholicism as displaying a marvelous vitality, unlike Confucianism and Buddhism, which had already dropped behind the times and were on the wane.⁴⁴ for example, in his account of his encounter with the Lord of Heaven (Sangje) in *Podeok-mun*, Su-un even asks Sangje: 'Shall I teach the Western Way?'⁴⁵

yet after his revelation Su-un describes the relationship between his nascent creed and Catholicism as follows:

The following year, many learned scholars came from all directions and asked: 'We have heard that the Heavenly Spirit descended on you. How could this happen?'

'it happened according to the cycle of fate in universal history,' I replied.

'What is the name of the Way?' they asked.

'Cheondo [the Heavenly Way],' I replied.

'How does it differ from the Western Way?' they asked.

'The Western religion is similar to our religion,' I replied, 'but also different. Worship in the Western religion is not authentic. The forms of our truth may be similar to those of the West, but the doctrines are very different.'

'How is this so?' they asked.

'our Way emphasizes accomplishing everything through natural predilection. if believers cultivate their heart, rectify their vital force, receive the divine teaching and put it into practice, transformation comes naturally. but the Westerners have neither order in their words nor logic in their writing. They are ignorant of the spirituality of the vital force and lack the concept of the Lord of Heaven. They merely pray for their own welfare. Their hearts are not truly open to the Lord of Heaven, nor is there any of His teaching in their doctrine. They act as if they are praying, but they have no Sacred incantation. Their way is vain and their

⁴² 'Western Learning', i.e. Catholicism.

⁴³ *Nonhak-mun* [Discussion of Learning], Ch. 4.

⁴⁴ Choe Dong-hui, 'The Life and Thought of Ch'oe Che-u' (above, n. 15), p. 30.

⁴⁵ *PDM*, Ch. 6.

doctrine does not commune with the Lord of Heaven. How can one say then that their Way and our Way are the same?⁴⁶

Su-un's attitude towards Catholicism may have been ambivalent, oscillating between a grudging admiration for the vitality of its power, fear of what this power might do to his country and the need to circumvent it, and a dismissive attitude towards the content of its teachings and towards its spiritual practices. Yet he did learn one important lesson from the new creed: the direct consequences of proclaiming a religion which challenged the fragile social fabric of the Joseon dynasty in the nadir of its existence; specifically, immediate proscription and certain persecution. When the time came to found his new religion, the consequences of his actions, for himself and for his followers, would have been a consideration he had to face realistically.

Su-un's Religious Quest

Su-un's wanderings around the country lasted for ten years, until 1854, when he was thirty-one years old.⁴⁷ During this time he was exposed to many different religious traditions. He became aware of the increasing influence of Catholicism and of the troubles caused by the declining influence of neo-Confucianism. He must also have been exposed to the influence of both *Jeonggam-nok* and the maitreyan millenarian movement, for during this time he came to the conclusion that the people were in need of a new focus, both ethical and religious, with which to reform their lives and serve their country in a time of impending trouble.⁴⁸

Shin yong-ha comments:

During his years of wandering throughout the country, Ch'oe Che-u clearly observed that the people desperately wanted a new society, a new order, a new ideology, a new religion, a new morality and a new world and he too felt keenly his desire for the same.⁴⁹

Su-un realized that, if Korea was to be saved from invasion by colonial powers and if the people were to be revitalized (the two being inextricably linked), a religious rather than a political solution had to be sought. Therefore the people must come to know the will of Hanul-nim, the Lord of Heaven.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ *NHM*, Chs 8–9.

⁴⁷ Yu byeong-deok, 'Tonghak Chondo-gyo' (above, n. 16), pp. 57–9.

⁴⁸ Han u-keun, 'donghak nongmin bongki' ['The donghak Peasant uprising'], *Kyoyang Kuksa Chongseo 19*, Seoul: National and Cultural Affairs Series, vol. 19, King Sejong the Great Anniversary Committee, 1976, p. 113.

⁴⁹ Shin yong-ha, 'Conjunction of Tonghak and the Peasant War of 1894' (above, n. 30), p. 62.

⁵⁰ Choe dong-hui, 'Su-un-eui Saengae' (above, n. 13), p. 153.

This insight can be identified as marking the beginning of Su-un's innovative approach to national reform, in that he deliberately separated the two dimensions, the political and the religious. up to this time, the succession of dynasties in Korea had been linked to a particular religious or ethical system, and leaders drew both guidance and authority from this association. Joseon dynasty Korea was so thoroughly neo-Confucian in its structures and government that it was impossible to distinguish where one system began and the other ceased. much the same could be said for the inter-relationship between buddhism and politics in the Goryeo d ynasty (CE 918–1392)⁵¹ and in the Silla d ynasty (CE 668–918) before it.⁵²

as will become evident, Su-un did not attempt a reform of the current religious–political system. His peripatetic lifestyle had taught him that such a far-reaching reform would not be possible. Speaking of himself in the third person, he writes:

He lamented that rulers did not act like rulers, ministers did not act like ministers, fathers did not act like fathers and sons did not behave like sons. a nxious thoughts filled his heart and no one understood him. So he left his family and business and wandered all over the country. He observed its moral conditions and saw that it was almost impossible to correct the immoral state of the nation. The people's lives lacked meaning, for they had no concern for Heaven.⁵³

Su-un's solution to the nation's problems, both internal and external, was entirely religious in its parameters. in his separation of state and religion and concentration on the latter, he was not neglecting the political sphere. He believed that, if and when individuals reformed their lives and lived according to the will of the l ord of Heaven, the reform of the political sphere would occur naturally.

As he ceased wandering and returned to live with his family, Su-un identified the role he was to play in this reformation. Specifically, he came to the conclusion that the tasks of saving the country and of saving himself were identical, and as a consequence he committed himself entirely to the will of the l ord of Heaven.⁵⁴

Hiatus of Frustration and Failure

The years between 1854, when he ceased his wandering, and 1859, when he moved his family to yongdam Pavilion on mt Gumi—that is, from the ages of thirty-one to thirty-six—were years of considerable confusion and frustration for Su-un. it was during this period that his life's purpose finally became clear to him: to initiate

⁵¹ Kweon Sang-no, 'History of Korean buddhism', *Korea Journal*, vol. 4, no. 5, 1964, pp. 8–14.

⁵² Ahn Kye-hyen, 'Buddhism in the Unified Silla Period', in Lewis Lancaster and C. S. yu (eds), *Assimilation of Buddhism in Korea*, berkeley: a sian Humanities Press, 1991, pp. 1–45.

⁵³ *MJNSMDG*, Ch 3, lines 11–17

⁵⁴ Choe d ong-hui, 'Su-un-eui Saengae' (above, n. 13), p. 153.

a spiritual transformation that would revitalize himself, his people and his country. How Su-un came to a clear recognition of his destiny is uncertain. *donghak* sources interpret the following incident as referring to Su-un's realization of the role he was to play in his nation's salvation.

in the summer of 1855, a buddhist monk came to visit Su-un, who at the time was living in his wife's natal home in Ulsan. The monk confided in Su-un that, while he had been meditating during a one-hundred-day retreat, a mysterious book appeared before him and, no matter how hard he tried, he could not understand it. He brought the book to Su-un to interpret for him. Su-un told the monk to return in three days, when he would explain the book. When the monk returned, Su-un explained to him the meaning of the book in detail. The monk then told Su-un to take care of himself, and then both he and the book disappeared.⁵⁵

The anecdote, with its obvious mythological content, may be interpreted to mean that this period in Su-un's life was one of growing awareness of his spiritual capabilities and of insight into his perceived mission. Choe *dong-hui*, while admitting that it is impossible to establish this story as historical fact, nevertheless speculates on the possible content of the book. He suggests two possibilities. first, it may be that the book's cryptic message revealed the means to save the world and indirectly indicated how to understand the Way of the Lord of Heaven. Second, the book may have revealed how to access the true heart of the Lord of Heaven and understand its workings.⁵⁶

Kim Gwang-il's view of this incident may be more perspicacious. for him the book's contents revealed to Su-un the method and meaning of a forty-nine-day prayer session, which was necessary for fulfilling his destiny.⁵⁷ Whatever the correct interpretation is of this particular anecdote, through his subsequent actions we can be sure that Su-un had come to realize the importance of intense sessions of prayer as a means of achieving his immediate goal of spiritual transformation. for Su-un had come to realize that, before he could legitimately seek a solution to his country's problems, he had to find a solution for his own. It would appear that this goal proved to be more elusive than Su-un had anticipated.

in the summer of 1856 Su-un traveled to a nearby buddhist monastery named *Naewon-sa*, where he began a forty-nine-day retreat. However, as Su-un approached the end of his retreat, his uncle died unexpectedly and he had to abandon his spiritual quest. He next traveled to a more secluded location named *nirvana Cave*, in close proximity to *Naewon-sa*, where he succeeded in completing the forty-nine-day retreat. but, to his great disappointment, he did not achieve his goal of spiritual transformation during this time.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Choe *dong-hui*, 'Su-un-eui Saengae' (above, n. 13), pp. 153-4; Kim Gwang-il, 'Choe Su-un-eui Chonggyo Cheheom' (above, n. 14), p. 70.

⁵⁶ Choe *dong-hui*, 'Su-un-eui Saengae' (above, n. 13), p. 154.

⁵⁷ Kim Gwang-il, 'Choe Su-un-eui Chonggyo Cheheom' (above, n. 14), p. 70.

⁵⁸ *yu byeong-deok*, 'Tonghak Chondo-gyo' (above, n. 16), p. 60. Choe *dong-hui*, 'Su-un-eui Saengae' (above, n. 13), pp. 156-7.

Su-un returned home and continued to meditate, to little apparent effect. In frustration, he gave up his spiritual quest. Filled with shame and lack of purpose, he became increasingly morose as he contemplated his pathetic state. At this time a severe economic blow deepened his depression. In order to support his family, Su-un had taken out a mortgage on his house and land, and when the time came for him to repay this debt in 1858, he could not. Consequently he lost all of his possessions to his creditors.⁵⁹ Economically ruined, mentally depressed and spiritually unfulfilled, Su-un summed up his feelings in the following words:

Reflecting on the past forty years of my life, I was full of regret that I had not been more successful in this world. I did not even own a house. How could I appreciate the vast beauty of the world around me? 'Things are not working out well for me. I cannot find my proper place.'

From the moment this thought surfaced, I forsook this troubled world to cleanse my heart of sorrow.⁶⁰

With his inheritance dissipated and no occupation or means to support his family, Su-un stood impotent in the face of forces over which he had no control. In addition, he was unable to take the first crucial step towards realizing his life goal. Specifically, he had failed in his attempts to achieve spiritual transformation. However, the above passage, which sums up Su-un's sense of failure, also contains the seeds of resolution: it hints at Su-un's intention to do something about his sorry state. It appears that, in the depths of despair and at the lowest point in his life, Su-un realized that he had to change his focus radically if he was to change his destiny and that of his compatriots. This conclusion can be inferred from the fact that Su-un made two crucial changes at this most desperate period in his life: he changed his place of residence and he changed his name.

Su-un's Change of Residence

In fact Su-un had little choice about changing location. With the loss of his inherited possessions, Su-un no doubt felt that, as he was unable to contribute to the upkeep of his extended family, it was time to move on. In October 1859, he moved his family to his father's retreat, Yongdam Pavilion on Mt Gumi, which is located to the west of the ancient Silla dynasty's capital, Gyeongju.⁶¹ This area was for Su-un a place of deep spiritual and historical significance, as he explains in the following passage:

⁵⁹ Choe Dong-hui, 'Su-un-eui Saengae' (above, n. 13), p. 159.

⁶⁰ *SDM*, Ch. 5.

⁶¹ *ibid.*, Ch. 6.

The name of our nation is Joseon; the name of our city is Gyeongju. The name of this area is Weolseong and the name of this river is munsu. Gyeongju was the capital city of the Silla dynasty one thousand years ago. Hanyang is the present capital, but there has never been a capital like Gyeongju since the beginning of history in the East. The water is pure and so are the mountains. Gumo is the southern mountain and Gumi is the western mountain. Phoenix fly over the tombs of Bonghwang. The tombs stand alone after they have flown away.

The high tower of Cheomseongdae [an astronomical observatory] stands watch over Wolsong [an ancient royal castle]. A pair of flutes made of sapphire and yellow jade offer protection, and the voice of the thousand-year-old Silla dynasty is still heard. People gather to see this wonderful place! When i see the three mountains to the east of Gyeongju,⁶² it is difficult to conceive that there could be no divinity. Why are there no teachings as profound as those of Confucius and Mencius [in Korea]?

All people, please come and see this ancient capital and its magnificent terrain. Wise and heroic men have sprung from this earth where the spirit dwells. mount Gumi is the central mountain of the Eastern capital. The Gonryun mountain in China has been called the source of world culture, but henceforth mount Gumi will be this source. Everyone knows that i was born here and that this will protect the ancient capital and its natural surroundings. i will preserve its heritage.⁶³

in this passage Su-un is doing more than just lauding the merits of the ancient Silla dynasty, which unified the Korean peninsula in 668 CE. He is also attempting to establish the credentials of mount Gumi as a cultural and spiritual centre on a par with the holy places of ancient China, and he identifies himself and his lineage as legitimate heirs to this ancient tradition. Special significance can be found in the following sentence: ‘Wise and heroic men have sprung from this earth where the spirit dwells.’ it appears that Su-un is speaking here of what he believes to be the transference of an ancient and holy tradition from one venerable location to another. The link between Chinese cultural and spiritual traditions, which for Su-un were the epitome of wisdom and holiness, and mount Gumi and yongdam Pavilion is evident in the following passage:

⁶² Kim Ki-seon explains that the mountains referred to here, lying to the East of Gyeongju, are famous not only for their splendid scenery, but also for their cultural and religious heritage. Kim Ki-seon, *Yongdam Yusa: Chuhae Haeseol [Commentary on the Legacy of the Dragon Pool]*, Seoul: Donghak Research Institute, 1991, p. 25. Examples of this heritage are the magnificent Buddhist temple, Bulguk-sa, and the nearby Seogguram Grotto which contains the giant eighth-century statue of the seated Amitayus Buddha surrounded by eight guardian deities. Hwang, Su-young, ‘Sokkuram’, in Son Chu-hwan (ed.), *Koreana: Korean Cultural Heritage*, vol. 1, Seoul: Samsung Moonhwa Printing Co., 1994, pp. 230–39.

⁶³ *Yongdam-ga [Songs of the Dragon Pool]*, Ch. 1.

Peach blossoms from the garden float down into the pond in front of the pavilion, drifting away from fishing boats. The deep blue water of the river and the boats in front of the pavilion are reminiscent of the locations made famous by Chiang Tse-ya, the renown fisherman [of ancient China]. The lake near the pavilion would attract Chou Tun-i [a famous scholar and naturalist]. The pavilion is named yongdam to evoke the memory of Chu-ke liang [a great minister in ancient China who was once a hermit].⁶⁴

in comparing the forthcoming passage from *Yongdam-ga* with the previous passage from the same book (*YDG*, Ch.1), one can detect a development in Su-un's thinking. in the previous passages it was the Gumi mountains in their beauty and depth of symbolism that were the focus of praise and the central source of inspiration; they drew to them an impoverished, status-less and forlorn individual in search of solace and salvation. However, in the following, post-illumination passage, a shift has occurred in the natural order and Su-un declares that his transformed presence and the Infinite Way of Truth takes precedence over the mountains. This presence and this Way bestow new meaning and purpose on this sacred site. in this scenario, the mountains are seen as the means by which the Way is revealed, and after its discovery they become a testament to, and a physical reflection of, its majesty.

I gathered my wife and children at Yongdam in order to instruct them. The infinite grace of Heaven came to me on the fifth day of the fourth month, 1860, in what seemed like a conscious dream. It was then that I realized the Infinite Great Way of Truth. It is difficult to express this in words. I have been so very fortunate.

Hanul-Nim said: 'You are the first one in fifty thousand years of creation. I could not find the right person in that time. I have succeeded in finding you. Your family is very fortunate.'

u pon hearing these words, my heart was full of joy and contentment. How could people know that this boundless fortune would be mine? i cultivated the infinite Great Way on the beautiful Gumi mountain and its rivers. This is a boon that is available only once in fifty thousand years.

How unique is my destiny! a birth like mine occurs only once in a million years. The beautiful scenery of Gumi mountain and its rivers seems to reflect my good fortune. Every branch and leaf lauds the beauty of this place.

is not this a paradise for a man of virtue? is not this the most exquisite place in the entire world, with its thousand peaks and valleys, its mysterious rocks and stones? How could this happen to just one among millions?

How extraordinary is my fortune! n o matter how majestic Gumi mountain and its rivers are, would it be so grand without the discovery of the Way? yet could we experience such mountains in our nation without awakening to the Way?

⁶⁴ *SDM*, Ch. 3.

Even if I were a divine sage and could fly to heaven, it would still be difficult to find a place as sacred as Yongdam. Even after the passage of ten million years, i would not forget yongdam Pavilion on mount Gumi. yet it is sad to contemplate its destruction.⁶⁵

in Su-un's opinion, his search for meaning in the place which he held as sacred resulted in the place being further sanctified by his presence. In the rhetorical questions he poses in the penultimate paragraph, Su-un indicates that the beauty of Gumi mountain enhances the realization of the Way. Ultimately, however, Su-un believes that it is his experience there of the transcendent that makes the mountain and its environs truly sacred.

Su-un's Change of Name

As noted at the beginning of Chapter one, prior to his revelation, Su-un changed his name from Je-seon to Che-u, 'saviour of the ignorant'.

There are only three references to this change of name in Su-un's scriptures. All three occur in *Gyohun-ga* [*Song of Instruction*]. Two are made by Su-un and one is made by Hanul-nim. In these three references there is no direct mentioning of the name Che-u. Su-un writes of this change of name as follows:

When I reflected on my life, I realized that I had done little but suffer ... When i looked at the world, there was nothing that excited me and i regretted my fate. i returned to yongdam on mount Gumi and i made a great resolution. Sharing my feelings with my wife, i lamented over the forty years which i had wasted. i changed my name and decided not to leave yongdam Pavilion.⁶⁶

Su-un indicates here that his relocation to yongdam Pavilion was not merely brought on by his economic situation. He saw this as a time to make a 'great resolution'. Donghak tradition relates that Su-un resolved not to step outside the perimeters of the pavilion until he had arrived at a definite plan for his future.⁶⁷

This purpose is verified in the only piece of writing in Su-un's scriptures which predates his transforming experience on mt Gumi: the poem *Ipchun-si*, written in early 1860:

⁶⁵ YDG, Chs 3–4.

⁶⁶ GHG, Ch. 2, lines 6–13.

⁶⁷ Choe Dong-hui, 'Su-un-eui Saengae' (above, n. 13), p. 159.

Where the Spirit of the Way abides
 Evil cannot enter.
 i will not return to the mundane world
 u ntil i awaken to the Way.⁶⁸

The title of the poem and its content indicate that, on the cusp of spring in 1860, Su-un was determined to effect a significant change in his life. Yet, despite Su-un's determination, his efforts to realize his goal met with initial—and familiar—frustration and failure. o n this stage in his life Su-un comments as follows:

‘Time⁶⁹ passed uneventfully, like flowing water, while I was at Yongdam Pavilion. On the fifth day of the fourth month I entered a dream-like state. Heaven and earth seemed remote and i could not clear my mind.’⁷⁰

Thus, at the advent of spring 1860,⁷¹ Su-un remained confused and lost in relation to his immediate and long-term future—a state which became more acute immediately before his encounter with the Lord of Heaven. This situation—his sense of being lost, coupled with an inability to think clearly and find a way out—was one which Su-un shared with his country and its people. Specifically, a once powerful dynasty had lost its way and was being destroyed by internecine infighting, endemic corruption and political ennui in the face of an increasing threat from hostile colonizing powers. a s a consequence, Su-un's fellow citizens lived in fear and confusion, a situation which they perceived to be beyond their control.⁷² In this sense Su-un's situation directly reflected that of his fellow citizens.

It was in this state of aimless lethargy (‘time passed ... like flowing water’), and perhaps because of it, that Su-un experienced a critical insight into his condition. in the second reference to his change of name in *Gyohun-ga*, he says:

a s i silently contemplated, my thoughts turned to my new name; sitting looking foolish, my appearance resembled my name and its meaning became clear to me.⁷³

⁶⁸ *Ipchun-si* [*Verse of the Vernal Equinox*].

⁶⁹ Specifically, ‘seven or eight months’.

⁷⁰ *ASG*, Ch. 4, lines 1–3.

⁷¹ The symbolic implications of Su-un's illumination and their coincidence with nature's rebirth are obvious here.

⁷² H. byron Earhart in his article ‘The new r eligions of Korea: a Preliminary interpretation’, *Transactions*, vol. 49, 1974, pp. 7–25 and J. Joe Wanne in *Traditional Korea: A Cultural History*, Seoul: Hollym, 1997, pp. 345–52 outline in detail the reasons for the imminent demise of the Joseon dynasty and the corresponding factors facilitating the birth of a new religion. See Chapter 9 for further discussion on this point.

⁷³ *GHG*, Ch. 4, lines 20–22.

although in this passage Su-un does not state exactly what his new name is, he indicates that, as a direct result of his contemplation, he had arrived at a new understanding of its meaning. The word he uses for ‘foolish’ is *orin*, which literally means ‘child’. Thus Su-un, an adult, portrays himself as looking as foolish or as ignorant as a child. (Perhaps there are also overtones of his having to recapture the innocence and simplicity of a child in order to view the world in its natural and innate beauty.)

One can only speculate on the meaning of the phrase ‘its meaning became clear to me’, but it would appear that, during this period of contemplation, Su-un’s understanding of his name and of his mission in life suddenly crystallized for him. Specifically, he realized that, in order to save the ignorant—that is, to live up to his new name—he had to recognize first that he himself was naïvely ignorant and in need of salvation. The emphasis here (‘sitting looking foolish’) is on Su-un’s own state of ignorance rather than on an exalted mission to save others.

Su-un’s critical insight, therefore, was that his new name was inclusive rather than exclusive. That is, he came to realize that, before undertaking any grandiose program to ‘save’ others, he had to acknowledge that he was as ignorant, as lost and as much in need of saving as the most vulnerable and ‘foolish’ of his compatriots.

The third mentioning of Su-un’s new name occurs precisely at this point of realization:

Since there was no other way, I refined my mind and questioned Hanul-Nim.

Hanul-n im replied:

‘are you not human? How could you know at the age of forty that countless people would unite as one with the Way? This is laughable. you have achieved everything. What was your purpose in doing so? Why are you so different from others in so many ways? Why did you change your name when you entered the mountains for meditation? you did not seek your own interest and blessings, as others do at the beginning of spring.’⁷⁴

This passage indicates that, according to Hanul-n im’s appraisal, it was Su-un’s altruism that distinguished him from those around him, and by implication, it was because of this quality that Hanul-n im chose Su-un to communicate his Way.

at this juncture in his life Su-un was poor, unemployed and practically unemployable, with few remaining resources left to support his family. He was, in fact, fast fulfilling the ‘nobody’ label of *seoja* which society had thrust upon him. yet, even in this dire state, Su-un had the interests of others at heart, and it was for this reason that, as the quotation above indicates, Hanul-n im chose him.

in contrast to his contemporaries, in desperate times Su-un looked inward for a solution to his problems—a spiritual solution which he believed existed; his

⁷⁴ *GHG*, Ch. 5, lines 1–8. The reference here may be to resolutions made and to hopes expressed at the beginning of a new period of fertility.

fellow Koreans, on the other hand, looked outward for relief and could find none. aware of their situation, Su-un (Che-u), as his change of name indicates, resolved to dispel his own and his compatriots' ignorance and 'save' them and save himself in the process.

in summary, during his initial period of contemplation at yongdam Pavilion, Su-un came to the realization that, rather than being a spiritual adept, he was in fact lost and ignorant, like a child in a dark and perilous place. This insight allowed him to identify with his compatriots, who were in an identical situation. as the meaning of his new name became clear to him, Su-un was filled with compassion for them, and with a new understanding of their plight; and he yearned to relieve their condition as well as his own.

Let us now consider the defining event that took place in Su-un's life as he sat lost, in silent contemplation, in the spring of 1860; that is, to examine the passages in the donghak scriptures which recount the revelation Su-un received on mt Gumi and the birth of the religion which followed it.

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Chapter 3

Su-un's Encounter with the Lord of Heaven

The Three Accounts

Su-un wrote three accounts of his encounter with the Lord of Heaven on Mt Gumi. Two of these accounts appear in *Donggyeong Daejeon* and one is recorded in *Yongdam Yusa*. Each one has its own particular style and character. The account in *Yongdam Yusa* differs considerably from the *Donggyeong Daejeon* accounts for reasons that will be examined. Initially the three accounts will be presented in their entirety, in the sequence in which they appear according to the dating procedure outlined in the chronological table in Chapter 1. The aim of presenting the accounts together, in the order in which they were written, is to enhance an appreciation of their similarities and differences.

*The Account in a nsim-ga*¹ (yongdam yusa)

Time passed uneventfully like flowing water while I was at Yongdam Pavilion. On the fifth day of the fourth month I entered a dream-like state. Heaven and earth seemed remote and I could not clear my mind. Then a voice came from Heaven and it seemed as if the earth trembled. My wife was startled and turned pale when she saw me.

'Oh dear! my pitiful fate! What has happened to my husband? Oh dear! Listen to me! How can we get medicine to help him on a dark night like this? Whom can I ask to help me?' she cried. Our children cowered in fear in the corners of the room and my wife ran around in great confusion.

The voice from Heaven said:

'Do not be afraid. Do not fear.'

How could I possibly recognize Sangje who dwells in the Golden Palace in Heaven? How could I, who grew up isolated in the countryside, know that I would become the founder of the new Way? I quickly wrote about the origins of our nation, ignoring the history of the distant Twelve States,² I concentrated on the time of creation of a new nation. My ecstasy gradually subsided. A short time passed and the voice commanded me to light a lamp and study all night. 'Spread out some writing paper,' I was told. In awe and surprise I arranged some paper and lifted a brush, and behold, a strangely shaped talisman appeared on the paper. I was dazed and called my wife and children, and asked:

¹ ASG, Chs 4–5.

² This is a reference to the Twelve States of ancient China.

‘Have you seen this? Have you ever seen such a symbol?’

my children replied:

‘What happened, father? Wake up please. you spread out paper and drew a symbol with your brush. you are in a pitiful daze. mother, what has happened to our father? I look how he is acting. How can he speak like this?’

mother and children sat holding hands and weeping.

Hanul-n im said:

‘Ignorant people! Can an ignorant person find the elixir of immortality on Samsin-san?³ Write the symbol, burn it in a bowl and drink it with water.’

a s soon as i heard these words, i drew the symbol and did as he bade me. it had neither taste nor smell. i consumed many, many more. Hundreds and hundreds. Seven, eight months passed; my body became healthy and my face shone. Worldly people, i am like a d aoist master. a ll is well, so good, so right. i am indeed ageless and immortal. Even Emperor Wanch’eng of Ch’in suffered death and was buried in yosan. Emperor Wu of the Han d ynasty could not attain immortality through divination.

How fortunate am i to be immortal and everlasting. i am so fortunate. i would not exchange this for gold or silver. The Emperors of Ch’in and Han died without this. if i had been born at that time i would happily have shown them the medicine of immortality. i regret that i was born too late. my life is so blest, so good.

*The Account in Podeok-mun*⁴ (d onggyeong d aejeon)

in the fourth month of 1860 my heart suddenly became chilly and my body trembled. Whether sick or not i could not tell, and i was unable to discern what was happening to me. Then i heard a mysterious voice within me. Startled, i questioned it and was told:

‘d o not be afraid. Humankind calls me Sangje. d o you not recognize me?’

i asked why He said this and was told:

‘u ntil this time i have not succeeded in my purpose, so i brought you into the world to teach humankind my l aw. Therefore, do not doubt.’

Then i asked, ‘Shall i teach the Western Way?’

The voice replied:

‘n o. i have a yeongbu [spiritual talisman], sacred medicine in the shape of *gung gung*, the great moral principle [Taeguk], the essence of all things in the u niverse. Take this talisman and deliver humanity from sickness. u se my sacred formula and teach humankind for me. you shall live forever and virtue shall be propagated throughout the world.’

i heeded His words.

³ ‘The Three Sacred mountains’.

⁴ *PDM*, Chs 6–7.

i wrote down the symbol which was given to me, burned the paper, dissolved the ashes in water and drank the mixture. my body was strengthened and i glowed with energy. i realized that this was sacred medicine. i applied it to the sick around me. Some were healed and some were not. i questioned why this was so. i realized that the faithful who followed Cheonju were healed, but the disobedient were not. Therefore, cure depends on the sincerity and faith of the recipient.

*The Account in n onhak-mun*⁵ (d ongyeong d aejeon)

it is not possible to express my feelings adequately at this time. a s i cringed in fear and sighed at this pitiful situation and my late birth into it, a chill swept through my body and i felt a vital force, a d ivine power descend into me. a mysterious teaching suddenly came to me.

i heard an inner revelatory voice. i looked but could see no one; listened but could not hear anything. I felt perplexed and mystified. I quieted my mind, refined my spirit and asked, 'How can this be?'

The Voice replied:

'my heart is your heart, yet how could humankind know this? They may know Heaven and Earth, but they cannot understand Kwisin.⁶ i am Kwisin. n ow you shall realize the Eternal Way, cultivate it, study it, record it, and teach it to all humankind.

'you shall set down the l aw's⁷ practices and propagate its virtue. Then you too shall be immortal. y ou shall prosper in this life and virtue shall be propagated throughout the world.'

i meditated on these words for a year, and realized the natural principle. i composed the Sacred f ormula and perfected the technique of making the Spirit descend. i wrote the verses about 'n ot forgetting' [the l ord of Heaven]. The procedure of practicing the l aw is contained in the Sacred f ormula of twenty-one characters.

Comparison of the Accounts

Before comparing the three accounts, it should be noted that they are not the first recorded references in the Donghak scriptures to Su-un's revelation. The first reference to this event is recorded in *Yongdam-ga*:⁸ 'The infinite grace of Heaven came to me on the fifth day of the fourth month, 1860, in what seemed like a conscious dream. It

⁵ *NHM*, Chs 5–7.

⁶ 'The Spiritual being'.

⁷ in his writings, Su-un appears to use the two terms 'Dao' ('Way') and 'beop' ('law'). interchangeably.

⁸ *YDG*, Ch. 3 lines 1–4.

was then that I realized the Infinite Great Way.’ As this is a reference to, rather than an account of, the event, it is noted rather than examined here.

Similarities between the Accounts

The first similarity which can be noted is the theme of physical distress at the beginning of each passage. Su-un describes this affliction, which is directly associated with the experience of revelation and not with any previous illness, in the account from *Podeok-mun*, as follows: ‘my heart suddenly became chilly and my body trembled’.⁹ In one of the three passages indicates that this condition is anything but a direct precursor to the divine revelation.

The passage from *Ansim-ga* is the most dramatic of the trilogy in that there is a trembling of the earth accompanying the voice from heaven, and not merely the trembling of Su-un himself. Some kind of personal affliction is implied in the account, however, as Su-un’s wife wonders how she can obtain medicine for her husband in the middle of the night.¹⁰ Whatever the cause of this affliction, it is just a temporary unease, as Su-un recovers immediately to write a passage on the origins of the nation and to draw a mysterious talisman.

Conversely, in two of the accounts, *Ansim-ga* and *Podeok-mun*, there is a transformation of Su-un’s physical appearance after his epiphany and his use of the heavenly symbols. This is most explicit in the *Ansim-ga* passage, with its reference to Su-un’s appearance as that of a Taoist master, ageless and immortal. A similar transformation is also promised in *Nonhak-mun*, in the form of prosperity and immortality. All three scriptural accounts of Su-un’s revelation at Yongdam Pavilion on Mt Gumi effectively contrast the pre-revelation depressed and afflicted Su-un with a post-revelation persona, a transformed and vibrant religious leader confidently preaching his new creed.

There is an obvious similarity between the *Podeok-mun* and *Nonhak-mun* accounts: both are written in Chinese script, which indicates that their intended readership is the same, namely scholars and an educated elite who could read this script.

Regarding the type of epiphany which Su-un experienced, the three accounts are in total accord. The Lord of Heaven’s choice of Su-un is unconditional, and the bounties which accompanied this choice were bestowed without conditions. Su-un did not have to perform any heroic acts or to undergo a rigorous series of trials in order to win the approval of the deity and thus to merit divine favour. While one cannot deny that Su-un’s life had been difficult up to this point, there is nothing in the divine revelation to suggest that the deity’s choice of him was conditional upon his surmounting the trials which external circumstances and his own inadequacies had thrust upon him. This is perhaps just as well, as Su-un had shown little success in overcoming his social, occupational and financial liabilities. Rather it appears

⁹ *PDM*, Ch. 6.

¹⁰ *ASG*, Ch. 4, lines 7–8.

that, from birth, Su-un was part of a divine plan, whose success depended on his post-revelation activity. The Lord of Heaven says to him: 'until this time i have not succeeded in my purpose, so i brought you into the world to teach humankind my law. Therefore, do not doubt.'¹¹ From this quotation it appears that the deity not only seeks Su-un's assistance in revealing his Way, but depends on it to complete successfully a work which, by implication, had previously ended in failure. The persona which Su-un presents in this account, in relationship to the deity and to the deity's plan for creation, is a potentially valuable clue to understanding the image which he had of himself and of the role he was to play in the new world order.

finally, in the *Ansim-ga* and *Podeok-mun* accounts, the spiritual talisman, the yeongbu, and the Sacred formula, the Jumun, are also given to Su-un with no conditions attached. He did not win them by overcoming obstacles in a test of his character and abilities.¹² nor did he undergo spiritual temptations and trials as did, for example, Jesus and the buddha. The symbolic 'gifts' Su-un received were exactly that; they were not earned, but given freely and unconditionally.

Differences between the Accounts

Several differences between the three passages are also evident. first, even in translation, it is evident that the *Kasa* verse passage from *Ansim-ga* differs significantly from the narrative style of the prose passages from *Podeok-mun* and *Nonhak-mun*. also, the presence of Su-un's family and their startled reaction to his ecstatic experience are peculiar to the *Ansim-ga* rendition.

Second, the details surrounding the yeongbu (the mysterious talisman) and the Jumun (the Sacred formula) differ. only the creation of the yeongbu is mentioned in the *Ansim-ga* passage; conversely, the passage from *Nonhak-mun* mentions only the Jumun. both symbols feature in the passage from *Podeok-mun*.

Third, the accounts vary on the theme of the 'reception' of the gifts and on that of their effect on Su-un. in the passage from *Ansim-ga*, the Lord of Heaven (Hanul-nim) leads Su-un to draw the yeongbu and tells him what to do with it, while its effect becomes apparent only after it is ingested hundreds of times, over a period of seven or eight months. in the passage in *Podeok-mun*, both the yeongbu and the Jumun are given to Su-un, and their function is explained in specific terms by the mysterious heavenly voice. The effect on Su-un of consuming the ashes of the yeongbu mixed with water appears to be instantaneous. in the passage from *Nonhak-mun*, Su-un does not record that he received anything from the Lord of Heaven. rather he relates that he himself composed the Jumun, after meditating on the words of the Lord of Heaven for a year and after realizing the 'natural principle'.

¹¹ *PDM*, Ch. 6.

¹² Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 2nd edn, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973, pp. 49-243.

fourth, the names of the Heavenly being differ in the three passages. in *Ansim-ga* the terms ‘Sangje’ and ‘Hanul-n im’ are used. in *Podeok-mun* the Heavenly being is referred to as ‘Sangje’ and ‘Cheonju’; in *Nonhak-mun*, ‘Kwisin’. (a fifth reference to the deity, ‘Sinlyeong’, Divine Spirit, is used by Su-un in his explanation of the Jumun in *Nonhak-mun* Ch. 13.) The meanings of these terms and their significance will be the subject of subsequent examination.

fifth, the references to the Chinese emperors and the elixir of immortality in *Ansim-ga* do not appear in the other passages. These references, whereby Su-un asserts his spiritual superiority over two ancient and respected Chinese emperors, may indicate an intention to transfer the locus of authentic religious tradition away from China to Korea, and specifically to Su-un himself. If so, this transfer would be in keeping with the distinctively ‘Korean’ nature of *Ansim-ga*, with its characteristic use of a traditional Korean verse form and with its predominant use of the Korean appellation ‘Hanul-n im’ for the Lord of Heaven.

Other, less significant, differences between the three accounts will become evident in the subsequent examination of the individual passages.

Examination of the *Ansim-ga* Account

Context of the Ansim-ga Account of the Revelation

Su-un’s intention in writing *Ansim-ga* is apparent from the title as well as from the initial line. The word ‘ansim’ can be translated as ‘comfort’, ‘relief’, ‘peace of mind’, and ‘security’, whereas *ga* means ‘song’. Thus the title indicates that the book is a song of comfort. Su-un identifies the audience he is seeking to comfort in the first stanza:

Hyeonsukhan naechip punyeo
 ikeul pogo ansim haso.¹³
 [Virtuous ladies of my family
 take comfort in my writing.]

The word *hyeonsukhan* (‘virtuous’) complements another, which Su-un uses to address his audience in *Ansim-ga*: namely *keorukhan* (‘respected’, ‘venerable’, or ‘holy’).¹⁴ These two terms of address indicate the profound respect with which Su-un held his audience.

The question arises: why would the women in Su-un’s extended family be considered to be collectively experiencing some form of disturbance or distress, which would move Su-un to devote a book to comforting them and offering them

¹³ ASG, Ch. 1, line 1.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, Ch 7, line 1; Ch. 8, line 14; Ch. 8, line 38.

reassurance? a s *Ansim-ga* was probably the second book which Su-un composed after his revelatory experience, the question takes on added significance.

The status of women in the latter part of the Joseon dynasty and the familial and societal difficulties which women were forced to contend with form too broad a topic to be treated at any length here, and besides the the topic is well documented elsewhere.¹⁵ yet some indication of the condition of women during this period will be helpful in understanding why Su-un chose them as forming one of his primary audiences and what this indicates about his role in their lives as he perceived it.

Condition and Status of Women in the Late Joseon Dynasty

r relationships in the society into which Su-un was born, and in which the women to whom *Ansim-ga* is addressed lived, were governed by the neo-Confucian principle of *Sam-Gang-O-Ryun*: 'the three bonds and five relationships'. The 'five relationships' are:

1. between ruler and ministers
2. between father and son
3. between husband and wife
4. between older and younger
5. between friends.

Each of the five relationships is governed by a key moral virtue and, out of the five, the initial three (*Sam-Gang*: 'the three bonds') are recognized as the most important for preserving the moral life of the community. The moral virtues associated with the 'three bonds' are:

1. justice, between ruler and ministers
2. intimacy, between father and son
3. distinction of duties, between husband and wife.¹⁶

While the moral principle guiding the relationship between father and son is intimacy (no principle is nominated for the relationship between a mother and her daughter or son, or a father and his daughter), the distinction of duties guides the moral relationship between spouses.

¹⁵ The articles in Sandra mattielli (ed.), *Virtues in Conflict*, Seoul: r oyal a siatic Society, 1977, and in particular martina d euchler's study, 'The Tradition: Women d uring the yi d ynasty' (pp. 1–47), offer valuable insights into the position of women in a neo-Confucian society. Helen r . Tieszen's article in the same volume, 'Korean Proverbs about Women' (pp. 49–66), is informative regarding the way this patriarchal society treated—and mistreated—women.

¹⁶ James bretzke, 'The Three bonds and five r elationships: a Korean r oot Paradigm', *Inculturation*, vol. 5, no. 2, Summer 1990, p. 16.

d euchler comments as follows on the role attributed to a woman of the yi (Joseon) dynasty once she married:

a girl became through marriage an adult member of society. When she left her natal home and started her life in her husband's lineage, she found herself in an environment in which she was an outsider, and with her field of action hedged in by a set of Confucian rules and values that stressed objective over subjective relationships. The lineage into which she married took precedence at all times over the family she was about to start. Within the lineage, the members' roles were differentiated on the basis of age and sex. ideologically, Confucianism postulated a clear delineation of the male and female spheres with the public domain dominating the domestic. This social division was accentuated by the emphasis Confucianism laid on agnatic organization as the backbone of the patrilineal kinship system. as a result, the intergenerational relationship between father and son was given priority over the conjugal union. although the bride came to her husband's home fully indoctrinated with the values of sex-separation and agnation, she soon found herself subjected to the tension between an ideology that aimed at social harmony and a reality that was fraught with daily conflicts.¹⁷

With little (if any) status in her husband's home and acting in a position of servitude in a traditional (and often oppressive) mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship, a newly married woman was under the considerable additional pressure of having to bear a male heir. yet, even if she was successful in this regard, her individual status in society was not significantly elevated. In most respects she lived a derivative life, being identified through the male members of her natal family and through the family into which she married.¹⁸

The status of women in relation to men in the neo-Confucian patriarchal structures of the Joseon dynasty can be determined from sayings which were in common use at the time, for example *Namchon yeobi* ('respect men, despise women').¹⁹ The women whom Su-un addressed in *Ansim-ga* had all experienced in their lives the overt and covert institutionalized sexual discrimination which characterized the society of the Joseon dynasty, pithily epitomized by the *Namchon yeobi* aphorism.

in addition, women too were living through the times of extreme adversity described in Chapter 2. buffeted by forces beyond their control and demeaned by a society in which their individuality was scarcely recognized, women were in need of comfort and assurance of their worth. When Su-un changed his name from 'Je-seon' to 'Che-u', it is likely that these people—the women of his immediate

¹⁷ martina d euchler, 'The Tradition' (above, n. 15), p. 21.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 26.

¹⁹ Helen r. Tieszen, 'Korean Proverbs about Women' (above, n. 15), p. 49.

circle, who were representative of their gender—were the first ones he felt the need to ‘save’.

However, there may have been other reasons for his choice of them as the primary audience for one of the first books he wrote after his divine revelation. Specifically, as mentioned in Chapter 1, women had a well-practised medium at their disposal by which they could communicate Su-un's message effectively: *Kasa* verse, which Su-un utilized in writing the books of *Yongdam Yusa*. It is probable that his choice of this verse form was reasoned and deliberate. He may well have chosen it not only to capture and hold the attention of those women to whom the work was immediately addressed, but also to draw the attention of women throughout the whole country, because *Kasa* verse was a form of communication, entertainment and education which was readily available to them and frequently practiced and enjoyed by them. Consequently, as well as offering comfort and hope to one of the groups most discriminated against in Joseon dynasty society, Su-un also used this group's ability and creativity to spread the news of his new Way. In a very real sense, the women of Su-un's immediate and extended family were his first disciples. In fact his first convert is said to have been his own wife.²⁰

This indicates that, from its beginning, the donghak religion promoted an egalitarianism which stood in direct contrast to the practices and rituals of the wider society. This egalitarianism evidenced itself in the fact that Su-un was as much in need of the women's assistance in promoting his religion as the women were in need of the comfort and hope which the religion offered to their lives.

Record of Su-un's Ecstatic Encounter in a nsim-ga: A Voice from Heaven

‘Then a voice came from Heaven and it seemed as if the earth trembled.’²¹

The voice from heaven spoke to Su-un on 25 May 1860, while he was lost in a disembodied, dream-like state. It spoke to him during the night, as is evidenced by his wife's statement: ‘What has happened to my husband? ... How can we get medicine to help him on a dark night like this?’²² It is possible that Su-un was meditating when he heard the voice. That his reaction to it was somewhat out of character is apparent from his wife's response to his suddenly altered state. In the account in *Ansim-ga*, the voice seemed to Su-un to be external to him, and it was accompanied by a trembling of the earth. However, throughout the entire revelatory experience, the attention of Su-un's wife and children was focused only on the strange actions of their husband and father. They did not hear the voice and seem to have been totally unaware of any supernatural manifestation. The encounter with the deity and its effects on Su-un were apparent to him alone.

²⁰ Susan Shin, ‘Tonghak Thought: The roots of the revolution’, *Korea Journal*, vol. 19, no. 9, 1979: p. 16.

²¹ *ASG*, Ch. 4, line 4.

²² *ibid.*, lines 7–8.

Su-un's wife assumed that he was sick. His children 'cowered in fear in the corners of the room',²³ which indicates that Su-un's actions were highly unusual and atypical. The first words that Su-un heard, 'Do not be afraid. Do not fear',²⁴ indicate that his initial reaction was one of apprehension. It is somewhat ironic, considering the title and the theme of *Ansim-ga*, that Su-un was initially the one in need of consolation and assurance.

The Dawn of a New Nation

The heavenly voice did not identify itself, but Su-un recognized its source. This passage tells us nothing about the being from whom the voice emanates; it has no discernable attributes other than a certain vocal authority. Yet Su-un is in no doubt about the source of this voice. He initially refers to this being as *Sangje*,²⁵ a Chinese-derived term for the supreme deity, meaning 'Emperor on High'. Su-un further identifies the speaker as the one 'who dwells in the Golden Palace in Heaven'.²⁶

From this point on in the narrative, Su-un makes a deliberate effort to distance himself from Chinese influences and to focus instead on Korean philosophical and religious thought: 'I quickly wrote about the origins of our nation, ignoring the history of the distant Twelve States [of ancient China], I concentrated on the time of creation of a new nation.'²⁷ While conceding that his nation had looked to China for guidance and inspiration, Su-un indicates that from this point on there would be a new creation, a new nation and a new Way for his people to follow, one that would be distinctly Korean in nature, composition and location.

The terms which Su-un uses for this beginning—*Kaepyeok-si kukcho-irul* ('the time of creation of a new nation')²⁸—are indicative of his conviction that *Sangje*'s intervention in human history signified a radical break with the past. The term *kaepyeok-si* is variously translated as 'the beginning of the world', or 'creation'. This word has overtones of the dawn of a new era of history. Su-un's response to the words spoken by *Sangje* are consistent with this concept of a new beginning, as the quotation above indicates.

Su-un appears to be writing the history of his nation from a new perspective from the moment when the Emperor on High intervened in its history by choosing

²³ *ibid.*, line 9.

²⁴ *ibid.*, line 12.

²⁵ The original printed text, mid-summer, 1883: northern unit new issue (cf. Ch. 1: Section 1:A), uses the honorific title *Sangde-Nim* in the passage from *ASG* Ch. 4

²⁶ *ASG*, Ch. 4, line 13. Susan Shin ('The Tonghak movement' (above, n. 20), p. 16) describes this supernatural being as 'the anthropomorphic deity of ancient Chinese provenance', and James Grayson, *Korea: A Religious History*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989, p. 235) notes that the title *Sangje* is derived from the Chinese term *Shangti* meaning 'ruler of Heaven'.

²⁷ *ASG*, Ch. 4, line 16.

²⁸ *ibid.*, line 15.

a person to liberate it from its present state of corruption, decline and vulnerability to foreign powers. This liberation offers more than mere earthly protection, as Su-un makes clear in a later passage of *Ansim-ga*: 'i received a mandate from Hanul-n im to preserve the sovereignty of our nation. People who wish to survive war will live according to the blessings of Hanul-n im and will beg me for immortality.²⁹

Su-un's Role in the New Foundation

Su-un's task, then, in the absence of competent leadership in the nation and according to the role accorded to him from on high, is to preserve the nation and also to purify it by granting immortality to those who live according to the blessings of the Emperor on High. Chapters 4 and 5 of *Ansim-ga*, which deal with the reception of the 'elixir of immortality', are key passages for understanding the image which Su-un had of himself as the one appointed to lead this new nation. As such, they will be examined in more detail at a later stage.

In stark contrast to the grandeur and significance of the new nation—this creation which will survive the approaching conflict—is the individual whom the Emperor on High chooses to be its founder. The term which Su-un uses to describe himself, *Choya-ae mudhin insang*,³⁰ literally means 'a person living in obscurity in the backwoods': a country bumpkin. Self-deprecating as this description may be, it appears that Su-un is using a literary device to contrast his position, or lack thereof, with the highest, most powerful authority in creation, thus emphasizing the potency of the gift which the Emperor on High is about to bestow on such a pathetic individual. For, without the intervention of the Emperor on High, how could such an outcast, with no status, no job, no money and no prospects be expected to protect the nation and preserve its sovereignty?

It should be kept in mind that, originally, *Ansim-ga* was a drama which was being acted out in verse form to an audience which needed to be entertained as well as comforted. As such, it is an excellent example of *Kasa* in the form of catharsis, a drama composed for women who were as powerless and marginalized as Su-un was, but who were also potentially as powerful and indestructible as he perceived himself to be. When reading the verses of *Ansim-ga*, it is instructive to remember how this dramatic poem was originally performed, and why.

One can imagine the different vocal renderings given to the participants in the drama by the person or persons reciting the tale: the stentorian voice of the Emperor on High, the panicked tones of the confused wife, the terror-filled cries of the young children, and the bewilderment and awe of the main character as he moves in and out of a state of ecstasy. And within this elaborate drama, in fact at its very center, is the means by which Su-un was to transcend his current state and achieve the plan ordained by the Emperor on High, namely the yeongbu. Its emergence, too, is surrounded by drama and mystery.

²⁹ *ibid.*, lines 14–15.

³⁰ *ibid.*, line 14.

Reception of the First Heavenly Gift

As Chapter 4 of the present book is devoted to an analysis of the yeongbu, little attention will be given now to its religious, cultural, historical and societal meanings, or their implications for the donghak religion and for the self-image of Su-un. What will be examined here is the context in which it was received.

In Su-un's ecstatic experience as recounted in *Ansim-ga*, the Emperor on High speaks to him three times. There is no dialogue involved in this account, and consequently there is no interaction between the deity and the human he has chosen to do his bidding. The deity completely dominates the proceedings. Su-un's role is that of a subservient underling. The Emperor on High at no point explains to Su-un why He chose him, from among all the people of the nation, for this salvific, foundational role in the establishment of a new nation founded on the theocratic principles of a new Way.

There is no teaching involved in this encounter. There is no mention of the second heavenly gift, the Jumun, with its implicitly pedagogical content and its philosophical and theological foundations. The being who utters the commands is transcendent in all respects and is in complete control. This is apparent when the words, or rather the commands, of the Emperor on High are considered sequentially: 'do not be afraid. do not fear.'³¹ 'Spread out some writing paper.'³² 'Ignorant people! Can an ignorant person find the elixir of immortality on Samsin-san?'³³ 'Write the symbol, burn it in a bowl and drink it with water.'³⁴ The Emperor on High is sparingly succinct in his commands. His manner towards Su-un is abrupt to the point of condescension and could even be described as scornful, particularly in regard to his third pronouncement. It is apparent from the tone of the commands that the focus of this revelation is not on nurturing a relationship between the Emperor on High and his earthly representative. Rather, the focus is on the symbol which is imparted to Su-un.

Yet, even in this regard, the Emperor on High is concise to the point of abstruseness. He does not explain why he is giving the yeongbu to Su-un. He does not explain what will happen to Su-un once he burns the yeongbu and consumes it with water. And he does not explain the purpose of the yeongbu for humankind, in the new order which is about to be realized. Presumably the efficacy of the

³¹ *ibid.*, line 12.

³² *ibid.*, Ch. 5, line 2.

³³ *ibid.*, lines 12–13. Samsin-san ('Three Sacred mountains') refers to three mountains in Korea held to be sacred because of mountain spirits or daoist-like beings endowed with supernatural powers dwelling therein. The three mountains are Gunggang to the north-east of the country, in present north Korea; Jiri in South Gyeongsang province to the south-west; and Halla on Jeju island, the southernmost point in the country. Kim Ki-seon, *Yongdam Yusa: Chuhae Haeseol [Commentary on the Legacy of the Dragon Pool]*, Seoul: Donghak Research Institute, 1991, p. 119.

³⁴ *ASG*, Ch. 5, lines 15–16.

'elixir of immortality' is sufficient in itself. It requires neither explanation nor instruction.

The Emperor on High's departure is as abrupt as his initial manifestation. Once his message has been communicated, he leaves. There are no words of farewell, no final benediction. The deity just ceases speaking, and Su-un moves on to fulfil his commands with no comment of his own to mark the deity's sudden departure. awe and ecstasy are immediately replaced by praxis.

There seems to be little emotional involvement between the Emperor on High and his lowly subject. yet something vital and lasting remains from this encounter, in the form of the mysterious symbol, the yeongbu.

Additional Points

Three additional points need to be made in regard to this passage in *Ansim-ga*. first, from the moment the 'strangely shaped talisman appeared on the paper', Su-un's attitude toward his heavenly visitor undergoes a change. from this point on, the deity is referred to not by a word of Chinese origin, but by the Korean term 'Hanul-n im', meaning 'the Heavenly being'.³⁵ on the eight occasions in *Ansim-ga* when Su-un speaks of the deity after his reception of the yeongbu,³⁶ he uses the term Hanul-n im exclusively.

This point may not appear to be radical at first glance, since Su-un does refer to the Lord of Heaven as 'Hanul-Nim' three times in the first three chapters of *Ansim-ga* before the revelation takes place³⁷ and as 'Sangje-n im' once.³⁸ yet the fact that he mixes the two appellations in the initial sections of the book and uses the Korean word exclusively in the latter ones is in keeping with the fundamental shift of focus noted earlier in regard to the divine benevolence and its locus of manifestation, namely from a Chinese to a Korean context. To prove that this change had taken place, Su-un compares his condition following the consumption

³⁵ This term appears in various forms, both in popular belief and in modern religious usage. *CGGJ* favors Han-ul-n im, whereas Kim Ki-seon in his *Commentary on the Legacy of the Dragon Pool* favors Ha-nal-n im. The reason for this variation is the ambiguity of the term in the original printed text of *Yongdam Yusa*, 1883 (mid-autumn), northern unit New Issue (cf. Ch. 1, Sec. 1:A), where the first two syllables are represented in the old-style Korean script, transliterated via modern Korean into English as 'ha-nal', in line with Kim Ki-seon's rendition. However, the term 'Hanul-n im' will be used in this book, as it is the standard and most easily identifiable denominator for the deity, as well as being the one used by the Cheondo-gyo organization. as both versions of the term refer to the heavenly being, the differences are phonetic rather than semantic and do not affect the meaning of the term or of the text. for a more scholarly analysis of the term and its history, see don Baker, 'Hananim, Hanūnim, Hanullim, and Hanöllim: The Construction of Terminology for Korean monotheism', *The Review of Korean Studies*, vol. 5, no. 1, June 2002, pp. 105–31.

³⁶ *ASG*, Ch. 6, line 5; Ch. 7, lines 5 & 6; Ch. 8 lines 10, 12, 22, 26, 37.

³⁷ *ibid.*, Ch. 1, line 4; Ch. 2, line 8; Ch. 3, line 7.

³⁸ *ibid.*, Ch. 2, line 7.

of numerous yeongbu to that of two mighty emperors of China who died without attaining immortality, as recounted in the final verses of Chapter 5 of *Ansim-ga*:

Worldly people, i am like a daoist master. a ll is well, so good, so right. i am indeed ageless and immortal. Even Emperor Wanch'eng of Ch'in suffered death and was buried in yosan. Emperor Wu of the Han dynasty could not attain immortality through divination.

How fortunate i am to be immortal and everlasting. i am so fortunate. i would not exchange this for gold or silver. The Emperors of Ch'in and Han died without this. if i had been born at that time i would happily have shown them the medicine of immortality. i regret that i was born too late.
my life is so blest, so good.³⁹

Su-un's admiration and sympathy for these two Chinese emperors is matched by his feeling of superiority over them due to his access to the source of immortality, which they sought but could not find.

The second point is specifically related to the theme of immortality, which runs through Chapters 5, 6 and 7 of *Ansim-ga*. The quest for immortality and its realization in the Yeongbu have definite Daoist overtones, which Su-un specifically identifies through the sentence 'I am like a Daoist master'.⁴⁰

The third point is that, when Su-un refers to the yeongbu in Chapter 7, he speaks of it thus: 'The skill [*jeju*] i received from Hanul-n im will cure all diseases. my success depends on Hanul-n im. n o one has anything that surpasses my mysterious d ivine medicine.'⁴¹ The term *jeju* can be variously translated as 'ability', 'talent', 'gift', or 'skill', but in all of these there is an element of activity and creativity involved. The implication is that the yeongbu is not simply a gift which is passively received in gratitude and distributed. it is a more complex entity than that. This complexity and the skill required to master it will be examined in the following chapter.

Having examined the style and, to the extent that it was necessary, the content of the passage in *Ansim-ga* relating to Su-un's ecstatic experience, it is time now to move on to the second account of this experience, in *Podeok-mun*.

³⁹ *ibid.*, Ch. 5, lines 21–s8.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, Ch. 5, line 22. as the following chapter will examine in detail the yeongbu as a panacea for earthly ills as well as the nature of the 'immortality' which Su-un promises through its correct use, it is sufficient at this point to note the Daoist overtones of these chapters and their relevance to Su-un's self-image, particularly in regard to this reference.

⁴¹ *ASG*, Ch. 7, lines 5–8.

Examination of the *Podeok-mun* Account

Context of the Podeok-mun Account

The term 'podeok' means 'propagating virtue', 'morality' or 'goodness'. The term 'mun' refers to characters, letters or writing in general. The combination of these vocables indicates Su-un's intention in writing *Podeok-mun*: to compose a book which propagates virtue, morality, and goodness. *Podeok-mun* is a short book. its twenty-six and a half columns of twenty characters each make it the shortest of the four main books of *Donggyeong Daejeon*.⁴² in regard to form alone, its length is the only thing which distinguishes it from the other books of *Donggyeong Daejeon*. as mentioned previously in the comparison between the three accounts of Su-un's ecstatic experience, the fact that *Podeok-mun* is written in Chinese characters indicates that the book was composed for an educated, scholarly audience.

Record of Su-un's Ecstatic Encounter in Podeok-mun: The Mysterious Voice Echoing Within

in contrast to the revelation account in *Ansim-ga*, the voice which speaks to Su-un in *Podeok-mun* comes not from outside but from within. in this account, Su-un experiences physical discomfort in the form of a chilling of the heart and trembling of the body before the voice speaks to him. a nother feature particular to the *Podeok-mun* account which can be noted immediately is that Su-un enters into a dialogue with the divine presence, whereas *Ansim-ga* relates only a monologue delivered by the divinity.

The tone of this dialogue is more civil than the commanding monologue of the deity in *Ansim-ga*. The deity identifies itself as 'Sangje',⁴³ a term rooted in Chinese religion, as noted earlier. use of this term is natural in a text written in Chinese characters. on the other three occasions where the deity is referred to in this book,⁴⁴ the term used is 'Cheonju',⁴⁵ another Chinese term. again, by contrast to the events recorded in *Ansim-ga*, in this account Su-un is alone when the voice speaks to him. The theatrics of the *Kasa* verse form are absent. Subdued dialogue replaces the drama of the former account.

The theme of nationalism is featured in the *Podeok-mun* account, in the form of a grudging respect for, yet opposition to, the Western powers. This is evident in the question which Su-un poses to the mysterious voice and in the categorical answer he receives. 'Then i asked, "Shall i teach the Western Way?"' The voice

⁴² The number of columns of twenty characters each in the other three books are: *NHM*, 67 and a half; *SDM*, 44; *BYGY*, 35.

⁴³ *PDM*, Ch. 6.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, Chs 1, 5 and 7.

⁴⁵ 'Lord of Heaven'. Unless another term is specified, this term will be used generically for the donghak deity throughout the book.

replied: “n o.”⁴⁶ immediately following this clear negative answer, Su-un receives the two symbols on which a new Way is to be founded. As will become apparent in subsequent examination, the composition of these symbols indicates that a shift in the spiritual axis of the world has just occurred, with Su-un, Yongdam Pavilion, Mt Gumi and Korea as its new center.

The Two Heavenly Gifts

Whereas *Ansim-ga* refers only to the yeongbu, the *Podeok-mun* account also mentions the Jumun, the second of the two heavenly gifts received by Su-un. Of the two, the yeongbu appears to be pre-eminent, not only because it is mentioned first, but also because its reception is accompanied by an explanation concerning its composition. The Lord of Heaven also distinguishes between the purposes of the two gifts. The yeongbu is to be used to ‘deliver humanity from sickness’; the Jumun is to be used ‘to teach humankind for me’. In other words, the purpose of the yeongbu is to heal; the role of the Jumun is to teach.

The theme of immortality is also raised in the final, critical statement of the Lord of Heaven: ‘you shall live forever and virtue shall be propagated throughout the world.’⁴⁷ This statement is linked to a prior explanation given by the Lord of Heaven: ‘until this time I have not succeeded in my purpose, so I brought you into the world to teach humankind my law.’⁴⁸

Su-un, then, as much as the message which he proclaims or the symbolic gifts which he receives to substantiate this message, is himself a sign of the Lord of Heaven’s intervention in human history. The Lord of Heaven speaks here of a relationship based on need. In the past he had tried to promote his Way among humankind, but the people whom he had chosen to accomplish this task apparently failed. Consequently, Su-un is ‘brought into the world’ for a specific purpose: to impart the Lord of Heaven’s law to humankind (a rationale which is entirely lacking in the *Ansim-ga* account). Su-un is himself the primary example or prototype of the virtuous person who lives according to this law; and the direct result of living according to, and of propagating, the Lord of Heaven’s law, his Way, through the use of the yeongbu and the Jumun, is immortality.

Application of the Yeongbu

Before disseminating the Yeongbu among the populace, Su-un first tested its efficacy upon himself. Its effects were profound, and Su-un realized that it was

⁴⁶ PDM, Ch. 5. The theme of nationalism parallels a similar one, articulated in greater detail in ASG, Ch. 8.

⁴⁷ PDM, Ch. 6.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*

indeed a sacred medicine.⁴⁹ He then ‘applied it to the sick around him’.⁵⁰ Just how he did this is not recorded, but it is worth noting that he uses the yeongbu before the Jumun, perhaps because of its preeminence, but perhaps also because ‘epidemics raged in our country and no one lived in peace’,⁵¹ and Su-un may have felt that curing the sick was a more urgent task than teaching. Su-un’s response to the suffering around him resulted in an important lesson in regard to the efficacy of the yeongbu. Consider the following passages from *Ansim-ga* and *Podeok-mun*:

‘Write the symbol, burn it in a bowl and drink it with water.’ as soon as i heard these words, i drew the symbol and did as he bade me. it had neither taste nor smell. i consumed many, many more. Hundreds and hundreds. Seven, eight months passed; my body became healthy and my face shone. Worldly people, i am like a daoist master.⁵²

i wrote down the sacred symbol which was given to me, burned the paper, dissolved the ashes in water and drank the mixture. my body was strengthened and i glowed with energy. i realized that this was sacred medicine.⁵³

‘i applied it to the sick around me. Some were healed and some were not.’⁵⁴

In the last quotation, Su-un’s attempt to share the beneficial effects of the Yeongbu with the sick resulted in only partial success. Su-un continues:

‘i questioned why this was so. i realized that the faithful who followed Cheonju were healed, but the disobedient were not. Therefore, cure depends on the sincerity and faith of the recipient.’⁵⁵

The result of Su-un’s questioning and the lesson he learned about the yeongbu will be considered shortly. another question arises from this account concerning Su-un’s attempt to share the benefit of the Yeongbu: did he ask those suffering from some kind of ailment to go through the same process of drawing, burning, immersing and consuming a number of talismans, as he himself had done, or did he merely distribute it to them? The text is not specific on this point.

in a passage from *Ansim-ga*, Su-un’s reaction to the people’s attitude to the Yeongbu is quite specific:

⁴⁹ *PDM*, Ch. 7.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*

⁵¹ *ibid.*, Ch. 8.

⁵² *ASG*, Ch. 5, lines 14–21.

⁵³ *PDM*, Ch. 7.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*

⁵⁵ *ibid.*

ignorant people of the world say: ‘Give us copies of the talisman.’

They say mockingly: ‘is this a divine act?’ foolish people do not like those who are superior to them. Personally, i can do nothing about this. The medicine of immortality will not be given to brutes.⁵⁶

The contrast between Su-un’s attitude in the passage above and that displayed in the passages from *Ansim-ga* (Ch. 5) and *Podeok-mun* (Ch. 7) quoted above is immediately apparent. His attempt to relieve the suffering of those around him is met with derision. He is both disillusioned and disappointed. Su-un’s choice of language emphasizes his mood. Specifically, in *Podeok-mun* (Ch. 7) he speaks of the yeongbu as ‘sacred medicine’. The term he uses, *seonyak*, recalls the daoist elixir which bestows immortality.

The term which occurs in the *Ansim-ga* (Ch. 6, line 6), *pulsayak*, has a similar meaning: ‘elixir of immortality’. The context in which it is used is, however, entirely different. Su-un does not make direct references to the yeongbu through this term. When he speaks of the yeongbu in this passage, the context is that of people asking him for copies of the ‘drawn’ or ‘sketched’ talisman (*kurin-bu*) he received from the Lord of Heaven. Their attitude towards this talisman is passive in that they expect it to effect a cure or to bestow immortality on them without any involvement or commitment on their part. The difference between their attitude to it as magical medicine and Su-un’s attitude to it as ‘sacred medicine’, which requires the sincerity and faith of the recipient for a cure to be effected, is clear.

The use of the term *kurin-bu* (‘drawn (yeong)bu’) also implies that, alongside faith and sincerity, emphasis is also placed on the composition of the yeongbu. However, the passage does not clarify who is actually required to do the drawing. Since the ‘brutes’ asked merely for copies of the yeongbu, it is apparent that they thought it should not be them. Also, it is quite possible that Su-un did not require the sick around him to go through the process of drawing the yeongbu when he ‘applied’ (distributed it) to them. The issues relating to the composition of the yeongbu and their seminal role in shaping not only Su-un’s identity, but the donghak religion itself, will be examined in the following chapter.

For the present, suffice it to note that the role of the Yeongbu in Su-un’s incipient religion quickly became misunderstood, and this caused him considerable distress. His distress is evident in the strong language he uses in referring to those who demeaned the yeongbu by treating it as magic, while simultaneously mocking it and deriding its origins. Su-un describes these people as *chik chik-han* (‘thick/dense’)⁵⁷ and as being like the *keumsu*, that is, brutes or beasts.⁵⁸

yet Su-un learned from these people something about the yeongbu, which suggests that his initial understanding of it was not very different from theirs.

⁵⁶ *ASG*, Ch. 6, lines 1–6.

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, line 3.

⁵⁸ *ibid.*, line 6.

Believing in its universal efficacy, he applied it indiscriminately to the sick around him, and only some were cured. It is little wonder then that, at the beginning, if Su-un did not fully understand the yeongbu's purpose or potential, those desperate people who were seeking either a cure for their illness or an elixir to see them through the dangerous times in which they lived did not understand it either. They grasped at anything which had the potential to make their lives more tolerable and secure. It was fortunate that they did. For their ignorance, and Su-un's own, taught him an important lesson. The yeongbu was a powerful religious symbol, not merely because it was received from the Lord of Heaven, but also because it required a commitment of faith and sincerity on the part of those who became involved with it.

The appropriateness of the term 'became involved with' in relation to the yeongbu will be examined in the chapter devoted to this potent symbol. What should be noted here is that the lesson which Su-un learned about the limited effectiveness of the yeongbu was accompanied by a clarity regarding his role in the new Donghak Way. Specifically, Su-un discovered that he was not a dispenser of sacred or immortal medicine—as was, by reputation, a Sinseon, a Daoist divine with supernatural powers. Su-un's destiny and his role lay elsewhere.

Su-un's disappointment, disillusionment and feelings of rejection, which he subsequently expresses in Chs 8–9 of *Podeok-mun* and in the complementary passage from *Ansim-ga* (Ch. 6, lines 1–6), had the positive effect of prompting him to determine his role more clearly in the religion he founded. The difference implied by this role and by the image of a religious leader which accompanied it, will become evident in the subsequent examination of the third account of the ecstatic encounter, in *Nonhak-mun*. What is important to note here is that, while Su-un's initial promulgation of the yeongbu may have been primarily a negative experience for him, it had the positive effect of helping to clarify the nature of the Yeongbu and of compelling him to reflect more deeply on his own role in relation to it and to the other heavenly gift he received, the Jumun.

Examination of the *Nonhak-mun* Account

The Title Nonhak-mun

The title, *Nonhak-mun*, means *Discussion on Learning*, which is a reasonably accurate description of the content of the book. Kim Ki-seon states that the book was originally entitled *Donghak-ron*, or *Discussion on Donghak*, because many people at the time were confused and could not clearly distinguish the teachings of Donghak from those of Seohak (Western Learning, that is, Catholicism). This confusion had serious repercussions, since Seohak was considered heretical, its followers were being persecuted, and Donghak, by association, was in danger of

suffering a similar fate.⁵⁹ The reason for the change of title is not given, but the change may have been effected in order to emphasize the pedagogical nature of the book, particularly in its latter section.

The Form of Nonhak-mun

Consisting of 1348 Chinese characters, *Nonhak-mun* is more than twice the length of *Podeok-mun*. The next longest of the major books of *Donggyeong Daejeon*, *Sudeok-mun*, is four fifths its size. Judged by length alone, *Nonhak-mun* is the most pre-eminent book of *Donggyeong Daejeon*. An analysis of its other qualities tends to support the theory of its overall pre-eminence.

The Content of Nonhak-mun

There are three sections in *Nonhak-mun*. The first section contains a cosmological introduction to the book in much the same style as, but in greater detail than, *Podeok-mun*. The second section is the account of Su-un's encounter with the Lord of Heaven. The third section, true to the book's title, contains a discussion between Su-un and a group of scholars who come to visit him to discuss the principles of his new Way.

The first two chapters of *Nonhak-mun*, an amalgamation of Confucian and Daoist cosmology, are important in that they set the tone of the book and introduce its key concepts. Of central importance is the *dao* ('the Way').⁶⁰ The importance of this concept for Su-un is evident from the book's first line: 'The Heavenly Way [*Cheon-do*] has no form, yet it is very real.'⁶¹ Su-un continues:

The earth and all it contains is incredibly immense, yet it has its dimensions. The nine stars in Heaven harmonize with the nine territories on Earth. As there are eight directions on Earth, the realms of humankind have eight trigrams which symbolize the waxing and waning, the change and the constancy of human life. While myriads of transformations emanate through the intertwining of yin and yang, humankind remains the most intelligent and spiritual being in existence. The sages identified three dimensions of existence: Heaven, Earth and Humankind, and they recognized the principle of the five elements of the universe: Metal, Wood, Water, Fire and Earth. Heaven is the origin of the five elements; Earth is the basis of the five elements. Hence we realize that Heaven, Earth and Humankind are the three dimensions of existence.⁶²

⁵⁹ Kim Ki-seon, *Hangul Donggyeong Daejeon [The Great Collection of Eastern Scriptures (Koeran version)]*, Seoul: Donghak Research Institute, 1991, p. 341.

⁶⁰ Pronounced in Korean as 'do'.

⁶¹ *NHM*, Ch. 1.

⁶² *ibid.*, Chs 1 and 2.

For Su-un, as for Daoist and Confucian sages, there is an order in the universe which is reflected in the order of human society. Conversely, a virtuous human being achieves this state through being in harmony with the Heavenly Way. The corollary is that, when humans are not in harmony with the Heavenly Way, they and the society in which they live are thrown into confusion and turmoil. Such was the case in the time immediately preceding Su-un's ecstatic encounter with the Lord of Heaven. Compounding this internal situation, the threat from abroad, both military and spiritual, loomed large.

in the fourth month of 1860, the whole world was in turmoil. People's minds were disturbed and they did not know what to do. a strange rumor spread through the land that westerners had discovered the Truth and that there was nothing they could not do. nothing could stand before their military power. Even China was being destroyed.

Would our country too suffer the same fate? Their Way is called the Western Way, their religion Seohak [Western Learning: Catholicism] and their doctrine the Holy Teaching. is it possible that they know the Heavenly order and have received the Heavenly mandate?⁶³

it is within this context that the account of Su-un's epiphany in *Nonhak-mun* takes place.

Record of Su-un's Ecstatic Encounter in Nonhak-mun: Descent of the Divine Power

Like the *Podeok-mun* account, the account in *Nonhak-mun* records that Su-un was alone when the Lord of Heaven spoke to him. yet the *Nonhak-mun* account differs significantly from that of *Ansim-ga* and *Podeok-mun*. as in *Podeok-mun*, Su-un feels a chill spreading through his body. but then, in the *Nonhak-mun* account, he feels a vital force or energy, a divine power, descending into him.⁶⁴ This physical manifestation is not mentioned in *Ansim-ga* or *Podeok-mun*. a further point of distinction in the *Nonhak-mun* account is that what comes to Su-un accompanying the vital force is 'a mysterious teaching'.⁶⁵

as in *Podeok-mun*, an inner voice speaks to Su-un, however, the emphasis on the pedagogical nature of the revelation is unique to *Nonhak-mun* and it sets the scene for Su-un's meeting with the visiting scholars, a meeting recorded in *Nonhak-mun* (Chs 8–18), where he assumes the role of a teacher.

a gain as in *Podeok-mun*, a dialogue emerges between Su-un and the spiritual being, called here Kwisin. The dialogue is, however, short. Su-un asks one question and receives one reply; then the encounter ends.

⁶³ *ibid.*, Chs 4 and 5.

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, Ch. 5.

⁶⁵ *ibid.*

The emphasis in this brief dialogue is also on teaching. The Lord of Heaven commands Su-un to realize the Eternal Way, the *dao*, ‘cultivate it, study it, record it and teach it to all humankind’.⁶⁶ Yet the first words that the Lord of Heaven speaks to Su-un not only distinguish this passage and the *Nonhak-mun* account from the other accounts—they also lay the foundation for a revolutionary approach to viewing the relationship between the human and divine levels of existence.

My Heart is your Heart.

i heard an inner revelatory voice. i looked but could see no one; listened but could not hear anything. I felt perplexed and mystified. I quieted my mind, refined my spirit and asked, ‘How can this be?’

The voice replied, ‘my heart is your heart, yet how could humankind know this? They may know Heaven and Earth, but they cannot understand the Spiritual being [*Kwisin*]. i am the Spiritual being.’⁶⁷

The second paragraph in the quotation above introduces a new concept into the religious climate of Korea: the concept of an individual human being sharing in a most intimate way the life of the heavenly deity. in this paragraph Su-un indicates that the concept of an aloof and commanding deity, removed from earthly involvement, as it was in the Confucian tradition, is no longer adequate. nor is the concept of a plethora of spiritual beings inhabiting the shamanic cosmos and moving in and out of the human sphere at will. Su-un replaces these concepts with that of a single spiritual being, whose heart is one and the same entity as the human heart.

This concept is not entirely innovative. r yu Seung-kuk states:

in the Silla dynasty the Hwabaek system of governing was Korea’s unique system of government. When affairs of state were discussed all the ministers had to agree unanimously before action was carried out. it was not based on the rule of the majority. When there is conflict based on selfish desires it is difficult to get unanimous decisions. but when man dialogues in the spirit of his true, loving and sincere nature it is possible. Any spot of selfishness clouds man’s nature and prevents unity of minds. but if men gather together at a quiet mountain and in accord with the seal of heaven join their minds and hearts as in the pearl of a mandala, then unity is possible.

in ancient Korean history the mind of heaven shines in man’s heart and the shape of the man who has this mind, this heart, has from the earliest time been the ideal of the Korean race.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ *ibid.*, Ch. 6.

⁶⁷ *ibid.*, Chs 5–6.

⁶⁸ r yu, Seung-kuk, ‘on the origins of Korean Thought’, *Korea Journal*, vol. 16, no. 5, may 1976, p. 44.

It is possible that Su-un was influenced by this ancient tradition. Even if this is so, however, the *Nonhak-mun* account is a significant development on the ancient ideal described in the passage above, for the following reasons:

The passage above refers to a human ideal described in the context of an aristocratic elite attempting to reach consensus under particular social, political and religious conditions.⁶⁹ The *Nonhak-mun* passage, on the other hand, describes an encounter and the subsequent establishment of an intimate relationship with the heavenly deity. The relationship is initiated and defined by the deity, and the deity speaks directly to the human concerned. There is no reference in *Nonhak-mun* to an intermediary religious symbol or artefact ('seal of heaven'), and the result of this encounter is not merely human consensus, but rather an intimate unity between the deity and human beings.

Also, the status of those referred to in the two passages is entirely different. The *Hwabaek*, as described by r yu, was headed by an aristocrat whose status was 'extraordinary rank one', and it was composed of those of 'extraordinary rank two.'⁷⁰ The person with whom the deity chooses to converse in *Nonhak-mun* does not approach this status. As noted previously, Su-un describes himself as a *choya-ae mudhin insang* ('country-bumpkin').⁷¹ He was, in effect, a status-less wanderer who could not support himself or his family and had no real prospects of ever doing so. The choice of this type of person by the deity for intimate unity has far-reaching implications for the religious culture in Korea. Referring to this encounter, John Duncan writes as follows regarding the divine-human relationship in the Donghak religion: 'This identification of the human mind with the divine mind implies a fundamental equality of all human beings not to be found in either the Chinese or the indigenous heritage.'⁷²

The egalitarian nature of the Donghak religion which flowed from this encounter will be the subject of later examination. For the present it can be stated that the context of the meetings described in the quotation from r yu Seung-kuk and in *Nonhak-mun*, their purpose and the status of those involved are distinctly different. Consequently, if Su-un was influenced by this ancient tradition, he adopted and adapted it to make it suit his emerging creed.

⁶⁹ This appears to be a reference to the *Hwabaek* (Council of nobles), a Silla dynasty institution which operated on the principle of unanimity (Lee Ki-baik, *A New History of Korea*, trans. Edgar W. Wagner, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984, p. 53). 'Liberations on particularly vital matters ... were convened at sites bearing special religious significance.' Lee then mentions three mountain sites. Lee describes the *Hwabaek* as 'corporate assemblies of the high aristocracy' (p. 53).

⁷⁰ *ibid.*

⁷¹ *ASG*, Ch.4, line 14.

⁷² John Duncan, 'The Emergence of the Tonghak Religion', in Peter Lee (ed.), *The Sourcebook of Korean Civilization*, vol 2, New York: Columbia University Press, 1996, p. 314.

It is conceivable that Su-un was influenced by Seohak (Catholicism), in which the relationship between humans and the deity is that of a loving father and his human family. If this is so, Su-un took the relationship a good deal further by promulgating that the deity and humans shared one heart.

However, speculation relating to the possible influence of Catholicism on Su-un's new Way is tenuous at best, and is not supported by Su-un's scripture. The previously quoted passage from *Nonhak-mun* (Chs 4 and 5) indicates that Su-un's opinion of Catholicism was ambivalent. While he questions whether this religion knows the 'Heavenly order and has received the Heavenly mandate', he also views it as the spiritual arm of an unstoppable and destructive military power which is an imminent and direct threat to his country. When Su-un inquires of Sangje in *Podeok-mun* whether he should teach the western Way, he receives an unqualified negative response, and is told rather that he will be given a distinctly eastern spiritual talisman and a sacred formula with which to propagate his new religion.⁷³

Finally, the name which Su-un gave to his new religion—*donghak* ('Eastern Learning')—stands in direct contrast to the name he used for Catholicism—*Seohak* ('Western Learning'). It would appear that, rather than being influenced by this religion, Su-un did all in his power to distance himself from it, both in its practices and in its beliefs.

'Mind' or 'Heart'?

The word 'heart' in the passage 'my heart is your heart' (*Nonhak-mun*, Ch. 6) is represented by the Chinese character 心(*sim*). The dictionary definition of this character is 'mind; heart; feeling; emotion'. The Korean term 마음(*ma-um*), given as equivalent to *sim*, is defined as 'mind; spirit; heart; soul'. It is this term, *ma-um*, that the *Chondo-gyo Gyeongjeon* uses as the Korean translation for 心.

Some scholars writing on Korean ethics and religion use both 'mind' and 'heart' to represent 心.⁷⁴ In relation to Chapter 6 of *Nonhak-mun*, 心 is variously translated into English as 'mind' and 'heart'. Two of the leading *donghak*/*Chondo-gyo* scholars who translated *Nonhak-mun* into English, Kim yong-choon and Susan Shin, differ in this respect, Kim yong-choon choosing 'mind', and Susan Shin choosing 'heart' to represent 心.⁷⁵

⁷³ *PDM*, Ch. 6.

⁷⁴ Michael Kalton uses both 'mind' and 'heart' to represent the character 心, commenting: 'in classical usage, *sim* is a broad term referring to all the elements of human interiority, and especially to man's inner disposition or impulses ...': 'Early Yi dynasty Neo-Confucianism: An Integrated Vision', in Laurel Kendall and Griffin Dix (eds), *Religion and Ritual in Korean Society*, Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1987, p. 15.

⁷⁵ Kim, yong-choon, 'modern Period: introduction', in *Sourcebook of Korean Civilization* (above, n. 72), vol. 2, p. 318; Susan Shin, 'The Tonghak movement' (above,

i have opted for translating 心 as 'heart', because i consider that this term most closely represents what Su-un is referring to in this passage: an amalgamation of the most intimate and essential components of human life, with its equivalent in the deity. i also consider that the concepts 'mind' and 'heart' are understood, at least in a western context, as representing intellectual processes on the one hand and affective, emotional relationships on the other. The Concise Oxford Dictionary makes this same distinction when it defines 'heart' as 'seat of the emotions, esp. of love', opposite to 'head' as seat of the intellect.⁷⁶

i consider that, for a westerner, the sentence 'my mind is your mind' does not convey the depth and the intimacy of the expression 'my heart is your heart', which *Nonhak-mun* Chapter 6 implies. For the latter speaks of a total unity, whereas the former merely implies unity of intellect. 'Heart' in the western sense of the term has several meanings, which range from the literal one—an essential yet physical characteristic of the body—to more symbolic meanings such as love, kindness, pity, courage, or determination. At a deeper level, the term refers to the 'central or innermost part, vital part, essence'.⁷⁷ It is this meaning, with its overtones of intimacy and unity, that i believe Su-un intends to convey when he speaks of his relationship with the Spiritual being. i think that it is not incorrect to state that the Korean term *ma-um* conveys a similar, if not identical, meaning. The problem arises when the character 心 (*sim*) is translated into English so as to represent one of two quite dissimilar concepts, at least in western terms.

From the context of *Nonhak-mun*, Chapter 6 and from Su-un's other writings, i believe that his intention is to convey the concept of unity with the deity on the most intimate level possible. As will be seen, Su-un communicates this concept through the seminal phrase *Si Chonju* ('bearing the Lord of Heaven') in the *Jumun*. i believe therefore that the character 心 and the concept it conveys are best represented in English by a term which conveys a unity of the heart rather than of the mind.

That the leaders and the faithful of the Donghak religion held this same opinion is indicated by the fact that, as the religion developed, the phrase *Si Cheonju* evolved into *Sain Yocheon* ('treat all people as God') and then into *in nae Cheon* ('humans are God').⁷⁸

The question arises: is this concept of unity of heart being used metaphorically? In other words, does the Spiritual being mean, for instance, that his/her purpose and Su-un's are identical, that both share the same determination and courage? There is nothing in the passage to suggest that this is so, and the later development of the concept, mentioned above, supports the literal interpretation. In other words,

n. 20)', p. 64.

⁷⁶ J. b. Sykes (ed.), *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, 6th edn, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976, p. 496.

⁷⁷ *ibid.*

⁷⁸ The evolution and meaning of these terms will undergo further examination in Chs 5 and 8.

the union referred to here is both total and intimate, and speaks of the indwelling of the deity in the inner core of a human being, a fusion so complete that the two can be treated as one.

Conclusions from the Examination of the Three Accounts

Development in Su-un's Concept of the Deity

The intimate nature of the relationship between the Lord of Heaven and Su-un displayed in Chapter 6 of *Nonhak-mun* is evidence of a development in his thinking between the time when he wrote *Ansim-ga*, and then *Podeok-mun*, and the time, approximately six months to a year later, when *Nonhak-mun* was composed. The stern, authoritarian deity of *Ansim-ga* is entirely absent from the *Nonhak-mun* account, and there has been a development from the civil yet transcendent deity represented in *Podeok-mun* to the intimate, almost tender deity present in *Nonhak-mun*, with whom Su-un shares the same essence, the same heart.

How did this development eventuate? What did Su-un experience in the interval between composing these books which moved him to alter his perspective of the heavenly being so radically? Surely, if he had held this view of the deity at an earlier stage he would have included it in *Ansim-ga*, given the latter's specific mandate to bring comfort to the women of his household. The answer may lie in Su-un's use of the two 'heavenly gifts' and in their effect on him. This hypothesis will be examined in detail in later chapters.

The Development of Su-un's Self-Image

The development in Su-un's concept of the deity is accompanied by a development in the concept he had of himself as a religious leader. In *Nonhak-mun* Su-un is no longer a physically, materially and spiritually bankrupt wanderer. He now speaks of a unity with the divine which could be described as symbiotic, that is, a union beneficial for both parties. For, as the Lord of Heaven says to Su-un: 'Until this time i have not succeeded in my purpose, so i brought you into the world to teach humankind my law.'⁷⁹

This relationship should be evaluated from the perspective of Su-un's metaphysical introduction to *Nonhak-mun*. In this introduction, after outlining the cyclic nature of creation moving in harmony with the laws of heaven, Su-un states that it is unclear whether this cyclic nature is the result of divine benevolence or just part of the natural order.

as the four seasons come and go, wind, dew, frost and snow appear in their proper order.

⁷⁹ PDM, Ch. 6.

The multitude of foolish humanity cannot understand this. Some say it is due to the grace of Cheonju. Others say that it simply a sign of natural harmony. yet, although some say that it is due to heavenly benevolence and others profess it to be a sign of natural harmony, it is difficult to perceive which it is. From ancient times until now, this has never been clear.⁸⁰

Su-un offers no solution to this age-old question and proceeds to describe how the world as he knows it is in turmoil. He then gives an account of his revelation. in this account, Kwisin, the Spiritual being, answers the question which Su-un raises in the introduction. The question which, 'from ancient times until now ... has never been clear' is resolved. it is resolved in the person of Su-un and in his intimate relationship with the Lord of Heaven. it is the Lord of Heaven that controls the destiny of nature and of humans. yet, although humans may know Heaven and Earth, they cannot understand the Spiritual being who guides them.⁸¹

This is Su-un's appointed task: to make the Way of the Lord of Heaven known by cultivating, studying, recording and teaching the Eternal Way, setting down its practices and propagating its virtue among humankind. He can do this by virtue of the fact that his heart and the Lord of Heaven's heart are one. Thus, by his looking into his own heart, the Way of the Lord of Heaven will become clear to him, and, by extension, to all those who accept and practice the Way. in other words, Su-un is the Lord of Heaven's intermediary for humankind.⁸²

in summary, the solution to the conundrum left open in the introductory verses of *Nonhak-mun* is Su-un himself: a new creation, in total harmony with the creator and His creation, fully alive and immortal. Su-un himself is as much part of his teaching as his books are. Through his spiritual and physical transformation, he is the religion's best advertisement for its efficacy.

The unity with the Lord of Heaven of which Su-un writes in *Nonhak-mun* indicates that Su-un saw himself as unique, as not fitting into the mould of previous religious leaders or messianic figures of the past, either in his country or in China, Korea's mentor. He sees himself as the first of the fully realized human beings aware of their elevated place in creation as being of one heart with the Lord of Heaven.

yet this is not a position which Su-un covets for himself. The spiritual gifts which emerge from his ecstatic encounter are not Su-un's alone, but are to be shared among his peers. This is clear in all the revelation accounts. What was not clear at the time, even for Su-un, was exactly how these gifts were to be effectively shared; this is apparent from his disappointing experience of applying the yeongbu, as recounted in Chapter 7 of *Podeok-mun* and in *Ansim-ga*, Chapter 6, line 6,

⁸⁰ *NHM*, Chs 2 and 3.

⁸¹ *ibid.*, Ch. 6.

⁸² This point will be examined further in Chapter 4 on account of its relevance to the ritual involved in drawing the yeongbu.

where Su-un states: ‘The medicine of immortality will not be given to brutes.’⁸³ The result of Su-un’s disillusionment will be examined in the next chapter.

One Divine Symbol or Two in Nonhak-mun?

i meditated on these words for a year and realized the natural principle. i composed the Sacred formula [*Jumun*] and perfected the technique of making the Spirit descend. i wrote the verses ‘not forgetting’ [the Lord of Heaven]. The procedure for practicing the Law is contained in the Sacred formula of twenty-one characters.⁸⁴

it is not surprising that *Nonhak-mun*, with its emphasis on the pedagogical nature of Su-un’s mission to propagate the Law of the Lord of Heaven among his people, emphasizes the role of the *Jumun* in accomplishing this goal. What is surprising here is Su-un’s failure to mention explicitly the second of the sacred symbols, the *yeongbu*.

A superficial reading of the text might suggest that Su-un is referring to the *yeongbu* when he writes of perfecting ‘the technique of making the Spirit descend’. This conclusion would be understandable in light of the practice of writing the *yeongbu*, which Su-un perfected. However, other factors must be taken into consideration before reaching such a conclusion.

Specifically, Su-un wrote not one but several *Jumun*, and two of these he entitled using the exact words he uses in the *Nonhak-mun* passage, namely *Ganglyeong Jumun* [*Descent of the Spirit Jumun*].⁸⁵ in addition, in the sentence ‘i composed the Sacred formula and perfected the technique of making the Spirit descend’, Su-un places the action of perfecting ‘the technique of making the Spirit descend’ consequent on the action, ‘i composed the Sacred formula’.⁸⁶ Also, in this chapter Su-un refers to writing the verses ‘not forgetting the Lord of Heaven’. This is a specific reference to the term *Bulmang* (‘not forgetting’), which is part of another *Jumun*: the *Pon* [original] *Jumun*, which consists of thirteen characters.⁸⁷

When Su-un refers in *Nonhak-mun* (Ch. 7) to the ‘Sacred formula of twenty-one characters’, he has in mind a combination of two *Jumun*: the *Ganglyeong Jumun* mentioned above, which is comprised of eight characters, and the *Pon Jumun*, comprising thirteen characters. These *Jumun* will be the subject of detailed examination in Chapter 5.

This reference, in one paragraph, to two *Jumun* which, together, formed the text of the twenty-one-character *Jumun* and represented for Su-un ‘the procedure

⁸³ *ASG*, Ch. 6, line 6.

⁸⁴ *NHM*, Ch. 7.

⁸⁵ *JM*, in d Gd J; The *Jumun* [*Jm*] is one of the books of *DGDJ*, and appears in the compilation of Cheongo-gyo Scriptures (Cheondo-gyo Gyeongjeon [*CGGJ*]), pp. 69–70.

⁸⁶ *NHM*, Ch. 7.

⁸⁷ *JM*, *DGDJ*, *CGGJ*, p. 70.

for practicing the law', is proof that Su-un speaks here of the 'descent of the Spirit Jumun', and not of the yeongbu.⁸⁸ On the basis of this opinion and of the evidence just presented, it can be concluded with certainty that there is no mention of the other sacred symbol, the yeongbu, in *Nonhak-mun* Ch. 7.

Why did Su-un not refer to the yeongbu in the *Nonhak-mun* account of his experience? Two possible reasons suggest themselves. The first is that he wished there to stress the pedagogical nature of his revelation and intended *Nonhak-mun* to be, specifically, a vehicle for promoting and defining his teaching. The second possible reason is that, disillusioned with the way people viewed the yeongbu, considering it 'magical medicine',⁸⁹ Su-un made a decision not to stress its use until the nature and purpose of the yeongbu could be more comprehensively explained.

Su-un would offer such a comprehensive explanation in his poem *Pilbeop* [*The Way of the Brush Stroke*], which, according to Kim Ki-seon,⁹⁰ was written in the third lunar month of 1863,⁹¹ approximately two years after *Nonhak-mun*. During these two years Su-un may have stressed the pedagogical aspects of his new religion, laying less emphasis on its healing nature until the yeongbu could be properly understood and utilized.

In summary, on 'applying' the yeongbu, Su-un discovered that the faithful were cured and those who did not believe were not. Because his religion was at its initial stage, he may have considered it necessary to educate his followers and to strengthen their faith before sharing with them the spiritually and physically efficacious, yet easily misunderstood, 'other' symbol—the Yeongbu.

Reception or Composition?

The following passage from *Podeok-mun* stresses that the two spiritual symbols are given directly to Su-un by the Lord of Heaven, who explains their specific use to him.

The Voice replied:

I have a spiritual talisman, sacred medicine in the shape of *gung gung*, the great moral principle, the essence of all things in the universe. Take this talisman and deliver humanity from sickness. Use my Sacred formula and teach humankind for me.⁹²

⁸⁸ Kim Ki-seon shares the view that it is clear from the context that Su-un is referring to this Jumun in the clause quoted above. Kim Ki-seon, *Hangul Donggyeong Daejeon* (above, n. 59), p. 63.

⁸⁹ *ASG*, Ch. 6, lines 1–6.

⁹⁰ Kim Ki-seon, *Hangul Donggyeong Daejeon* (above, n. 59), p. 331.

⁹¹ Solar Calendar: 18 a pr.–17 may 1863.

⁹² *PDM*, Ch. 6.

The account in *Nonhak-mun* presents quite a different scenario from this passage. In *Nonhak-mun*, the emphasis is not on symbols at all, but rather on the relationship between the Lord of Heaven and Su-un, his chosen human representative. In consequence of this relationship—that is, of a union of hearts—the Lord of Heaven tells Su-un to cultivate, study, record and teach the Eternal Way to humankind and to ‘set down its practices and propagate its virtue’.⁹³ Hence Su-un writes: ‘I meditated on these words for a year, and realized the natural principle. I composed the Sacred formula and perfected the technique of making the Spirit descend.’⁹⁴

In this account there is no allusion to reception of the Jumun by Su-un from the Lord of Heaven. Rather, the Jumun results from an activity on the part of Su-un after a year’s meditation. Therefore the Jumun cannot technically be called a gift from the Lord of Heaven. It was rather a composition, an attempt by Su-un to convey, in a succinct yet profound way, the substance of his ecstatic experience. It was also, according to the above quotation, a method created by Su-un to re-enact this experience.

Su-un’s purpose in composing the Jumun was not merely pedagogical but was also functional: the Jumun was a means of making the Spirit descend. The dual purposes of the Sacred formula will be examined in detail in Chapter 5. For the present, just one consequence of this functional application of the Jumun will be considered.

The ‘Otherness’ of the Lord of Heaven

The intimate nature of Su-un’s relationship with the Lord of Heaven has already been noted: a union of hearts and the sharing of an essential nature. This not only signified a dramatic development in Su-un’s religious thinking but was also a significant, if controversial, contribution to the religious and social ethos of the Joseon dynasty.

There appears to be an inconsistency in Su-un’s thinking at this stage. Despite their sharing the same essence, Su-un still considered his relationship with the Lord of Heaven to be finite, limited and separate. For why else would he need to perfect a technique for summoning the Heavenly Spirit? In other words, the intimacy which Su-un shared with the Lord of Heaven did not mean, at this stage of *donghak* thinking, that the Lord of Heaven and Su-un were in constant communion or that the two were identified as one. For Su-un, the Lord of Heaven, was definitely ‘Other’, existing outside the human realm but being able to be summoned if the correct technique was utilized.

The means of understanding the relationship between the Lord of Heaven and Su-un involves a detailed study of the *yeongbu* and the Jumun, the two symbols central to early *donghak* spirituality and worship. For the present it is important to note that a development took place in Su-un’s attitude towards the Lord of

⁹³ *NHM*, Ch. 6.

⁹⁴ *ibid.*, Ch. 7.

Heaven between the time he wrote *Ansim-ga* and the time he composed *Nonhakmun*; and also that a development occurred regarding the image he had of himself in relationship to the Lord of Heaven during this time. This development and its implications will be examined in Chapter 6 in order for us to reach a conclusion regarding Su-un's self-image.

The examination to be undertaken next—namely that of the Yeongbu, the first symbol which Su-un received at the yongdam Pavilion on mt Gumi—will yield an essential element in arriving at this conclusion.

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Chapter 4

The mystical Talisman

in the midst of all the words written by Su-un in two languages in his two volumes of scripture and of all the books and scholarly articles written over a century and half in many languages about Su-un, donghak, the donghak Peasant rebellion, and Cheondo-gyo, there lies a single, enigmatic symbol. This symbol, a mystical talisman, is located at the heart of all that Su-un taught and believed, and within it lies the key to understanding his relationship with the Lord of Heaven and everything that flowed from this intimate bond. In order to understand the significance of this mystical symbol it is necessary to place it in the context of similar symbols in the history of Korea and beyond.

History of the *bujeok* in Korea

The use of talismans¹ (*bujeoks*) in Korea can be traced back to the foundation myth on which the nation was formed: the story of Tangun, the progenitor of the Korean people. This story is recorded as follows in the *Samguk Yusa: Legends of the Three Kingdoms*:²

Hwan-in, the Heavenly King, gave his young son Hwan-ung three heavenly treasures when Hwan-ung descended to earth, married a bear which had been transformed into a woman, and established his kingdom. The three treasures are referred to in the myth as *Cheon buin*—*Cheon* representing heaven, *bu* representing bujeok and *in* representing a seal.

Considerable speculation has arisen regarding the composition of these heavenly treasures. The general consensus among scholars is that they are symbols which

¹ While sharing properties of both talismans and amulets, the Korean *bujeok* is considered here as belonging to the first category, in accordance with the following definition: 'A talisman is an object ceremonially endowed with the power of attracting favourable influences: it reinforces, and may be thought of as a sword. An amulet is an object naturally possessing the power of turning away evil or undesired influences: it *protects*, and may be likened to a shield.' C. Nelson Stewart, 'Talismans', in Richard Cavendish (ed.-in-chief), *Man, Myth and Magic: The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Mythology, Religion, and the Unknown*, New York, London, Toronto: Marshall Cavendish Limited, 1985, vol. 10, p. 2772.

² Hwang In-yeon, *Samguk Yusa: Legends and History of the Three Kingdoms of Ancient Korea*, trans. Ha Tae-hung and Grafton K. Mintz, Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 1972, p. 32.

represent the power of the early shaman kings and are a bell, a knife and a mirror.³ Later, *Cheon buin* became the term used for the royal seal and it was handed down, generation after generation, to the kings of the nation. A document sealed by the *Cheon buin* was recognized as a legitimate order, to be transferred to the leaders who controlled each region, to enforce the decrees of the king. In time, documents sealed by the *Cheon buin* came to be regarded as powerful symbols in their own right and the person who possessed them was guaranteed protection from the gods. Consequently, the *Cheon buin* came to represent both the royal seal and a powerful *bujeok*.⁴

An alternative view of the *Cheon buin* can be ascertained by considering its development retrospectively. Specifically, the early rulers of Korea, in their capacity as both religious (shamanic) and political leaders, may have promoted and solidified their authority by linking its seal to the heavenly treasures mentioned in the foundation myth. By identifying their seal with the *Cheon buin*, they introduced a note of mysticism and magic into their official documents, making them, at once, proclamations sealed by the authority of heaven and valued for the content of their message, and objects of value in themselves, which protected and promoted the fortune of their bearer.

Thus the characters which comprise the term *Cheon buin* ('heaven'/'*bujeok*'/'seal') each indicate a particular nuance in relation to the legitimization of the early Korean rulers and to the theocratic nature of the society over which they ruled. They ruled with the full weight of the heavenly mandate to support them, and this was verified by an efficacious seal, capable of transforming an otherwise ordinary document into an object which could both summon and encapsulate the powers of heaven.

Development of the bujeok in Korea

The use of *bujeoks* by individuals not directly related to the royal court can be ascertained from the following examples:

Choe Chi-won, a lesser noble under the unified Silla dynasty (CE 668–935), had occasion to visit Tang dynasty China (CE 618–907) as a member of a group of scholars studying the reform of the hereditary bone-ranking system of Silla.⁵ On his return from studying the Confucian system of merit-based appointments,

³ Kim Kwang-on, 'The implements and the Costumes of the Shaman', *Koreana*, vol. 6. no. 2, 1992, p. 47; Chino k, 'bujeok-eui Shinang-kwa Sasang' ['bujeok: faith and rationale'], in Lee Hyeon-chong (ed.), *Namhae Dos Chibang-eui Bujeok Yeongu [Bujeok Research on the Islands of the Southern Province]*, yeosu: yeosu Cultural institute, 1987, p. 13.

⁴ Kim, min-ki, *Hanguk-eui Buchak [Korean Talisman Composition]*, Seoul: Porimsa, 1987, p. 90.

⁵ Lee Ki-baik, *A New History of Korea*, trans. Edgar W. Wagner, Cambridge, ma : Harvard University Press, 1984, p. 94.

Choe developed the practice of posting a *bujeok*—termed the *O-Saek-Bu*, or five-coloured *bujeok*—on the door of the Jon-wang Buddhist temple in order to prevent possible disaster.⁶ In this practice we have an example of a noted Confucian scholar visiting a Buddhist temple to post a folk symbol on its main entrance. This indicates that religious eclecticism was present in Korea a millennium before Sun formed his religion.

In book Two of *Samguk Yusa*, which concentrates on the myth and history of the united Silla period, the following story appears. The dragon King of the Eastern Sea, having been pleased with the actions of King Heonyang (CE 875–886), appeared to him with his seven sons and entertained the king with music and dance. The story continues:

One of the dragon King's sons followed the King to the capital and became his faithful servant. The King named him Cheoyong ['dragon's son'], conferred on him the office of 'Kupkan' and gave him a lovely woman for his wife. But her beauty drew the attention of the plague spirit, who, taking the form of a handsome man, had secret love-meetings with her at night while Cheoyong was away. One night Cheoyong returned unexpectedly and found his wife sleeping with another man. He thereupon composed the following song:

Under the moonlight of the Eastern Capital
 I revealed late into the night.
 When I came home and entered my bedroom
 I saw four legs.
 Two legs are mine,
 To whom do the other two belong?
 The person below is mine,
 But whose body is raping her?
 What shall I do?

Thus he sang and danced, and then turned to leave. But the plague spirit rose from the bed and fell on his knees before Cheoyong saying, 'I admired your wife for her beautiful person and now I have despoiled her. When I perceived you were not angry with me, I was struck with wonder and admiration. Hereafter when I see even the picture of your face I swear I will not enter the house.' Believing this, all the people began hanging Cheoyong's picture on their gates as protection against disease.⁷

The visage of Cheoyong consequently developed into a *bujeok* under the late Silla and Goryeo (CE 918–1392) dynasties. It was placed on the doors of sick people, to

⁶ Chino k, 'bujeok-eui Shinang-kwa Sasang' (above, n. 3), p. 14.

⁷ Ilyeon, *Samguk Yusa* (above, n. 2), p. 127.

drive away evil and to ensure the recovery of the afflicted person,⁸ and a Cheoyong mask was also used to exorcise spirits, usually on new year's Eve.⁹

The Song of Cheoyong and other *hyangga* poems¹⁰ were used as magic talismans against disease, particularly by the *hwarang*, the aristocratic warrior artists of the Silla dynasty. However, by the time the *Song of Cheoyong* was written, the perception of the *hwarang* had changed: from being incarnations of the maitreya buddha and a source of leadership for the nation, they became professional performers and shamans. It was in this latter capacity that they danced and sang the *Song of Cheoyong* to prevent and exorcise disease.¹¹

It is possible to detect an alteration in the nature of the *bujeok*, as is outlined in the two cases recorded above. From being a relatively rare and efficacious symbol of both divine and earthly authority with a direct link to the foundation myth, the *bujeok* became an image posted on doors, to ward off disease and disaster, and one which was readily available to ordinary citizens. Whereas the provenance of the *Cheon buin* could be traced back to the royal court, the *O-Saek-Bu* of Choe Chi-won and the visage of Cheoyong were more pedestrian in nature and signaled a movement towards the widespread use of *bujeoks* among all classes of society.

The Song of Cheoyong and the *Cheon buin* were both closely associated with shamanism. As Lancaster points out, the *Song* itself was considered to be a magical talisman against disease. This is an important development in the use of the *bujeok* by ordinary people, for it links a drawn symbol with a song-chant, which came to be standard practice in the creation of the *bujeok*.

Bujeoks were in widespread use during the Goryeo dynasty, and these are regarded as the direct forerunners of the modern *bujeok*. They were placed in buddhist temple monuments in order to ensure good fortune, entrance to paradise, or protection from evil spirits; to relieve fever; to eliminate typhoid; and to disperse the three afflictions.¹² There is evidence of the use of *bujeoks* also among members of the royal family, sometimes in association with a sorcerer's incantations; this practice was intended to bring disaster to enemies within the court.¹³

The use of *bujeoks* became even more widespread under the Joseon dynasty (CE 1392–1910), mostly in relation to preventing or curing diseases. Houses, tombs and jewelry boxes were the sites most frequently chosen for placing the *bujeoks*.

⁸ Kim min-ki, *Hanguk-eui Buchak* (above, n. 4), p. 92.

⁹ Peter H. Lee, *Anthology of Korean Literature*, Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1981, p. 21.

¹⁰ Native songs composed by buddhist monks (*hwarang*): see Li Ki-baik, *A New History of Korea* (above, n. 5), p. 61.

¹¹ Lewis Lancaster, 'maitreya in Korea', in Ian Sponberg & Helen Hardacre (eds), *Maitreya: The Future Buddha*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, p. 141.

¹² Namely flood, fire, wind, or, alternatively, war, pestilence, famine: Yu Deok-seon, *Bujeok Mansa Hyeontong* [*Bujeoks for All Occasions*], Seoul: Jiga Publishers, 1997, pp. 18–20.

¹³ Kim, min-ki, *Hanguk-eui Buchak* (above, n. 4), pp. 92–3.

Whereas it was possible to identify ten kinds of *bujeok* during the Goryeo dynasty, the number had risen to at least seventy-six under the Joseon.¹⁴

It was in this climate of frequent use of *bujeoks* that the *donghak yeongbu* came into being.

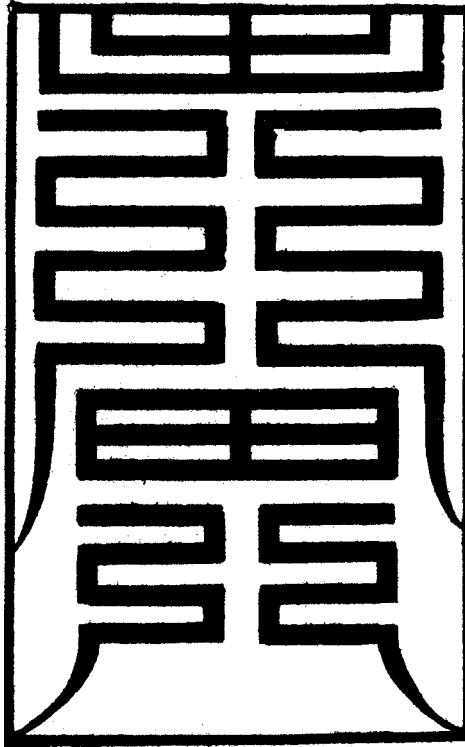


figure 4.1 a typical Korean *bujeok* ('talisman')

The Meaning of the Term *yeongbu*

The initial syllable of *yeongbu*—*yeong*—refers to spirit: 'spiritual', 'divine', 'supernatural', 'efficacious'. The Chinese character, transcribed into English as *yeong*, can also be transcribed as *lyeong*, with no alteration to its meaning. When combined with the term *sin*, as in *sinlyeong*, the term refers even more specifically to god, deity, or spirit.¹⁵ The second syllable of *yeongbu*—*bu*—designates a written

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 93.

¹⁵ Bruce K. Grant, *A Guide to Korean Characters*, Seoul: Hollym Corporation, 1982, reprinted from 1986, p. 330. The term *lyeong* is used in the title of one of the *Jumun*, the *Ganglyeong Jumun* ('descent of the Spirit *Jumun*').

charm.¹⁶ its common usage as part of the word *bujeok* is religious,¹⁷ referring to a buddhist or daoist paper amulet with designs drawn with red ink.¹⁸

When the syllables are combined, the term *yeongbu* indicates a divine or supernatural talisman with inherent powers of protection from, and prevention of, evil and calamity. of the two terms *yeongbu* and *bujeok*, the latter is the more commonly used. for example, there is no entry for *yeongbu* in the *Dong—A Korean—English Dictionary*. The term does appear in *The Standard Practical Use (Chinese—Korean) Dictionary*, where its meaning is given as ‘place of the soul: in other words, the heart/mind’.¹⁹

one can detect a change of emphasis here. The ‘place of the soul: the heart/mind’ carries with it allusions to a spiritual realm without a physical object which purports to protect its owner from evil or calamity. This shift in meaning, from the physical to the spiritual, lies at the heart of a misunderstanding which precipitated the early demise of the *yeongbu* in the *donghak/Cheondo-gyo* religion. This will be the subject of detailed examination later in this chapter.

The Donghak Yeongbu²⁰

it would appear logical to begin any study of the *donghak yeongbu* by considering the symbol itself, in its original form. This consideration would offer an insight into the mind of Su-un at the time of the composition of the *donghak yeongbu*, particularly if a comparison could be made between several of Su-un’s original drawings. This is certainly possible with the other symbol, the *Jumun*, of which five are recorded in *Cheondo-gyo Gyeongjeon*. The shape of the *yeongbu*, however, has been lost to history, or so it would appear.

Various historical forms of the *yeongbu* do exist, but these could be considered as artistic representations of what the *yeongbu* might have looked like before the symbol fell into disuse. The earliest extant recorded example of a *yeongbu* appears fifty years after Su-un’s death, in a 1914 publication: ‘Drawings and Record of a Practical Spiritual Experience’.²¹ This publication offers a pictorial rendition of

¹⁶ This term is also defined as ‘a charm (against ill luck); a talisman (against evil); an amulet (against calamity)’. *Dong-A’s New Concise Korean-English Dictionary*, Seoul: dong-a Publishers 1985, p. 856.

¹⁷ The syllables *bu* and *pu* are interchangeable.

¹⁸ Grant, *A Guide to Korean Characters* (above, n. 15), p. 195.

¹⁹ *Pyochun Hwalyong Okpyeon [Standard Practical Use Dictionary (Chinese-Korean)]*, Seoul: isangsa Publishers, 1996, p. 660.

²⁰ The capital ‘y’ will be used for the *donghak yeongbu* to distinguish it from other *yeongbu*.

²¹ Jung Won-seop, *Drawings and Record of a Practical Spiritual Experience*, Jung Kyung-duk publisher (approved by the Japanese Colonial Government), 1914, p. 14.

Su-un's life, with accompanying text in Chinese characters and the old form of Korean Hangul script.

in this book the yeongbu appears as follows, under the heading 'Picture of the gung-eul yeongbu':²²

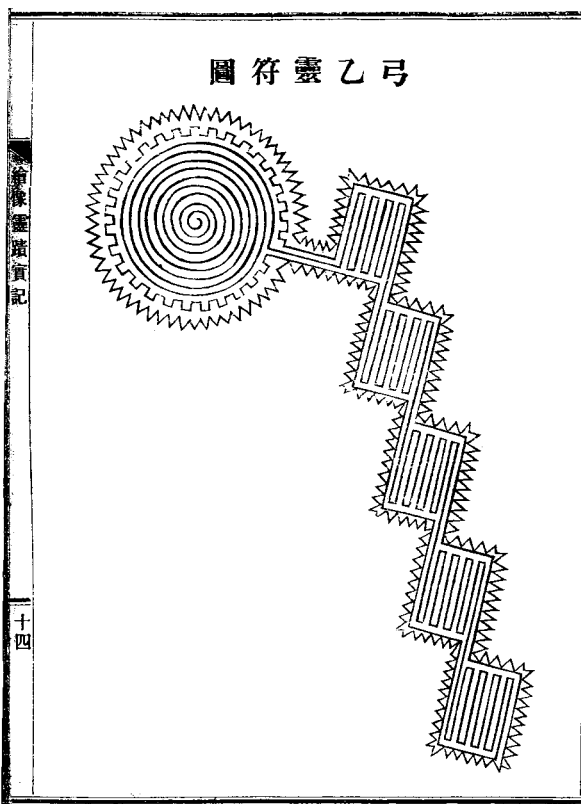


figure 4.2 'Picture of the gung-eul yeongbu'

The drawing is both complicated and fanciful, and its shape is not verified in any of Su-un's references to the symbol. Consequently, rather than assisting, it distracts from attempts to ascertain the original shape of the yeongbu, and, by association, its meaning and purpose.

in the apparent absence of an original yeongbu, a study will be undertaken of Su-un's writings in an attempt to ascertain the meaning and place of this symbol in donghak thought and practice.

²² The meaning of *gung* and *eul* will be examined later on in the chapter.

The Yeongbu in Su-un's Writings: Use of the Term in Cheondo-gyo Gyeongjeon

There are sixteen references to the yeongbu in Su-un's scriptures.²³ However, as fundamental as the yeongbu is to the foundation of Su-un's new religion, the word itself, *Yeongbu*, is used only once in Su-un's writings, by the Lord of Heaven.²⁴ On the other fifteen occasions, either abbreviations of the term or more descriptive terminology are used. In all, the yeongbu is referred to by four different entities: by the Lord of Heaven, by Su-un himself, by Su-un's children, and by a group of people whom Su-un describes disapprovingly as ignorant. The references are made in the following sequence:

in *Ansim-ga*, reference is made to the yeongbu eleven times. In Chapter 5, line 5, Su-un refers to it by the abbreviation *bu*. In Chapter 5, line 3, he refers to it as *mulhyeong-bu*, the *mul* and *hyeong* meaning 'thing' and 'shape' respectively. In Chapter 5, line 19, he refers to the yeongbu as *mogun-bu* ('the *bu* which is eaten'). In Chapter 6, line 5, he refers to it as *kurin-bu* ('the *bu* which is drawn'). In Chapter 5, line 8, Su-un's children refer to it as *mulhyeong-bu*.

These five references are straightforward in their descriptiveness. Yet the choice of term in another reference in *Ansim-ga* indicates that what is being spoken of is something significantly more complex and life-giving than an ordinary *bujeok*: 'Hanul-Nim said: "Ignorant people! Can an ignorant person find the elixir of immortality on Samsinsan? Write the symbol, burn it in a bowl and drink it with water."²⁵

In regard to the elixir of immortality, Kim Ki-seon relates the legend of an emperor of Ch'in dynasty in China²⁶ who, hearing that the elixir of eternal life was growing at the three locations on Samsinsan (the Three Sacred mountains), dispatched a conjurer by the name of Seo, accompanied by several thousand men, to bring the elixir back. The expedition traveled to the three sacred mountains and ate the wild mountain ginseng growing there. Filled with energy, they chose not to return home but journeyed instead to Japan, where their descendants remained until the outbreak of the Hideyoshi invasion of Korea (1592–98), when they returned to China.²⁷

The implication of the above quotation from Chapter 5 of *Ansim-ga*, however, is that it is not necessary to spend one's time searching for the elixir of immortality in obscure places when it can be obtained without leaving the confines of one's home, namely in the form of the yeongbu. The fact that it is the Lord of Heaven who uses the term 'elixir of immortality' (*pulsayak*) adds weight to the exchange.

²³ *Donggyeong Daejeon* and *Yongdam Yusa*.

²⁴ *PDM*, Ch. 6.

²⁵ *ASG*, Ch. 5, lines 12–15.

²⁶ The legend refers to Emperor Chin Shih-hwang, who reigned 246–206BCE.

²⁷ Kim Ki-seon, *Yongdam Yusa: Chuhae Haeseol* [*Commentary on the Legacy of the Dragon Pool*], Seoul: Donghak Research Institute, 1991, p. 119.

one must bear in mind that a subtle play on words is being utilized here as the drama, cast in the form of *Kasa* verse, escalates as follows.

in the previous chapter of *Ansim-ga*, Su-un's wife, disturbed by the actions of her husband after he entered a dream-like state, asks: 'How can we get medicine to help him on a dark night like this?'²⁸ Little does she know that in a few moments her husband will be in possession of a unique and priceless medicine, the elixir of immortality, so described by none other than the Lord of Heaven. The contrast between her intention and that of the Lord of Heaven highlights the difference between the ways of the humans and the Way of Heaven. This contrast, and the message of hope that it contains, would not have been lost on an audience whose world was under siege both from outside and from within Korea's own borders.

This is the only time in *Yongdam Yusa* that the Lord of Heaven refers to the yeongbu. That the deity chose the term *pulsayak*, which means literally 'medicine of no death', to describe the yeongbu indicates that the donghak symbol is no ordinary, humanly constructed talisman.

Su-un too uses the term *pulsayak*. He does so twice, in *Ansim-ga* (Ch. 5, line 30, and in Ch. 6, line 6). in Chapter 7, line 8 he uses a similar term, *seonyak*, 'medicine of the immortals' or divine medicine.

in *Podeok-mun* (Ch. 6), as has already been noted, the full term *yeongbu* is used.²⁹ it is Sangje who uses it. in the same passage Sangje makes use of the vocable *seonyak* and of the abbreviation *bu*. The yeongbu is referred to twice more in *Podeok-mun*, both times by Su-un, and he uses the *bu* and *seonyak* to describe it.³⁰ in Chapter 8 of *Sudeok-mun*, Su-un uses the term *pulsayak* for the yeongbu.

There is one more reference to the yeongbu: in Chapter 6, line 1 of *Ansim-ga*, where the 'ignorant people of the world' ask Su-un to give them copies of the talisman. A specific term for the Yeongbu is not used, but the meaning is understood from the context. The fact that Su-un did not record these people—who had little regard for the true purpose and meaning of the yeongbu—as actually uttering the word for it in any of its forms perhaps indicates that he wished to preserve its dignity, even in a spoken form, by restricting its use to those who respected the symbol.

of the sixteen references noted above, the Lord of Heaven, represented as both Sangje and Hanul-nim, refers to the yeongbu four times, using a different term each time: *yeongbu*, *pulsayak*, *seonyak* and *bu*. Su-un uses the abbreviation *bu* five times and the descriptive terms *pulsayak* and *seonyak* three times and twice respectively. Su-un's children use the term *bu* once, and the 'ignorant people of the world' refer once to copies of the yeongbu rather than naming (or being allowed to name) the sacred symbol itself.

What can be derived from this analysis is that a hierarchy of use of the terms for the yeongbu is being employed by Su-un in his writings. for example, only

²⁸ *ASG*, Ch. 4, line 7.

²⁹ See the *PDM* account at the beginning of my Ch. 3.

³⁰ *PDM*, Ch. 7.

the Lord of Heaven uses all four terms, and he is recorded in *Podeok-mun* (Ch. 6) as the sole user of the word *yeongbu*. The terms occur interchangeably on most occasions. This is evident from the Lord of Heaven's use of three of them (*Yeongbu*, *seonyak* and *bu*) in the same paragraph.³¹

Su-un's reluctance to use the full term *Yeongbu* or to record anybody other than the Lord of Heaven using it is in keeping with the meaning of the word, as discussed in the initial section of this chapter. namely, it is the Lord of Heaven alone who uses the term *yeong*, meaning 'divine', 'supernatural', 'spiritual'. This restricted use emphasizes the sacredness of the object and its divine origin, two factors which were ignored by a populace in search of an immediate remedy for their ills.

in his usage of three of the terms—*pulsayak*, *seonyak* and *bu*—Su-un employs *bu* most frequently, usually when he is referring to the physical properties of the symbol rather than to its spiritual qualities. In most instances he qualifies the term by the descriptive 'thing-shape' prefix or by physical activity prefixes such as 'drawn' or 'eaten'. When he wishes to emphasize its spiritual, healing properties, he uses the terms *pulsayak* and *seonyak*. These two vocables are very similar. *Pulsayak* is slightly more expressive, in that it indicates directly that the person who consumes this medicine will not experience death, whereas *seonyak*, as pointed out above, more generally refers to the medicine of immortal (mountain) deities.

indicative of the importance of the term *pulsayak* for Su-un is the fact that he chooses to use it in the one passage of *Sudeok-mun* where the shape of the *yeongbu* is being discussed: 'i had the elixir of immortality [*pulsayak*] stored in my bosom. its shapes are gung [☳] and eul [乙].'³² yet there is little to separate the terms *pulsayak* and *seonyak*, as Su-un uses both of them to indicate a spiritual medicine which transforms the individual who consumes it. for example, the following excerpt from *Podeok-mun* indicates the importance of the term *seonyak* for Su-un:

The voice replied:

'no. i have a *yeongbu* [spiritual talisman], sacred medicine [*seonyak*] in the shape of *gung gung*, the great moral principle, the essence of all things in the universe. Take this talisman [*bu*] and deliver humanity from sickness. use my sacred formula and teach humankind for me. you shall live forever and virtue shall be propagated throughout the world.'

i heeded His words.

i wrote down the symbol [*bu*] which was given to me, burned the paper, dissolved the ashes in water and drank the mixture. my body was strengthened and glowed with energy. i realized that this was sacred medicine [*seonyak*].³³

³¹ *PDM*, Ch. 6.

³² *SDM*, Ch. 8.

³³ *PDM*, Chs 6–7.

ultimately, what is important is not which one of the terms, *pulsayak* or *seonyak*, is higher in Su-un's hierarchy of values when he refers to the yeongbu, but rather that he and the Lord of Heaven are exclusive users of both terms.

Su-un's children's use the term *bu* once, accompanied by the prefix *mulhyeong* to indicate its shape, which implies that they are aware only of its physical properties, that is, its shape drawn on paper. As noted, the misguided populace only refers to the yeongbu indirectly and is not permitted use of the term in any of its variations. Su-un may very well have intended this hierarchy of use to indicate an appreciation for the meaning of the yeongbu by not allowing those who had no sense of its profundity to use the term and by recording only the Lord of Heaven, who had full knowledge and appreciation of it, as the only one who uses the term in its entirety.

This selective, hierarchical use of *yeongbu* and its synonyms suggests that Su-un had a deep respect for the symbol and for the power contained in it. This respect, or lack thereof, is also indicated by the descriptions of the yeongbu which occur in his writings. These descriptions offer an insight into what the symbol represented for Su-un and the part it played in the formation of his self-image.

The Characters *gung* and *eul*

The yeongbu is described twice in *Donggyeong Daejeon*, once by the Lord of Heaven and once by Su-un. In *Podeok-mun* the Lord of Heaven describes the shape of the yeongbu as follows: 'I have a yeongbu [spiritual talisman], sacred medicine in the shape of *gung gung*, the great moral principle, the essence of all things in the universe.'³⁴ In *Sudeok-mun* Su-un offers the following description: 'I had the elixir of immortality [*pulsayak*] stored in my bosom. Its shapes are *gung* and *eul*.'³⁵

The Chinese character *gung* [弓] represents a bow, as in bow and arrow; *eul* [乙] means 'second' or the second of the Ten Heavenly Stems—a system utilized in ancient China to calculate time.³⁶

The two characters, *gung* and *eul*, taken separately or in combination, appear to have no intrinsic spiritual or religious meaning, and also to have little connection to the above-mentioned method of calculating time. It can be concluded, therefore, that Su-un chose them for other reasons.

As part from the above quotations from *Podeok-mun* and *Sudeok-mun*, Su-un's only other reference to the character *gung* occurs in a single book. The following quotation from this book, *Dialogue Between the Old and the Young in a Dream*, is a lengthy one; but, as it contains elements which are fundamental to understanding Su-un's reason for using the symbol, it is necessary to consider it in its entirety.

³⁴ *ibid.*, Ch. 6.

³⁵ *SDM*, Ch. 8.

³⁶ C. a. S. Williams, *Chinese Symbolism and Art Motifs*, Rutland, Vermont and Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 3rd rev. edn, 4th printing, 1996, pp. 391 and 104.

The initial chapters of the book refer to Su-un's miraculous birth and to his genius as a child. The following quotation is taken from Chapters 3–5:

3. [...] yet he was concerned about the wicked world. He lamented that rulers did not act like rulers, ministers did not act like ministers, fathers did not act like fathers and sons did not act like sons. Anxious thoughts filled his heart and no one understood him.

So he left his family and business and wandered all over the country. He observed its moral conditions and saw that it was almost impossible to correct the immoral state of the nation. The people's lives lacked meaning, for they had no concern for heaven.

4. Lifting up the mysterious d onguk Jamseo [*Jeonggam-nok*], some say: 'at the time of war with Japan in the years of imjin [1592–98], people were safe under pine trees; at the time of the Kasan uprising at Jeongju [the Hong Kyeong-nae rebellion in 1811], people were safe at home.'

Taking these examples, let us prepare for life.

it was predicted in the I utushu [a Chinese book of prophecy] that the Ch'in dynasty would perish because of the Heo [mongols], and so they built the great wall to protect themselves. yet the nation perished during the reign of the second emperor.

it is said that our fortune is in *gung gung*. Government authorities who sell government positions believe in *gung gung*. Wealthy landowners rich in money and crops believe in *gung gung*. beggars also believe in *gung gung*. Those who act on rumors after wasting their wealth follow *gung gung*. Some enter remote high mountains and others become Christian. yet each one claims and argues every day that he is right and others are wrong.

5. Extinguishing the wishes that lay in my heart, i abandoned my travels through the country and returned home to read many books. i was fourteen and my future lay before me. alas, this world may not become peaceful even with the rule of yo and Sun, the sage kings, or with the virtuous teachings of Confucius and mencius.

on the way i stopped on the peak of the Gungang mountains for a brief rest and fell into a deep sleep. in a dream, a spiritual guide in celestial raiment appeared and instructed me, saying:

'Why are you asleep in this isolated mountain where there are so few people? Why aren't you cultivating yourself and governing your home rather than traveling through the mountains? What meaning is there in looking down on the people of this wicked world, and what value is there in laughing at the pitiful people who seek salvation in *gung gung*?

do not lament the bad times, but look at the world carefully. People may know trees and houses, but how can they know the value of *gung gung*? Heavenly fortune is returning. do not worry. return home and observe the cycle

of destiny. at the end of bad times in this world, a cycle of creation will begin. universal peace and prosperity will be the fortune of the nation. Therefore, do not lament and grieve, but wait patiently. The old era will pass away, a new era will dawn and the ultimate Great Way will appear. you are still young. you will see millions of people singing a song of great peace and joy.

The ultimate Great Way will continue forever! you will know the will of Heaven and the mind of the people. if Hanul-nim wills, even brute-like humans will understand.

i am a daoist immortal.’

‘When shall we meet again?’ i asked.

‘you have a divine destiny. do not forget this. We shall meet again,’ the immortal replied.

i woke up and looked around me but could not see my spirit guide.³⁷

before commenting on the content of this passage, several technical comments need to be made. First, the account changes from third person to first person at the beginning of Chapter 5. This change was necessary in order to allow a transition from passages lauding Su-un’s talents to a personal account of his encounter with the spiritual guide.

Second, Su-un’s age at the time of the encounter is given as fourteen. This age is not in accord with that quoted in Chapter 2 in the section *Su-un’s Years of Wandering*. The references in this section indicate that Su-un did not begin his wanderings until after his father died (when he was sixteen) and after his unsuccessful experience of teaching village children and trying his hand at a number of trades. it was his failure to provide for his family at home that motivated him to take up an itinerant lifestyle.

The age Su-un gives in the above account may be meant to represent a young person seeking his destiny in a troubled world. The image that Su-un presents here is, perhaps, symbolic of a young person on the cusp of maturity, who is concerned about the deteriorating state of the nation and is being led by a heavenly power to accept what destiny has in store for him.

The implicit message of the sage in the *Dialogue Between the Old and the Young in a Dream* passage is that the mysterious concept of *gung gung* is connected to the unfolding of a heavenly fortune, a cycle of divine destiny in which Su-un is inextricably involved. as the character *gung*, together with *eul*, is linked by Su-un to the shape and the meaning of the yeongbu, and by extension to the meaning of Su-un’s mission to his people, it is necessary to examine in depth the symbolic meaning of these two apparently unrelated characters.

in order to appreciate more fully both the meaning of the yeongbu as expressed through these characters and Su-un’s linking of them to ‘sacred medicine’, to ‘the

³⁷ *Mongjung Noso Mundap-ga* [*Dialogue Between the Old and the Young in a Dream*], Chs 3–5.

elixir of immortality' and to the 'Great moral Principle of the universe',³⁸ it is necessary to consider the source from which he borrowed the characters and the reason why he chose them to represent the most fundamental aspect of his religion. The first source is the one mentioned in Chapter 4 of *Dialogue Between the Old and the Young in a Dream*, that is, *dongguk Jamseo [Jeonggam-nok]*.

Jeonggam-nok

James Grayson offers the following description of this enigmatic book of prophecy:

The *Chonggam-nok [Record of Chong Kam]* purports to be a record of a conversation between a man called Chong Kam and Yi Tam, who wrote down the conversation. The book claims to reveal the names of successive dynastic founders and the location of their new capitals following the fall of the Choson kingdom. The Yi family will be followed in turn by the Chong, Cho, Pom, and Wang families on the throne of Korea. Apparently, neither Chong Kam nor Yi Tam are historic personages. In addition, the book also contains purported prophecies of the Silla monk Toson (827–98), the Koryo-Choson monk Muhak and the Choson-period seers T'ojong (Yi Chiham, 1517–78) and Kyogam. Said to date from the 16th cent., there is no firm evidence for its existence prior to 1785 when the first copy was 'discovered'.³⁹

Scholars of new religious movements in Korea such as Choi Joon-sik, Yun Seung-jong and Mun Sang-hi are in agreement that *Jeonggam-nok* is the most influential book of prophecy for new religions in their land. Mun Sang-hi comments that the main theme of *Jeonggam-nok* is faith

in a messianic royal figure, the *Jin-in* (True man);
 in the emergence of a new dynasty with a new capital city;
 in auspicious heavens which assure safety in time of war;
 in South Korea, in which a utopian existence will flourish under a new dynasty.⁴⁰

Choi Joon-sik makes particular reference to ten geomantically auspicious locations, mentioned but not identified in *Jeonggam-nok*, where people would be safe in times of war or epidemics.⁴¹ These would have been havens of considerable

³⁸ *PDM*, Ch. 6; *SDM*, Ch. 8; and *SDM*, Ch. 8 respectively.

³⁹ James H. Grayson, *Korea: A Religious History*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989, pp. 242–3.

⁴⁰ Mun Sang-hi, 'fundamental doctrines of the new religions in Korea', *Korea Journal*, vol. 11, no. 12, 1971, p. 22.

⁴¹ Choi Joon-sik, 'new religions', *Religious Culture in Korea*, Seoul: Jeongmoon Samunhwa Co., 1996, pp. 105–6.

importance to a populace desperately seeking safety and hope in a world on the brink of implosion.

Examination of *Jeonggam-nok*

in what is perhaps a deliberate understatement, mun Sang-hi says of *Jeonggam-nok*: 'it is a hard book to understand.'⁴² *Jeonggam-nok* is written in Chinese script and comprises thirty-four short chapters. Esoteric and cryptic in expression, it makes frequent reference to the five elements recognized in Chinese cosmology and to the twelve animals of the Chinese zodiac, admixed with many stem and branch combinations which denote, often ambiguously, years and days in the Chinese calendar. full of obscure references and arcane symbolism intended to discourage perusal by any but the most committed reader, it was no doubt a difficult book to interpret even in the age in which it was written. To the modern reader, it is in places indecipherable.⁴³

yet, as it appears to hold the key to understanding the meaning of the two symbols, *gung* and *eul*, which lie at the heart of the yeongbu, and as it may have had a formative influence on the image Su-un had of himself as a religious leader, particularly in regard to the *Jin-in* ('True man'), an attempt must be made to decipher its message.

The following extracts from *Jeonggam-nok* have been chosen for their relevance to the present study. The first is taken from the first chapter of *Jeonggam-nok* entitled *Gam Gyeol*.⁴⁴

Chong said, 'if you wish to escape from human society [if disaster occurs], mountains and rivers are not safe, but *yang gung* [both *gungs* or the two *gungs*, i.e. *gung gung*] are the best places to escape to.'

yon asked, 'The ten places of refuge from society are indeed choice land. But how does one find the wide back road to Saejae?'

Chong replied, '[...] these ten places of refuge are far from the fires of war and far from a poor harvest. but if you leave these places, where can you go to live? When Chang organizes the militia for an uprising in Gyeongyeom,⁴⁵ people with sense will go to the ten places of refuge. but the people who go to

⁴² mun Sang-hi, 'fundamental doctrines' (above, n. 40), p. 22.

⁴³ i gratefully acknowledge assistance received from ms Choi Hui-suk and ms Park yeong-suk in interpreting the language of *Jeonggam-nok*.

⁴⁴ a book on the occult written by a person named Gam. literal meaning: Gam's Secrets. The quotation is taken from Jeong d a-un, *Jeonggam-nok Wonbon Haeseol* [Commentary on the Original Book of Jeonggam], Seoul: mil il, 1986. This book presents the full text of *Jeonggam-nok* in Chinese characters, a translation into Korean and a commentary by Jeong d a-un.

⁴⁵ Jeong d a-un, *Jeonggam-nok Wonbon Haeseol* (above, n. 44), p. 28 comments that Gyeongyeom (庚 (*gyeong*) the seventh of the ten heavenly stems; and 炎 (*yeom*), 'flame,

the places of refuge first will be the first to return. The people who live there in the middle time will be saved. but the people who go later will die.’⁴⁶

This quotation, even in its obscurity, establishes the importance of the ten places of refuge and links them to the character *gung*. The following information is taken from a chapter of *Jeonggam-nok* entitled ‘d oseon Pikyeol’ [‘d oseon’s Secrets’]. Unlike the section quoted above, ‘d oseon Pikyeol’ is not a recorded conversation, but rather relates the prophecies of a person named d oseon. In an introduction to the chapter, the commentator, Jong d a-un, states that d oseon, a folk religion luminary, helped Wanggeon to establish the Goryeo dynasty (CE 918–1392). d oseon predicted that, in 400 years, the capital of the nation would be moved to Hanyang (Seoul), and consequently he constructed a buddhist temple called d oseon-sa at the foot of Samgak mountain.⁴⁷

The yi (Joseon) dynasty would then last for 500 years, and would be replaced by a dynasty founded by a man named Jeong. Jeong’s dynasty would flourish for 800 years and its capital would be located in the Gaeryeong mountains. During this time, the Buddhist temple of Doseon-sa would flourish.⁴⁸

In ‘d oseon Pikyeol’, d oseon predicted the manchu invasion of 1636. At this time, he stated, it would be no use fleeing to mountains or rivers. The only safe place would be *gung gung*.⁴⁹ In the chapter ‘Samdo Pong-si’⁵⁰ the language of the book becomes even more obscure, particularly in relation to the location of the safe havens: ‘if you wish to know the location of *eul eul gung gung*, it is on the outskirts of a metal bird and a wooden rabbit.’⁵¹

spark, inflammation’) is a symbolic reference to a place which is as hot as a flame at midday on the hottest day of summer.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 26–8.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p. 73.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 74–5.

⁵⁰ ‘Samdo Pong’s Poem’. According to this chapter in *Jeonggam-nok*, Samdo Pong is the pen-name of a person who contributed significantly to the foundation of the Yi dynasty.

⁵¹ *ibid.*, p. 130. This sentence may refer to a measurement of time as well as to a location. Jeong d a-un comments that, if we interpret 金鳩 (*geumgu*): metal pigeon as 金鷄 (*geumkye*): metal cock, the reference is to 辛酉年 (*sinyu-nyeon*), the 58th year of the sexagenary cycle (p. 130). Williams, *Chinese Symbolism* (above, n. 36), p. 106 confirms that the element of this year is metal and its animal sign is the cock. Jeong d a-un continues that *mokto* (‘wooden’) hare refers to 乙卯年 (*ulmyo-nyeon*), the 52nd year of the sexagenary cycle. Williams states that the element of this year is wood and its animal sign is the hare. Thus the metal pigeon/cock reference may signify 1741/1801/1861 etc., and the wooden hare, 1735/1795/1855 etc. The author may be referring to a year in between that of the metal cock and that of the wooden hare.

in the chapter ‘Tocheogga Changkyeol’⁵² the language of the book becomes more urgent and apocalyptic. The text refers to mountains collapsing, stars dropping from the heavens, the spread of malevolent energy, the appearance of white rainbows as the sun and moon lose their brightness, wars erupting and natural disasters occurring on an unprecedented scale, epidemics breaking out, people descending into misery and dying of starvation, human bodies blocking rivers and streams. Then a note of hope is woven into the narrative. young master Jeong leads a body of troops, which is a sign that good fortune is on the increase. This note of hope is followed by the following—cryptic yet crucial—words of advice:

Without fail, listen to and bear in mind this record [of events]. according to an omen, there are three mysterious characters in the fortune of *mr y i*. ‘Song’ (松) is beneficial against Japanese enemies; ‘Ka’ (家) against the barbarians; ‘Jeon’ (田) against a poor harvest.⁵³ The poor harvest means arms and weapons, and arms and weapons mean a poor harvest.⁵⁴ *Gung gung* is beneficial to the military *gung* at this time, but is of little benefit to the earth *gung*.

according to the classical texts, due to nine years of bad harvest, seeds of grain should be obtained in Sampung and, consequent on twelve years of war, human seed can be obtained in yangbaek. This refers to the person Jeong.

Care should be taken regarding where to go. *f* or people seek the ten places of refuge, but you may face difficulties earlier or later, so if you go to these places lacking in the proper knowledge, you may confront unexpected misfortune. *y* ou must be very careful. *a t* that time *gung gung* will be beneficial. *Gung gung* means *Nakban Kosayu* (落盤孤四乳).⁵⁵

In the final sentence, *Nakban Kosayu*, which translates literally as ‘fall/dish/orphans/four/breast-milk’, can be interpreted to mean that *gung gung* is essential sustenance for poor, displaced people (‘orphans’) at a time when society is collapsing. finally, in reference to the transition that would occur at the end of the time of upheaval, this same chapter of *Jeonggam-nok* relates: ‘in the high heavens the tip of a sword grazes the wind. The heavens opened in Gumpo and this is the young master Jeong. The earth opens at Hwa mountain and *mr y i* is dismissed and destroyed.’⁵⁶

The above excerpts from *Jeonggam-nok* were chosen because they refer to three themes central to Su-un’s writings, and in particularly to the *y*eongbu: *gung*

⁵² Tocheong’s ‘Household Secrets’ The commentator Jeong d a-un describes Tocheong as a brilliant devotee of astrology, divination and philosophy: *Jeonggam-nok Wonbon Haeseol* (above, n. 44) p. 171.

⁵³ These characters represent ‘pine tree’, ‘house’ and ‘field’ respectively.

⁵⁴ i.e., poor harvests will be compounded by war.

⁵⁵ Jeong d a-un, *Jeonggam-nok Wonbon Haeseol* (above, n. 44), pp. 181–3.

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 189–90.

gung eul eul, ten places of refuge, and the fall of the y i dynasty and its replacement by the Jeong dynasty.

Conclusions from the Examination of Jeonggam-nok

The following conclusions can be drawn from the passages quoted above:

- a 'm r y i' represents the y i (Joseon) dynasty. This is particularly evident in the last passage quoted regarding the transfer of power from one dynasty to the next.
- b The term *gung* has various meanings in *Jeonggam-nok*. it is used in conjunction with military power—that is, 'military *gung*' as opposed to 'earth *gung*', the latter probably representing specific physical locations. in this sense, during the period referred to in the 'Tocheogga Changkyeol' chapter of *Jeonggam-nok*, *gung gung* appears to represent characters which exercise mysterious powers, as do the previously mentioned characters *ka*, *song* and *jeon* for the y i dynasty. How power is exercised through these characters is not explained in the text.

Gung also represents some form of sustenance in the *Tocheogga Changkyeol* chapter. f or example, the term *gung* is used in relation to breast milk. yet its primary usage links it to the ten places of refuge, as can be seen in all the passages quoted above, with the exception of the short final reference.

The sentence 'a t that time *gung gung* will be beneficial' (in the final paragraph of the second last quotation) indicates that *gung gung* has another meaning: the characters will enhance the people's knowledge of secret locations. This information is vital because, as is pointed out in the same paragraph, without proper knowledge difficulties may arise. Also, as the final sentence in the quotation from the 'Gam Gyeol' chapter explains, not all the people who go to the secret locations will be saved. o nly those who go there in the middle time will survive. Those who go early will return and those who go late will die. Knowledge, not only of how to find the locations but also of the auspicious time to go there, is vital. The key to this knowledge is *gung gung*. a gain, the text does not explain why.

- c o f the two characters, *gung* and *eul*, *gung*, through frequency of use, appears to be the dominant one. The relationship between these characters and the reason for their efficacy at a particular time do not emerge clearly from the text.
- d a s has been remarked in note 51, the location of *eul eul gung gung* is possibly linked to a period when presence in the ten heavens will be necessary for survival. a lthough other references to time in the quotations are reasonably specific—the twelfth month of Kapo, Ulmi, and so on—when reference is made to *gung* and *eul*, the text seems to be made deliberately obscure in regard to place and time: for example interpreting the references to metal

bird/cock and wooden hare in the chapters ‘Samdo Pongsi’ and *Nakban Kosayu* in ‘Tocheogga Changkyeol’ is at best a speculative exercise, as one can only guess at their meaning, which one can surmise is the exact intention of the author of *Jeonggam-nok*.

- e There is an obvious similarity between the description of the apocalyptic events in *Jeonggam-nok* and the events which took place during Su-un’s lifetime. Naturally, given the symbolic and esoteric language employed by the author of *Jeonggam-nok*, a direct correlation is impossible to establish. Yet, to a population trying to survive floods, epidemics, starvation brought on by failing crops and exacerbated by systemic corruption at every level of government, local rebellions and the increasing threat from colonizing powers, the events described in *Jeonggam-nok* would have seemed very familiar. It is little wonder that the book enjoyed such widespread popularity in Su-un’s time, or that he looked to it when he was searching for symbols which would immediately attract and hold the attention of the common people. As expounded in the passage from *Mongjung Noso Mundap-ga* previously quoted, people from all walks of life were looking for the meaning of *gung gung* and for the ten secret places of refuge.
- f After all the signs, portents, turmoil and disturbances, the ushering in of the new dynasty occurred with little drama, as is evidenced by the last passage quoted. All it took, in the symbolic language of *Jeonggam-nok*, was for the tip of a sword to graze heaven—and the old dynasty was swept away. A new one, full of promise, then arose under Jeong, who set up his capital at Mt Gaeryeong.
- g Young master Jeong appears in the book as the procreator of the new dynasty, both literally and figuratively. According to the latter part of the passage from ‘Tocheogga Changkyeol’,⁵⁷ after twelve years of warfare and the loss of many soldiers, Jeong supplies his own human seed in order to populate the new dynasty, in much the same way as, after nine years of poor harvest, seeds of grain are needed to replenish the nation’s granaries. This use of metaphorical language may well indicate that Jeong is to be considered the father figure and progenitor of the new dynasty, with sufficient power and potency to restore the depleted stocks of his nation’s population and to create something which will endure for 800 years.

Su-un’s Divine Destiny

Although Su-un mentions *Jeonggam-nok* in his writings, he does not refer directly to the person who would usher in this new era, the young master Jeong. Yet passages referring to him are relevant to this study, as he is a figure who inspired hope in an oppressed people in much the same way as Su-un sought to do, and

⁵⁷ ‘[a]nd consequent on twelve years of war, human seed can be obtained in Yangbaek. This refers to the person Jeong.’: *ibid.*, pp. 182–3.

the possibility must be considered that Su-un, in some way, modeled himself on Jeong.

mun Sang-hi states that Su-un's followers made this connection: 'The Chondogyo re-interpreted the young lord *Chong* [鄭] as *chong* [正].'⁵⁸ In other words, mun is of the opinion that Su-un's followers interpreted the syllable *Jeong* not as a family name (鄭), but rather as a homophonous adjective represented by the Chinese character 正, which means 'upright, true, right, whole', thus linking the messianic figure mentioned above with the characteristics expected of him. Su-un, by implication, is the upright and true figure, the *Jin-in* ('True man'), who is the central focus of *Jeonggam-nok*. This deft substitution by Su-un's followers clearly indicates how they viewed the founder of their religion and the messianic role he was to play in this crucial period of Korea's history. The following quotation from *Yongdam-ga*, the first book of Su-un's scriptures, indicates that Su-un shared this view of his status as an upright figure, one who had received a heavenly mandate to lead his people into a new era, in the same fashion as the *Jin-in* of *Jeonggam-nok*.

Hanul-Nim said: 'You are the first one in fifty thousand years of creation. I could not find the right person in that time though I tried. I have succeeded now in finding you. I have succeeded, and so have you. Your family is very fortunate.' Upon hearing these words my heart was full of joy and contentment. How could people know that this boundless fortune would be mine? A dmirable, admirable is my future. I cultivated the Infinite Great Way in the beautiful Gumi Mountain and its rivers. This is a boon that is available only once in fifty thousand years.⁵⁹

by his own reckoning, Su-un unites in his person both heavenly and human aspirations. This role is affirmed by the spirit guide in his final words to Su-un: 'you have a divine destiny.'⁶⁰ Su-un's spirit guide does not explain the nature of this destiny. nor does he explain the meaning of *gung gung* to Su-un; but, by implication, this must have to do with the heavenly fortune which is about to return. and the keys to understanding this heavenly fortune are the symbols *gung eul*, which form the shape of the mystical talisman, the yeongbu.

The Shape and Meaning of the Yeongbu

As has been noted in Chapter 3,⁶¹ Su-un's initial experience of disseminating the yeongbu was not a positive one. The people's attitude to it as a 'magical' medicine which served a utilitarian purpose was in stark contrast to Su-un's belief that it

⁵⁸ mun Sang-hi., 'fundamental doctrines' (above, n. 40), p. 22.

⁵⁹ *YDG*, Ch. 3, lines 6–9 and Ch. 4, lines 4–5.

⁶⁰ *MJNSMDG*, Ch. 5.

⁶¹ *Record of Su-un's Ecstatic Encounter in Podeok-mun: Application of the Yeongbu*.

was a ‘sacred’ medicine, to be both respected and revered.⁶² His reverence for it is such that he does not permit the ‘ignorant people of the world’ to utter the word *Yeongbu* or to use any of its synonyms.⁶³

yet Su-un himself is partly at fault for this misconception, as he distributed the *yeongbu* liberally among the people, as a panacea for both their physical and spiritual ailments. Seeing that it worked for some and not for others, Su-un was struck with an important insight: ‘i realized that the faithful who followed Cheonju were healed, but the disobedient were not. Therefore, cure depends on the sincerity and faith of the recipient.’⁶⁴ This realization that healing depended on the faith of the recipient appears to have provided an incentive for Su-un to re-evaluate the meaning of the *yeongbu*. on the basis of his experience of distributing it on demand, he came to the conclusion that the *Yeongbu* was not a quick fix for people’s illness, no matter how much compassion he showed towards them or how much he yearned to relieve them of their distress. Su-un no doubt reflected on his own experience during this time of discernment; specifically, he may have reflected that it took the consumption of hundreds and hundreds of *Yeongbu* over a period of seven or eight months for his own body to become healthy and for his face to shine.⁶⁵

Seeing the alteration in Su-un’s physical appearance, it is little wonder that people wanted to discover the cause and to imitate him. The lesson that Su-un learned, both from those who were healed and from those who were not, was that sincerity and faith played a central role in the transformation and healing of an individual. yet something more was required of Su-un’s followers if the *Yeongbu* was to be efficacious in their lives: a skill acquired through constant practice. ‘The skill i received from Hanul-n im will cure all diseases. my success depends on Hanul-n im. n o one has anything that surpasses my mysterious d ivine medicine.’⁶⁶

This skill was not to be mastered quickly. Su-un’s writings contain a number of admonitions to his followers to be patient and persevere in learning the Way. o ne of his shorter essays in *Donggyeong Daejeon* is entitled ‘Tando y usim Keup’ [‘d o n ot Hurry the Way’], and this theme is repeated in *Dosu-sa*, in the ‘Song of Cultivating the Way’ in *Yongdam Yusa*.

To achieve virtue through spiritual training in ten years is considered a rapid accomplishment, but it is possible for anyone to realize the Infinite Great Way in three years if you study correctly. you seem impatient and, without proper training, you expect to realize the Heavenly mandate. There is a saying from ancient times that achieving sudden wealth and honor is harmful. you know that

⁶² *ASG*, Ch. 6, lines 1–11 and *PDM*, Ch. 7.

⁶³ *ASG*, Ch. 6, line 1.

⁶⁴ *PDM*, Ch. 7.

⁶⁵ *ASG*, Ch. 5, line 20.

⁶⁶ *ibid.*, Ch. 7, line 5.

a person must cultivate and study our Way and await fortune from Heaven. Why are you so impatient?⁶⁷

According to the dating procedures outlined in Chapter 1 in relation to the chronological sequence of texts, *Dosu-sa* was written in the year following the composition of *Ansim-ga*, around the time *Podeok-mun* was written. This shows a development in Su-un's thought regarding the time required to realize the heavenly Way and, by association, to understand and utilize its two central symbols, the yeongbu and the Jumun.

In summary, Su-un's attitude to the yeongbu underwent a fundamental change in the crucial period between his applying it to the sick around him as a remedy and his realization that faith, sincerity, patience and proper training were necessary for mastering the skill to use it with a full appreciation of its meaning and its potency. Simply put, it appears that in Su-un's mind the yeongbu underwent a transformation too: from being a thing or a physical entity to becoming an action, a skill to be mastered with patience, faith and sincerity.

The Way of the Brush Stroke (1)

As mentioned above, Su-un's disillusionment with people's attitude to the yeongbu and of his subsequent adaptation of it from an object to a process. Nowhere is this transition better exemplified than in his poem *Pilbeop* [*The Way of the Brush Stroke*], which relates to the method of drawing the yeongbu.

Kim Ki-seon dates the composition of this poem to the spring of 1863,⁶⁸ which means that it was written approximately two years after Su-un's account in *Ansim-ga* of his negative experience of distributing the yeongbu. In this interval, Su-un no doubt grappled with the problem of how to lead his followers to appreciate and appropriately utilize this gift, which he had received from the Lord of Heaven. Because of his disillusionment with its reception by a needy yet impatient populace, he came to the conclusion that giving the yeongbu as a gift to the sick around him merely served to emphasize its magical properties at the expense of its proper meaning and purpose. What was required was a pedagogical practice which not only served to instruct, but also captured the essence, mystery and sacredness of the symbol. Su-un accomplished this by reflecting on his own experience following his encounter with the Lord of Heaven on Mt Gumi and decided that, in order to appreciate fully the meaning and purpose of the yeongbu, his followers needed to follow his example and spend time mastering the technique of drawing it. After all, Su-un records that he himself spent the year following his encounter with the Lord of Heaven concentrating on his own spiritual development:

⁶⁷ *DSS*, Ch. 4, lines 1–7.

⁶⁸ Kim Ki-seon, *Hangul Donggyeong Daejeon* [*The Great Collection of Eastern Scriptures* (Korean version)], Seoul: Donghak Research Institute, 1991, p. 293. Kim immediately identifies *Pilbeop* with the drawing of the yeongbu.

originally i did not think of teaching others but rather concentrated on my own spiritual training. i delayed preaching until the sixth month, the summer of 1861, when my friends came and filled the room and I established a method for spiritual training. Scholars came and inquired about the Way and asked me to teach it to the world.⁶⁹

The emphasis here on the necessity of an extended period of spiritual training relating to the yeongbu and to the Jumun may well have been the basis for his didactic poem on the method of drawing the yeongbu and on the position the latter occupied in the spiritual cultivation of the donghak Way.

The Way of the Brush Stroke

Practicing self-cultivation
is like learning to use the brush.
you achieve this
by focusing the mind/heart.
Korea is the symbol Wood in the five elements,
on three occasions our nation was almost destroyed,
but ultimately endured.
as i was born and awakened to the Way in my native land
i consider Korea and the East of primary importance.
The people of the world are not the same,
yet we treat all equally.
With heart at peace and spirit refined
begin to move the brush.
All truths are revealed in the first stroke.
Place the tip softly on the page
and concentrate on drawing.
make the ink yourself by rubbing an ink stick.
draw a little at a time.
Select fine paper to write on.
Write large or small,
There is a difference between great and small in the Way.
begin with dignity and care.
draw an image as lofty as the mightiest mountain
piled high, rock upon rock.⁷⁰

in this poem, the practice of calligraphy is both a metaphor for, and a method of, self-cultivation. as with practicing the art of calligraphy, concentration is necessary if one is to realize the Way. in this poem, Su-un relinquishes the concept

⁶⁹ *SDM*, Ch. 7.

⁷⁰ *Pilbeop*, in *DGDJ*, *CGGJ*, pp. 110–11.

of the yeongbu as a thing or a gift and emphasizes that it is a process which must be learned and perfected.

Su-un comments in this poem on the egalitarian nature of the donghak Way. Such a comment may initially seem out of place here, but it makes sense in a context in which the practice and discipline of drawing the yeongbu is a skill which anyone can master. Unlike the arcane practices of neo-Confucian rituals accessible only to select cognoscenti, access to this central symbol of the donghak religion was open to all, and all who practiced the technique were considered equal. (The consequences of this teaching and practice will come under further scrutiny when the nature of the yeongbu is examined.)

In giving instructions for the physical and mental preparation necessary for drawing the yeongbu, Su-un does not advise his followers to draw a particular shape, for example the characters *gung* and *eul*. Rather, he focuses entirely on calligraphic technique. He advises his followers ‘with heart at peace and spirit refined’ to ‘place the tip softly on the page and concentrate on drawing’; in other words, allow the drawing to be an extension and expression of a calm and concentrated heart and mind. After beginning ‘with dignity and care’, the follower is encouraged to

draw an image as lofty as the mightiest mountain
piled high, rock upon rock.⁷¹

The image which Su-un offers here suggests a lengthy and laborious process; he likens the practice of mastering the drawing of the yeongbu to constructing a mountain by piling one rock on top of another: an onerous task indeed. Yet Su-un’s admonition may not be what it appears at first reading.

‘Piled high, rock upon rock’

On a field trip to the Gyeongju area conducted on 3–4 July 1999, I visited the Mt Gumi–yongdam area where Su-un experienced his encounter with the Lord of Heaven. On this trip, as on many of the other trips I had made to the mountains of Korea, I noticed a phenomenon which, on this occasion, took on special significance because of the poem *Pilbeop*. This phenomenon was the practice, often in the general location of a buddhist temple, of people making ‘miniature mountains’ by piling stones one on top of another, in a rough imitation of the mountains that towered above them.

My guide at the time was Choe Chong-pyo, principal of a secondary school, local historian and a descendant of Choe Haewol, the second leader of donghak. As we scaled the mountain peak on our way to observe the seated buddha of Golguram, I inquired of him the meaning of this practice evident all around us, as it appeared to reflect the image which Su-un used when instructing his followers to draw the yeongbu. Principal Choe replied that it was a practice through which

⁷¹ *ibid.*, p. 111.

the faithful petitioned Sakyamuni, the buddha, by placing a single rock on top of a pile of rocks and offering a silent prayer in the process. The resultant pile of stones represented the *stupa*, or reliquary stone pagoda found in a temple's courtyard, which contained the cremated remains of a famous monk or of a valued buddhist sutra (teaching).

in an attempt to understand more fully the imagery that the piling of stones represents, i sought further explanations of the practice on my return from the field trip, as I knew the practice was widespread throughout Korea and beyond, for example in Tibet.

The Korean scholar of religion yun Seung-yong added more information relating to the rock piles. in an article in *Religious Culture in Korea*, yun refers to 'pebble piles' representing village deities. The piles are usually found in close proximity to the entrance to a village and are often located next to a divine tree, in a place referred to as *seonangdang* (an altar for a tutelary deity).⁷² This indicates a practice more complex and widespread than that suggested by Principal Choe.

The best documented and quite possibly the leading example of the stone monuments in Korea, while primarily buddhist in nature, represents a complex mixture of philosophies and beliefs. it is found in what the novelist Kim Joo-yong refers to as 'The Stone Pagodas of Horse Ear mountain'.⁷³

Edward r . Canda gives the following explanation of the 'stone pagodas', the person who created them and the mountain spirit who inspired him to do so:

Yi Kap-lyong ... was a Buddhist monk for five years when *san sin* appeared to him in a dream ... The largest task which the mountain spirit set for hermit yi was to construct towers of piled stones as an act of compassion for the benefit of suffering humanity. yi positioned one large rock each day after long prayer and meditation. The towers range in height from several feet to approximately fifty feet. The hermit labored at least ten years to complete his task,⁷⁴ residing at ma-i mountain until his death in 1957. a statue of hermit yi sits sage-like amidst these towers; yi is honored with constant offerings there.⁷⁵

yi Kap-lyong was born in 1860 and was only three years old when Su-un wrote *Pilbeop*. Therefore his 'stone pagoda' constructions could not have influenced Su-un's thinking. yet, given that they imitate the shapes of similar rock formations

⁷² yun Seung-yong, 'folk beliefs', in *Religious Culture in Korea*, Seoul: Jeong moon Sa munhwa Co. l td., 1996, pp. 124-5.

⁷³ Kim, Joo-yong, 'The Stone Pagodas of Horse Ear mountain', *Koreana*, vol. 8, no. 4, 1994, pp. 38-43.

⁷⁴ Kim Joo-yong states that yi began to erect the stone pagodas in 1884 and continued until 1914. The scale and number of the monuments, and the fact that yi was reputed to position only one large rock a day, would lend more credence to Kim's time frame.

⁷⁵ Edward r . Canda, 'The Korean mountain Spirit', *Korea Journal*, vol. 20, no. 9, 1980, p. 15. ma-i mountain = Horse-ear mountain.

around the country, both in village *seonangdang* and beside every mountain trail, Canda's explanation of why monk *y i* constructed them may offer an insight into why Su-un used the image of 'piled high, rock upon rock' when describing how to draw the *yeongbu*.

What Su-un's *yeongbu*, *y i*'s stone pagodas, the pebble piles representing village deities and the miniature prayer mountains located near Buddhist temples have in common is that they each represent an attempt to communicate with a higher-than-human source of power. Su-un's *yeongbu* and *y i*'s stone pagodas share a further common element: prayerful discipline.

y i's pagodas are a visible sign representing his and the mountain spirit's compassion for suffering humanity. Su-un shared the same compassion, as is apparent from his change of name. Yet his solution to the problem of suffering was distinctly different from *y i*'s. Despite an abundance of imagery presented in *Pilbeop*, Su-un does not specifically elaborate on the nature of the *yeongbu* in the poem. Furthermore, in contrast to *y i* Kap-lyong's stone pagodas, no *yeongbu* which Su-un drew remains as a visible testament to his concentrated, prayerful efforts.⁷⁶ In the poem there is just one cryptic statement which sums up the purpose of the calligraphic exercise, namely: 'All truths are revealed in the first stroke.'⁷⁷

Realizing truth rather than creating a physically enduring article is the aim of the exercise, and it appears that one must practice the drawing of the *yeongbu* according to the generalized directions offered in the poem for a considerable length of time in order to achieve this aim.⁷⁸

Pilbeop is concerned with praxis, not with philosophical reflection, which indicates that the act of drawing is of itself more important than what is being produced. The purpose, therefore, of this concentrated, meditative act of drawing, this Seon (Zen) Buddhist practice of mindfulness which Su-un adopted and adapted, is to become aware of all truth in the single stroke of a pen. What does this mean exactly? Or, more specifically, what did it mean for Su-un? The following section addresses these questions.

⁷⁶ The single extant work attributed to Su-un is an ink-brush calligraphic representation of the Chinese character for 'turtle'. The turtle is a symbol both for long life and for the universe, representing heaven (the top shell), living beings (the turtle) and earth (the bottom, supporting shell). This framed piece of calligraphy hangs on the wall of the yongdam Pavilion on Mt Gumi, alongside a portrait of Su-un, at the site at which Su-un experienced his ecstatic encounter with the Lord of Heaven. Some consider it to be Su-un's symbolic signature, as the name of the mountain on which he experienced his epiphany, Mt Gumi, means 'turtle-tail mountain'.

⁷⁷ *Pilbeop*, in *DGDJ*, *CGGJ*, p. 111.

⁷⁸ Su-un's short poem 座箴 (*Jwa-jam: Counsel* [in *DGDJ*]) emphasizes that: 'a waking to the Way takes time'. The title of another *DGDJ* text, *Tando Yusim Keup* (*Do Not Hurry the Way*), expresses a similar sentiment.

The Meaning of the Yeongbu (I)

As noted, there are two descriptions of the yeongbu in Su-un's writings. One is by Su-un himself: 'I had the elixir of immortality [*pulsayak*] stored in my bosom. Its shapes are *gung* and *eul*.'⁷⁹ and the other is by the Lord of Heaven: 'I have a yeongbu, sacred medicine in the shape of *gung gung*, the great moral principle [Taeguk], the essence of all things in the universe. Take this talisman and deliver humanity from sickness.'⁸⁰

As noted, the characters *gung* and *eul* have no intrinsic spiritual or religious meaning by themselves. The evidence presented indicates that Su-un borrowed these terms from *Jeonggam-nok*, where they (particularly *gung*) are used to represent ten geomantically auspicious locations, where people could take refuge in time of social upheaval and war.

In his encounter with the mysterious monk described in Chapter 5 of the *Dialogue Between the Old and the Young in a Dream*, Su-un is presented with the question: 'People may know trees and houses, but how can they know the value of *gung gung*?' This is undoubtedly a question to which Su-un gave considerable thought and which he sought to answer, and he did so in a radical, religiously innovative way, as is evidenced by the above quotations from *Sudeok-mun* and *Podeok-mun*. At this point in Su-un's thinking a crucial transition takes place. For it is in *Podeok-mun* (Ch. 6) that a link is made between the characters *gung gung* and Taeguk, the original principle of being, the ultimate Great Way of the universe. And it is in *Sudeok-mun* (Ch. 8) that Su-un places the characters *gung* and *eul*, which he identifies as the elixir of immortality, within his bosom.

What Su-un does in these passages is to take the two mysterious symbols, which were at the forefront of people's thinking and imagination as they sought security and peace in a volatile world, and transform them from secret physical locations and forms of physical sustenance into religious symbols equated with the most enduring and powerful force in the universe. He then relocated these symbols, storing them in the human bosom.⁸¹

⁷⁹ *SDM*, Ch. 8.

⁸⁰ *PDM*, Ch. 6.

⁸¹ The Chinese characters which Su-un uses are 胸 ('bosom') and 藏 ('store'). The Cheondo-gyo organization translates the character 胸 in the *SDM* passage (*CGGJ*, p. 50) as 가슴 *kaseum*, meaning 'breast, bosom' (*Dong-A's New Concise Korean-English Dictionary*, p. 26). (Kim Ki-seon uses the same translation in *Hangul Donggyeong Daejeon* (above, n. 68), p. 139.) The same dictionary equates 가슴 with 마음 (*Maeum*: 'the heart; the bosom; the mind') in defining the term and in the numerous examples it gives to explain it (p. 26). There is therefore a very close relationship in Korean, to the point of identification, between the terms 'bosom' and 'heart'. As will be examined in the following chapter, Su-un made the further step of equating the 'great moral principle, the essence of all things in the universe', with the Lord of Heaven in the phrase *si Cheonju* ('bearing the Lord of Heaven').

What Su-un effected here is more than the relocation of *Jeonggam-nok*'s safe physical havens within the human person. In identifying humans as the locus where Taeguk dwells (which is therefore a guarantee of ultimate safety), he elevated the status of human beings, in particular of powerless and disenfranchised human beings like himself, to a new 'heavenly' or 'godlike' level of existence. In a strictly neo-Confucian hierarchical, patriarchal and status-oriented society, under threat from inside and outside forces it had little power to contain, this innovation could not be, and was not, regarded in a kindly light.

In its most pure form, the egalitarian message of hope for the dispirited populace which Su-un proclaimed is contained in the phrase spoken to him by the Lord of Heaven: 'my heart is your heart.'⁸² Considering the relationship, close to the point of identification, between bosom and heart, the relationship referred to in the above quotation parallels what is said in *Sudeok-mun* (Ch. 8): 'I had the elixir of immortality *pulsayak* stored in my bosom. Its shapes are *gung* and *eul*.' This in turn is closely related to the passage in *Nonhak-mun*: 'I have a yeongbu, sacred medicine in the shape of *gung gung*, the great moral principle [Taeguk], the essence of all things in the universe.'⁸³

There is a convergence of several powerful images in these passages: the shape of the yeongbu (*gung* and *eul*: *gung gung*), heart/bosom, sacred medicine, the great moral principle and the elixir of immortality. What is the relationship between these images? and what, if anything, does the development of an intimate relationship between Su-un and the Heavenly Lord mentioned in *Nonhak-mun* Chapter 6 have to do with the shape of the yeongbu referred to in the other two passages?

The answers to these questions lie in two texts, one of which Su-un composed, which has already been subject to examination; the other is from a radically different source.

The Way of the Brush Stroke (2)

In reflecting on the meaning of the Yeongbu, that is, on its identification with the human heart—the locus where the Lord of Heaven and humans are united—the purpose of drawing the yeongbu becomes clear. This exercise is not designed to achieve unity with the Lord of Heaven. This is obvious when the complete sentence containing the words 'my heart is your heart' is considered; for the Lord of Heaven follows these words with the question: 'yet how could humankind know this?'⁸⁴ What the Lord of Heaven refers to here is not something yet to be achieved, but rather something which is already a reality, albeit an unknown one: namely that the Lord of Heaven's heart and Su-un's heart were one *before* Su-un 'meditated on

⁸² *NHM*, Ch. 6.

⁸³ *PDM*, Ch. 6.

⁸⁴ *NHM*, Ch. 6.

these words for a year and realized the natural principle'.⁸⁵ The implication is that the unity between Heaven and humanity in the human heart is an essential part of the human condition. yet all but Su-un are unaware of this fact.

in light of this, the ultimate purpose of the meditative exercise of drawing the yeongbu becomes clear. it is to bring to consciousness the unity of Heaven and humanity—a rock-by-rock meditative exercise in which, through constant repetition and refinement of the spirit, believers come to an increasingly greater awareness of the indwelling of the Lord of Heaven in their hearts. This repetition and refinement is the *jeju*: the skill, referred to in Chapter 3. in other words, a person practises the Way of the brush stroke not in order to achieve union with the Lord of Heaven, but in order to become aware of it, in other words illuminated to the reality of '*O-sim cheuk yeo-sim*: my heart is your heart'. This is the truth which is revealed with the first stroke of the pen for those who are totally committed to, and practised in, the donghak Way.

The practice instituted by Su-un, of burning the mystical talisman, dissolving it in water and drinking the mixture, has sacramental overtones. That is, the meditative drawing and consumption of the yeongbu is a visible sign and celebration of the intimate union between the Lord of Heaven and the practitioner, the effect of which invigorates both body and spirit. 'i wrote down the symbol [*bu*] which was given to me, burned the paper, dissolved the ashes in water and drank the mixture. my body was strengthened and glowed with energy. i realized that this was sacred medicine [*seonyak*].'⁸⁶ The further implication is that, following the realization of the mystical union, all artificial human structures and practices based on status, gender and age are no longer considered valid or relevant. The *O-sim cheuk yeo-sim* phrase serves as the foundation of the donghak egalitarian creed, an egalitarianism which is not restricted to humans but extends to the heavenly Lord and to all creation.

The principle of *O-sim cheuk yeo-sim*, put into practice in the yeongbu ritual, becomes, then, a catalyst for change and a stimulus for a grass-roots rejection of the status quo.⁸⁷ although this was a consequence rather than the purpose of the *Pilbeop* exercise, Su-un could not have been unaware of the implications of this rejection, for himself and for his followers.

⁸⁵ *ibid.*, Ch. 7.

⁸⁶ *PDM*, Ch. 7.

⁸⁷ Su-un did not merely proclaim the ideology of *O-sim cheuk yeo-sim* but put it into practice. His family at the time had two female servants. Su-un burned their legal documents, took one as his daughter-in-law and adopted the other (Kim Ki-seon, *Hangul Donggyeong Daejeon* (above, n. 68), pp. 60–61).

*The Shape of the Yeongbu (1)*⁸⁸

as noted in Chapter 1, all of Su-un's writings were burned following his execution. Consequently, no originals of the yeongbu drawn by Su-un are in existence today and no memory of its shape is thought to have survived. The successor to Su-un, Choe Haewol, comments that the shape of the yeongbu is that of the human heart, and also of all creation, and that 'gung is the Heavenly gung and eul is the Heavenly eul'.⁸⁹ However, these comments relate primarily to the qualitative aspects of the yeongbu rather than to the characters themselves. Haewol's description leads us no closer to understanding how the shape or form of the characters relate to the meaning of the yeongbu, or even whether there is a relationship at all.

Considering the tendency of Su-un's successor and followers to concentrate on the qualitative properties of the characters gung and eul rather than on their etymological significance or actual form, the task of determining their special efficacy for Su-un is not a simple one. The descriptions of gung and eul in Su-un's scripture provide no insight into why Su-un chose these characters, apart from the fact that they are important symbols in *Jeonggam-nok*.

There is, however, one source which may assist in determining why the shapes of these two characters motivated Su-un to choose them to express the fundamental tenets of his religion. This source is a document which sets out the evidence used against Su-un in his trial. It is contained in the great archival record *Ilseong-nok*, a Joseon dynasty archive containing a variety of records, including a report of Su-un's trial submitted to the throne by the governor of Gyeongsang province.⁹⁰ The report's date corresponds to 5 April 1864, just ten days before Su-un's execution.

⁸⁸ a substantial proportion of this section is taken from the article 'In Search of the Yeongbu: The Lost Talisman of Korea's Tonghak Religion', written by Roderick S. Bucknell and by the present author and published in *The Review of Korean Studies*, vol 4, no. 2, December 2001, pp. 201–22.

⁸⁹ Choe Si-hyeong, *Yeongbu Jumun*, in *HWSSBS*, p. 290.

⁹⁰ This report describes the practices of Su-un and his followers and presents evidence which led to his conviction on charges of heresy and subversion. *Ilseong-nok* [*Records of (the King's) Daily Reflection*], Section 5, Kojong 1st year (*kapja*), 2nd month, 29th day. Seoul National University Gyujeongguk Archives, vol. 65, 1995, pp. 158–62. The statement about the document's author and intent follows Susan Shin, 'The Tonghak movement: from Enlightenment to revolution', *Korean Studies Forum*, no. 5, Winter/Spring 1978–9, p. 20), as I had direct access only to the section under consideration here.

ilseong-nok and the Shape of the Yeongbu

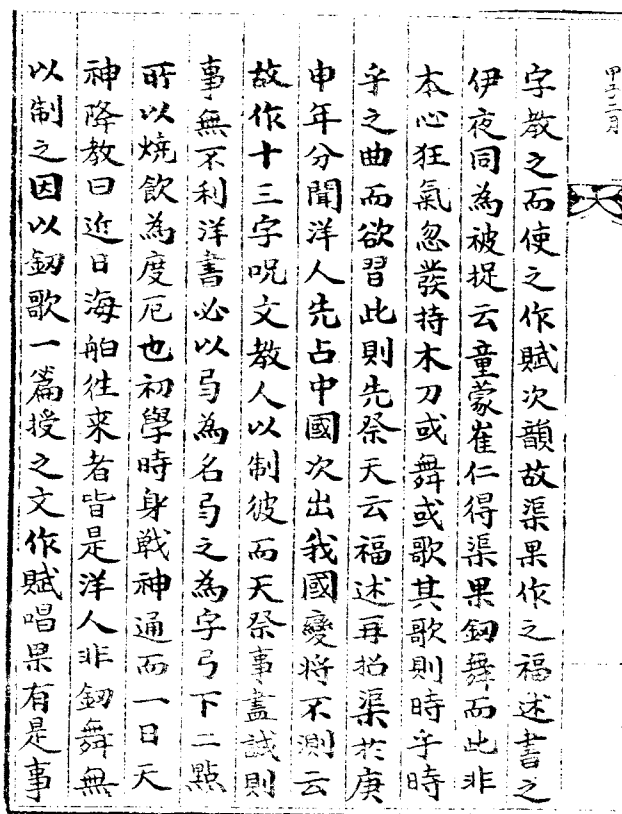


figure 4.3 The yeongbu in *Ilseong-nok*⁹¹

The governor's report in *Ilseong-nok* describes the practice of using the yeongbu. The report includes the following statements relating to the yeongbu's shape:

1. People who have various sicknesses write the character *gung* on paper and burn and drink it.⁹²
2. it must be written as *kyu*. This *kyu* is the character *gung* with two dots below it. It is burned and drunk to overcome difficulties.⁹³
3. The so-called medicine consists of half the character 穹. draw a circle on paper. Write a couple of character *gung* on paper. followers explain that

⁹¹ *ISN*, page 160a. note fourth column from left for the shape of the donghak yeongbu.

⁹² *ibid.*

⁹³ *ibid.*, p. 160b.

this is called Taeguk and is also called *gung gung*.⁹⁴

4. The so-called medicine is two of the character *gung*. it is either burned and drunk or chewed and swallowed.⁹⁵
5. [Su-un] explains the character *kyu* in terms of daoist texts [...] The auspicious *kyu* consists of the character 𠄎 with two dots below it.⁹⁶

Of these five statements, the second and the fifth are particularly informative regarding the actual shape of the yeongbu. They indicate that the yeongbu must be written as the character *kyu*, which has the form of ‘the character *gung* with two dots below it’. However, an examination of the *Ilseong-nok* text shows that this description of *kyu* is not entirely accurate. That is, the extra brushstrokes which distinguish *kyu* from *gung* are not ‘two dots’, but are in fact two horizontal lines identical to the character 二 meaning ‘two’.⁹⁷

The character *kyu* (𠄎: *gung* with two extra strokes, 二, which appear above the hook in the tail of the character) is not a standard Chinese character. it does not appear in modern Chinese dictionaries or in Chinese word-processors. However, *kyu* does appear among in the authoritative 47,000 character *Kangxi Dictionary* compiled in eighteenth-century China;⁹⁸ and it also appears in the Sino-Korean historical–phonological dictionary *Sae okpyeon* [*Dictionary of Sino-Korean Characters*].⁹⁹ in both of these sources, the character in question is explained as a non-standard variant of the well-known character 糾, which means ‘to supervise; to correct; to gather’ and is pronounced *kyu* in Korean. This explains why the compilers of the report considered it necessary to describe the *kyu* of the yeongbu in terms of components (*gung* with two dots): to most readers of the report and to most participants in Su-un’s trial, this *kyu* would have been a totally unknown character. describing an unfamiliar character as a combination of two or more familiar ones is common practice in languages employing the Chinese script.¹⁰⁰

The information gained from the report appears to provide a direct answer to our central question: What did the yeongbu look like? it can be seen to correlate, to some extent, with the information contained in Su-un’s own writings. in his detailed account, in *Pilbeop*, of the procedure for drawing the talisman, Su-un describes the resulting form as ‘lofty as the mightiest mountain, piled high, rock

⁹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 161a.

⁹⁵ *ibid.*

⁹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 161b.

⁹⁷ bucknell and beirne, ‘in Search of the yeongbu’ (above, n. 88), p. 211.

⁹⁸ *Kangxi zidian* [*Emperor Kangxi’s Dictionary*], Taipei: Wenhua tushu gongsi, 1977 (original publication 1716).

⁹⁹ *Sae okpyeon* [*Dictionary of Sino-Korean Characters*], Seoul: Tap Chulpansa [Tap Publishers], 1989 (original publication 1963).

¹⁰⁰ An example of this appears in the third of the above five statements, where the ‘medicine’ is explained as half of the character 穹, ‘sky, spacious, high’: the reference is to the character’s bottom half, which is identical with the character *gung* (‘bow’).

upon rock'. This image fits well with the form of the Yeongbu reproduced in the report: the character *kyu* does have a vertically layered appearance, especially if it is written in the square, angular style commonly used in a written talisman.

at the same time, the new information brings to light two problematic anomalies. one is the lack, in Su-un's writings, of any mention of 'gung with two dots below it'. The other is the lack, in the report, of any mention of the character *eul*.

These two anomalies may well be linked. as noted above, the 'two dots' reproduced in the *Ilseong-nok* text are actually a pair of horizontal strokes identical in form to the character 'two', which is pronounced *i* in Sino-Korean; and 'two' happens also to be the meaning of the character *eul*. This semantic correspondence is matched by a resemblance in form. When written cursively, the character 二 acquires virtually the form of the character 乙; for it is a common feature of Chinese cursive writing that the brush is allowed to remain lightly in contact with the paper in the move from the end of one stroke to the beginning of the next.

These semantic and formal correlations suggest the following as a viable explanation for the observed anomalies:

in descriptions of the yeongbu, 乙 is to be understood as equivalent to 二. This implies that, when Su-un wrote of the elixir of immortality that 'its shapes are 𠄎 and 乙', he could equally well have written 'its shapes are 𠄎 and 二'. His preference for *eul* over *i* in his description is readily explained: *eul* provided the desired link with the *Jeonggam-nok* reference to *eul eul gung gung*.¹⁰¹

This explanation of the two linked anomalies brings the report into close agreement with the data gleaned from Su-un's writings. as noted earlier, there is a contradiction in Su-un's writings: Su-un frequently describes the talisman as *gung gung*, but in one place he describes it as *gung eul*.¹⁰² and, as can be seen from the five statements set out above, the report describes the talisman sometimes as *gung gung* (otherwise 'a couple of *gung*' or 'two of the character *gung*') and sometimes as 'gung with two dots'. The interpretation here of *eul* as equivalent to the 'two dots' has the effect of converting these into two different instances of the very same contradiction.

This being established, attention can now turn to the contradiction itself, that is, to the fact that both sources describe the yeongbu in two different ways: (1) it has the form of *gung gung* and (2) it has the form of *gung eul* or *gung* with two dots—where *eul* and 'two dots' are equivalent. a likely explanation for this seeming contradiction emerges naturally out of the interpretation of *eul* as equivalent to 'two'. This equivalence means that *gung eul* amounts to 'gung and two'; and, since *gung gung* amounts to 'two *gung*', it follows that *gung gung* has exactly the same significance as *gung eul*. There is therefore no contradiction.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Bucknell and Beirme, 'In Search of the Yōngbu' (above, n. 88), p. 213.

¹⁰² *SDM*, Ch. 8.

¹⁰³ Bucknell and Beirme, 'In Search of the Yōngbu' (above, n. 88), pp. 213–14.

This chain of equivalences is also strongly suggested in one of the five statements quoted from the report: the one which says that the so-called medicine is ‘two of the character *gung*’. The text reads 二弓字, a phrase which embodies a certain ambiguity. While the obvious translation is ‘two of the character *gung*’, the phrase could also mean ‘the characters *i* (and) *gung*’. Therefore, since we have the equation i (two) = *eul* (two), the quoted phrase could be interpreted as signifying either *gung gung* or *eul gung*.

We have seen that there is considerable explanatory power in the interpretation $Z = \equiv$, *eul* = *i* (two). First, this interpretation resolves the seeming discrepancy between the descriptions given in the report and in Su-un’s writings: the yeongbu is *gung* with two dots (report) versus the yeongbu is *gung* and *eul* (Su-un’s writings). Second, it resolves the seeming contradiction that both the report and Su-un’s writings also describe the yeongbu as having the form of *gung gung*. The fact that one interpretation simply resolves both of these problems constitutes strong evidence that this interpretation is correct. Underlying this interpretation is the recognition that Su-un was familiar with, and attached spiritual importance to, the references to *gung* and *eul* in *Jeonggam-nok*. This connection will now be examined, with a view to specifying more precisely how Su-un used and interpreted the mystical syllables.¹⁰⁴

The Shape of the Yeongbu (2)

in *Jeonggam-nok*, *gung* appears frequently in the combination *gung gung*, whereas *eul* appears only in a single occurrence of the formula, *eul eul gung gung*. In terms of the above interpretation, this latter formula amounts to a doubling of the device which the report describes as ‘*gung* with two dots’. Such a doubled version—*eul eul gung gung*—would have approximately the following appearance: 弱. Unlike the combination of strokes (*kyu*) which the report identifies as the shape of the yeongbu, this doubled version is a recognized Chinese character. Pronounced *yak* in Sino-Korean, it means ‘weak, feeble, fragile, delicate, tender, young’.

The character *yak*, ‘weak’, has long existed in several stylistic variants—written forms which differ slightly in appearance, without any corresponding difference in semantic significance. Two of these variants are available in modern print font, namely the ones labeled a and b in figure 4.4.

Of concern here is the shape of the portion which remains when *gung* is removed from each half of the character. The form of the yeongbu reproduced in the report (i.e. *kyu*) has neither the leftward sloping parallel strokes of variant a nor the rightward converging dots of variant b; it has instead a pair of short horizontal straight lines. This form corresponds to another of the variants of *yak* shown in figure 4.4: it is seen in the right-hand half of the standard handwritten version, labeled C. There the two short strokes are written horizontally (from left

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.*, p. 214.

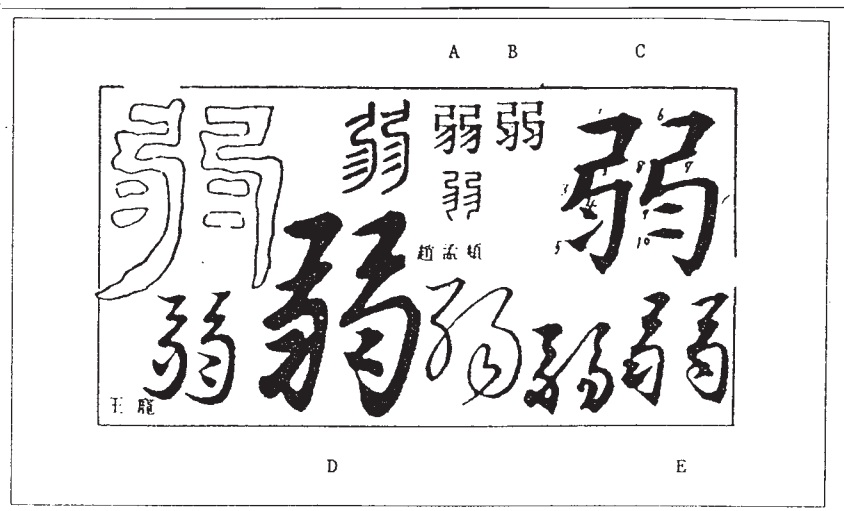


figure 4.4 Various forms of the character *yak* ('weak')¹⁰⁵

to right), in the form 二. in effect, then, Su-un's yeongbu was half of the character *yak*, 'weak'; it was half of the character which, according to his understanding of *eul*, was cryptically represented in the *Jeonggam-nok* formula *eul eul gung gung*.

The above observations suggest a more detailed interpretation of the yeongbu, which is summarized as follows:

Su-un was inspired to create a talisman based on the mystic syllables *gung* and *eul* of the prophetic book, *Jeonggam-nok*. He recognized that the combination *eul eul gung gung* could comprise the character *yak*, 'weak', provided one equated 乙 with the closely similar 二. He also recognized that the character *yak*, with its angular shape, bore a natural resemblance to the stylized characters in popular *bujeok* talismans. To express the sense of mystery he felt, Su-un adopted for his own talisman not the whole of the character *yak* but just one of its two identical halves. This enabled him to refer cryptically to the yeongbu as *gung eul* or, even more cryptically, as *gung gung*.¹⁰⁶

Considering the above analysis, which is based on material present in the independent sources of *Ilseong-nok* and *Jeonggam-nok* and summarized immediately above, the likely shape of Su-un's yeongbu is as follows:

¹⁰⁵ *Shuti da zidian* [Dictionary of Written Chinese Character Styles], Tainan: Zhengyan chubanshe 1974, p. 357.

¹⁰⁶ Bucknell and Beirne, 'In Search of the Yǒngbu' (above, n. 88), pp. 211–16.



figure 4.5 Shape of the donghak yeongbu

A Vulnerable Deity

Why did Su-un choose half of the character *yak* to represent the yeongbu? On the basis of Su-un's Scriptures, a likely reason is as follows.

The character 弱 (*yak*, 'weak') is crucial to the above interpretation, since it explains the detailed structure of the yeongbu. Recognition of the fact that the two dots of the yeongbu represent *eul* of *Jeonggam-nok* serves only to explain the talisman's component shapes; recognition of the specific role which *yak* played in Su-un's theology would explain the configuration of those components relative to each other.

It is appropriate therefore to consider what significance Su-un might have found in a character meaning 'weak'. The yeongbu had to be written with mindfulness and concentrated attention, and it was actually swallowed at the culmination of the ritual. Evidently, the underlying belief was that the practitioner thereby assimilated, or became identified with, the qualities signified by the written symbol. The findings suggest that Su-un, in performing the Yeongbu ritual, intended to embrace the quality of *weakness* and to identify with it. They suggest that he saw *weakness* as the solution to his and his followers' problems, the cure for all their ills.¹⁰⁷

For Su-un, the character 'weak' is likely to have had deep spiritual connotations. His writings indicate that, as he sought enlightenment, retreated to mount Gumi and reflected despondently on his situation, he was painfully conscious of his own powerlessness. In *Sudeok-mun*, *Anshim-ga* and other writings Su-un repeatedly expresses despair and remorse that his life to that point had been a failure: at the age of forty he lacked the skills and resources necessary even for housing and feeding his family, let alone solving the nation's problems.¹⁰⁸ As he wrote at the time immediately preceding his revelation:

as I silently contemplated, my thoughts turned to my new name; sitting looking foolish, my appearance resembled my name and its meaning became clear to me.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 216–17.

¹⁰⁸ *SDM*, Chs 5–6; *ASG*, Chs 2–3; *GHG*, Chs 2–3; *YDG*, Ch. 2.

¹⁰⁹ *GHG*, Ch. 4, lines 20–22.

in other words, Su-un recognized that he was as weak and as powerless as an *orin* ('child'). Consequently, the single word 'weak' would have been an apt encapsulation of his negative appraisal of himself. Then came the breakthrough from despondency to joy when, in response to a divine command, he first performed the yeongbu ritual. Writing the character 'weak'—and, later, only half of it—in large size and then ingesting it may well have amounted, in his mind, to a symbolic embracing and affirming of the weakness which he had initially deplored and rejected, and finally accepted.

Sympathetic as he was to daoist notions and practices, Su-un would have been well aware of the daoist message about the virtue of 'action through inaction' (Chinese *wu-wei*) and about the real strength which lies concealed in apparent weakness. Being well versed in the Chinese classics, he would have been familiar with the passages from the *daodejing*:

Weakness is the means employed by the *dao*. (Ch. 40)

Nothing in the world exceeds water in softness and weakness, yet nothing can surpass it in attacking the hard and the strong. Nothing can replace it.

Weakness overcomes strength. Softness overcomes hardness. This is known to all in the world, though none can practice it. (Ch. 78)¹¹⁰

Also, being familiar with *Jeonggam-nok*, Su-un would certainly have known the very similar line which appears twice in that book: 'Weakness can overcome strength. In the insubstantial there is the substantial.'¹¹¹

In each of these quoted passages, the word 'weakness' is represented by the character *yak*. Such ideas, combined with his ruminations about *eul eul gung gung*, may well have inspired Su-un to adopt the character *yak*, 'weak', as the basis for his talisman. Thus this written character, suitably disguised (through reduction to one identical half of the character) and ritualized, became Su-un's safe place, his inner refuge from the troubles surrounding him.¹¹²

Su-un saw the yeongbu as a gift from the Heavenly Lord—which was natural, given his developing theological ideas. He also saw the yeongbu as 'sacred medicine' (*seonyak*), the 'medicine of immortality' (*pulsayak*). This also seems natural, since the ritual swallowing of the mixture resembles the act of taking medicine. But it is likely that another factor is involved here.

Beside the character which means 'weak', there are several other Chinese characters which are pronounced *yak* in Sino-Korean. Meanings (listed in descending order of the characters' approximate frequency) are: 'medicine', 'if', 'approximately',

¹¹⁰ Saitō, Chō, *Rōshi [Laozi: Dao-de jing]* (Zenshaku Kambun Taikei 15), Tokyo: Shueisha, 1979.

¹¹¹ Jeong da-un, *Jeonggam-nok Wonbon Haeseol* (above, n. 44), pp. 185, 227. Su-un's conviction that weakness could overcome strength perhaps also allayed his concerns about Korea's vulnerability to the threatening colonial powers.

¹¹² Bucknell and Beirne, 'In Search of the Yōngbu' (above, n. 88), p. 219.

‘agree’, ‘key’, ‘leap’, ‘pan-pipes’. most of these are rare in everyday Sino-Korean vocabulary and in any case have no evident bearing on the present issue.

There is, however, a significant exception; namely 藥 (*yak*, ‘medicine’). This character is frequent in Sino-Korean vocabulary and clearly relevant in the context of the yeongbu. The fact that the spoken syllable *yak* means both ‘weak’ and ‘medicine’ would have facilitated the identification of the Yeongbu (*yak*, ‘weak’) with the Taoist elixir of immortality (*yak*, ‘medicine’). For example, in speech and in the Korean texts, the word *seonyak*, ‘sacred medicine’, would have lent itself to a punning interpretation as ‘sacred weakness’. Su-un may very well have been exploiting this linguistic fact.¹¹³

Examination of the Yeongbu: Conclusions

On the basis of the evidence presented in this chapter, the first conclusion is that the original form of Su-un’s yeongbu, though lost to present day Cheondo-gyo religion, can nevertheless be recovered: the once widely used talisman resembled half of the Chinese character 弱 (*yak*, ‘weak’). The straightforward statements to this effect in the report of the governor of Gyeongsang province are supported by several hints contained in Su-un’s writings. These relate to all three of the ‘dimensions’ which are traditionally recognized in any Chinese character: its shape, its sound, and its meaning.

As regards shape, half of the character 弱 comes close to being a combination of the mystical *gung* and *eul*, with which Su-un equated the yeongbu; and, when the ‘two dots’ are written, as in the governor’s report, as horizontal straight lines, the result resembles a vertical pile of flat rocks, Su-un’s description of the completed talisman in *Pilbeop*. As regards sound, the character ‘weak’ is homophonous with the character ‘medicine’ (both of them *yak* in Korean), which is in keeping with Su-un’s identification of the Yeongbu as ‘sacred medicine’ and as the ‘medicine of immortality’. As regards meaning, identification of the Yeongbu with the notion of ‘weak’ yields a coherent interpretation of Su-un’s transforming experience on Mount Gumi: despair at his own weakness gave way to supreme confidence, as he embraced the positive assessment of weakness known to him from Taoist writings and *Jeonggam-nok*.

The rationale presented regarding the form of the yeongbu is therefore not only compatible with a range of available data; it is also powerfully explanatory,

¹¹³ *ibid.* An example of the Cheondo-gyo faithfuls’ penchant for the use of pun has been alluded to previously in the interpretation of the syllable *Jeong* (鄭) not as the name of the young lord who was to usher in a new era of peace and prosperity, as recounted in *Jeonggam-nok*, but rather as *jeong*, a homophonous adjective represented by the Chinese character 正 meaning ‘upright, true, right, whole’, which the Cheondo-gyo faithful interpreted as referring to Su-un. See above, n. 58.

providing answers to some otherwise puzzling questions about early Donghak religious practices.¹¹⁴

The conclusions reached regarding the original shape of Su-un's yeongbu, its symbolic rendering of the concept of 'sacred weakness', and—if it is respected, understood and correctly practiced—its spiritual and physical transforming qualities are in accord with the way the symbol was understood and developed as the religion grew and matured.¹¹⁵

Further verification of the above conclusions can be observed directly in Su-un's writings, in a play on words in *Ansim-ga*. This play on words, between 약: *yak*: medicine and 不死藥: *pulsayak*: medicine of immortality, occurs during the encounter between Su-un and the Lord of Heaven. At the beginning of this encounter (Ch. 3, line 7), Su-un's wife, concerned about Su-un's erratic behaviour, asks: 'How can we get medicine (약) to help him on a dark night like this?' Later on (Ch. 5, line 13), Hanul-nim gives Su-un the elixir of immortality (*pulsayak*); and Su-un uses the same term (Ch. 5, line 30) in reference to the astonishing restoration of his health to the point where his appearance is like that of a Daoist master.

The dramatic irony of Su-un's receiving the elixir of immortality (*pulsayak*) while his wife was concerned with ordinary medicine (*yak*) would not have been lost on an audience familiar with the *Kasa* rendition of *Ansim-ga*. Also contained in these references is the contrast between belief and non-belief, another theme in *Ansim-ga*.¹¹⁶ Apparent here is the seemingly deliberate interplay of the themes of illness/weakness, belief/non-belief and healing, with the yeongbu as catalyst, from the earliest account of Su-un's ecstatic encounter with the Lord of Heaven.

Considering the complexity of the symbol and its depth of meaning (outlined above), one can understand Su-un's despair at the people's simplistic attitude toward the yeongbu, as they treated it as a magical talisman to be used merely for protection or personal gain. This misunderstanding and misuse continued after Su-un's death. There are accounts of Donghak militants wearing the yeongbu in battle, during the Donghak Peasant Rebellion, in the belief that it would protect them against bullets—a belief encouraged by their leader, Jeon bong-jun.¹¹⁷

The realization that the yeongbu offered no such physical protection could have been a reason for its being abandoned by a significant number of Donghak followers. Also, had they been aware of its subtle semantic associations, the increasingly militant Donghaks may have wished to dissociate themselves from anything to do with the character *yak*, 'weak', as it could have undermined morale in their military campaign. From the militants' misuse of the symbol it is obvious that they had become oblivious to the founder's expressed wish that the yeongbu be used for spiritual rather than for magical purposes.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 216–20.

¹¹⁵ This understanding and development will be examined in Chapter 8.

¹¹⁶ *ASG*, Ch. 6.

¹¹⁷ Shin, 'The Tonghak movement' (above, n. 90), p. 45.

¹¹⁸ Bucknell and Beirne, 'In Search of the Yōngbu' (above, n. 88), pp. 217–18.

The initial and fervent opposition of Choe Haewol, second leader of Donghak, to the militant wing of the movement led by Jeon Bong-jun¹¹⁹ indicates that the spirituality of the yeongbu and a Daoist-like passivity were accepted qualities in the Donghak religion from its inception. These qualities are significantly different from those which inspired the militant Donghak Peasant Rebellion.¹²⁰

A second conclusion which can be drawn from the semantic examination of the character 弱 is that the yeongbu, which represents ‘the great moral principle [*Taeguk*], the essence of all things in the universe’,¹²¹ mirrors a distinctive quality of the Great Absolute, specifically of an ultimate entity or principle which favours, as its *modus operandi*, passive, even vulnerable action-through-inaction rather than pro-active intervention in human affairs. In other words, a primary quality evidenced by Su-un’s deity is that of ‘sacred weakness’.

These conclusions will now be examined as keys to understanding the image which Su-un had of himself as a new type of religious leader in Korea.

The Yeongbu and Su-un’s Self-Image

What does the yeongbu, in its various phases, tell us about the development of Su-un’s self-image?

Did Su-un, for example, view himself as the new Tangun, a shaman king and spiritual progenitor of a resurgent race of people among whom there were to be no inherent hierarchical distinctions, who would live in harmony and practise mutual respect? In this theocracy, in which the Lord of Heaven and humans were united in the most intimate way, did Su-un choose the yeongbu to take the place of the *Cheonbun* and stand as a symbol of divine authority and divine/human harmony? Did Su-un see himself as representing in his person a union of heaven and humanity, just as the original progenitor of the Korean people, Tangun, represented in his person the union of heaven (*Hwan-ung*) and humans (the bear-woman)?

As the following poem, *Geom-Gyeol* [*Song of the Sword*], indicates, shamanistic imagery did appeal to Su-un in the earlier stages of the development of his religion.¹²²

¹¹⁹ b. Weems, *Reform, Rebellion and the Heavenly Way*, Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1964, pp. 44–6.

¹²⁰ This subject is examined further in Chapter 9.

¹²¹ *PDM*, Ch. 6.

¹²² *Geom-Gyeol* was written prior to the end of 1861, and possibly soon after Su-un’s epiphany on Mt Gumi.

Time! Time! These good times will never return.
 Though i be born only once in countless ages,
 I shall encounter the first fortunate times in fifty thousand years.
 What shall i do if i do not use the cleansing sword of
 yongcheon¹²³ at this time?
 Wearing the robes of a sword dancer, i raise my sword in the sword dance.
 Standing alone in the vast world, i sing the melody of the sword:
 ‘The fortunate time has come! The fortunate time has come!’
 The shining sword of yongcheon toys with the sun and the moon.
 Shimmering energy covers the entire universe like a robe.
 Who is the most famous general in history?
 n one other than i.
 Wonderful, wonderful, wonderful is my lot.¹²⁴

Su-un is definitely adopting the persona of a shaman in this combination of song, dance and ritual sword play.¹²⁵ However, he diverges from the usual role of the shaman with his words:

Who is the most famous general in history?
 n one other than i.
 Wonderful, wonderful, wonderful is my lot.

Shamanistic ceremonies often involve a powerful deity in the form of a famous deceased general who is summoned to use his influence to achieve a specific request.¹²⁶ in his *Song of the Sword*, Su-un not only shows his dominance over the cosmos;¹²⁷ by stating that he is the most famous general in history, he implies that it is not necessary to summon great generals to exercise their power. Through

¹²³ ‘dragon-Spring’.

¹²⁴ *GG*, in *YDYS, CGGJ*, p. 237. Su-un’s performance of the Sword dance is referred to in his trial, recorded in *Ilseong-nok*.

¹²⁵ Hyun-key Kim Hogarth, *Kut: Happiness Through Reciprocity*, Budapest: Kadmiel Kiad, 1998, comments on the role of song and dance in shamanistic ritual (pp. 43–6). Hogarth also comments on the shape of the shaman sword: ‘What is noteworthy about the shape of the swords used in *kut* is its resemblance to the half-moon or crescent. [...] in my view its shape is linked to the dominance of the sun, the moon and the stars in the shamanistic cosmos’ (p. 50).

¹²⁶ Yu Chai-shin, ‘Korean Taoism and Shamanism’, in Yu, Chai-shin and Richard Guisso (eds), *Shamanism: The Spirit World of Korea*, Berkeley, CA: Sian Humanities Press, 1988, pp. 110–11; Halla Pai Huhm, *Kut: Korean Shamanistic Rituals*, Seoul: Hollym International Corp., 1980, pp. 13, 20; Alexandre Guillemoz, ‘What do the *naerim mudang* from Seoul learn?’, in Keith Howard (ed.), *Korean Shamanism*, Seoul: Royal Asiatic Society, 1998, pp. 78–80.

¹²⁷ His sword ‘toys’ with the dominant features of the Shaman cosmos, the sun and the moon.

him, 'shimmering energy covers the entire universe like a robe'. Su-un sees his role as being so crucial to humankind that he can say: 'Though I be born only once in countless ages, I shall encounter the first fortunate times in fifty thousand years'. If Su-un did envisage himself as a shaman-king in the tradition of Tangun, or as a famous general, his role was not that of a traditional shaman. The words of *Song of the Sword* indicate that Su-un believed that he exercised control over the cosmos and that a new era of history had begun in and through him.¹²⁸ It is doubtful whether this cosmic outlook would be shared by a traditional shaman.

As noted previously, the shamanistic imagery Su-un utilized in *Song of the Sword* may be closely connected to his self-identification with the young lord Jeong of *Jeonggam-nok*: the *Jin-in* ('True man'), who would deliver peace and security to the oppressed and the downtrodden through the establishment of a new dynasty. Su-un adapted two of *Jeonggam-nok*'s central symbols, *gung* and *eul*, to represent not physical havens in time of turmoil but, as expressed in the *yeongbu*, the union between the Lord of Heaven (the Great Moral Principle of the universe) and humanity. With this adaptation, did Su-un develop the concept of the 'True man' and did he apply it to himself, thereby envisaging that his role fulfilled a divine destiny by leading the anguished populace to a haven which is both everlasting and as close as the human heart? The final line of *Song of the Sword*, 'Wonderful, wonderful, wonderful is my lot', would be an appropriate description of a person who envisioned himself as fulfilling this salvific role.

Or since Su-un chose a Seon (Zen) Buddhist method of concentrated meditation to practice the drawing of the *yeongbu*, and given the central position this symbol occupied in his new religion, was his self-image also affected by, and even centered on a Buddhist spirituality and soteriology? Did he see himself as a bodhisattva, or even as Maitreya, the future Buddha who would fulfill all human aspirations and 'thus represent a hope for the future, a time when all human beings could once again enjoy the spiritual and physical environment most favorable to enlightenment and the release from worldly suffering'?¹²⁹

Or, being under the influence of his father, did Su-un view himself primarily as a neo-Confucian literatus whose primary task was to instruct a confused populace on the fundamental principles of his new Way? The fact that he wrote an entire collection of scriptural works, *Donggyeong Daejeon*, in Chinese characters comprehensible only to an educated elite suggests that this view may well be correct. Additionally, the pedagogical nature of *Nonhak-mun* supports this view of

¹²⁸ Recall the quotation from *Jeonggam-nok*: 'in the high heavens the tip of a sword grazes the wind. The heavens opened in Gumpo and this is the young master Jeong. The earth opens at Hwa mountain and Mr Yi is dismissed and destroyed', as well the observation in this chapter: 'All it took, in the symbolic language of *Jeonggam-nok*, was for the tip of a sword to graze heaven and the old dynasty was swept away. A new one, full of promise then arose under Jeong who set up his capital at Mt Gaeryeong.'

¹²⁹ Alan Sponberg, 'introduction', in Alan Sponberg and Helen Hardacre (eds), *Maitreya: The Future Buddha*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, pp. 1-2.

Su-un as a neo-Confucian literatus in the tradition of his father, for whom he had the utmost reverence and respect.¹³⁰

or did Su-un identify the role he was to play in the liberation of his people as that of a Daoist divine, a spirit-guide in the tradition of the one who, clothed in celestial raiment, spoke to him of his destiny in the Gungang mountains? Su-un's indebtedness to, and adaptation of, traditional Daoist thought has been noted in the present chapter, in the discussion of the meaning of Samsinsan and of the true location and meaning of the elixir of immortality. Su-un believed that he had succeeded in finding, in the Yeongbu, what every Daoist practitioner longed to discover: the elixir of immortality. His joy at discovering this treasure was expressed in these words: 'i am like a Daoist master ... How fortunate i am to be immortal and everlasting.'¹³¹

The discussion of the shape and meaning of the characters *gung* and *eul* (their being configured as half of the character 弱; the meaning 'weak, feeble'; the homophony with 'medicine', *yak*) indicates that Su-un's thinking was profoundly influenced by Daoism. His experience of transformation through the embrace of his own weakness, in a symbolic way, through the drawing and ingestion of the Yeongbu is further indication of the influence of Daoism on Su-un's self-understanding.

bucknell's and beirne's article further documents Su-un's indebtedness to Daoism through his combination of the concepts of 'sacred medicine' and 'sacred weakness' in relation to the yeongbu and to the Lord of Heaven. The idea of the Lord of Heaven and of Su-un being of one heart and sharing the Daoist-inspired quality of 'sacred weakness' manifested in the spirituality of the yeongbu has definite implications for the self-image that Su-un developed as he promoted his religion and faced the inevitable consequences associated with this promulgation.

The use of water as a metaphor for power (which is implicit in 'weakness' in Daoist philosophy) has already been noted. Su-un's final recorded action is a 'powerful' expression of this philosophy. Following his arrest, trial and sentencing and immediately prior to his execution, Su-un requested that a bowl of *cheong-su*, 'pure water', be brought to him. Su-un placed the bowl beside him, prayed silently and faced death calmly and peacefully.¹³²

Su-un's 'action through non-action' and calm acceptance of his fate were consistent with Daoist philosophy and with a belief that, having attained union with the most powerful yet most vulnerable force in the universe, he had nothing

¹³⁰ The influence of neo-Confucianism on Su-un will come under scrutiny in the following chapter, in the examination of the Jumun.

¹³¹ *ASG*, Ch. 5, lines 22 and 28.

¹³² Hong Jang-hwa, *Cheondo-gyo Undongsa [History of Cheondo-gyo]*, Seoul, Cheondo-gyo Central Headquarters, 1990), p. 27, footnoted acknowledgement in Cheondo-gyo Compilation Committee for *Cheondo-gyo Paeknyeon Yaksa [Cheondo-gyo Hundredth Anniversary History Publication]*, Seoul, Cheondo-gyo Central Headquarters Publishing, 1981), p. 115.

to fear from earthly authorities, whose power was rooted in their own transient mortality.

Daoist philosophy influenced Su-un throughout his life, right to its final moment. Was Su-un's self-image fashioned primarily by this philosophy and by his adaptation of it, to the extent that he envisioned himself as a daoist (human) divine, living within an *O-sim-cheuk yeo-sim* ('my heart is your heart') spirituality?

Or was the image which Su-un had of himself an eclectic mixture of all of the above? Did he, as was his practice, adopt elements from both traditional and folk religion and adapt them to suit his needs, thereby creating an identity which was, in his eyes, unique in the history of humankind? Duncan's statement regarding Su-un's concept of *O-sim cheuk yeo-sim* (and of the equality of all human beings it implies)¹³³ supports a claim for uniqueness, which Su-un may have subjectively entertained. The following quotation from *Yongdam-ga* adds credence to this theory:

Hanul-Nim said 'You are the first one in fifty thousand years of creation. I could not find the right person in that time. I have succeeded in finding you. I have succeeded and so have you. your family is very fortunate.'

[...] How unique is my destiny! a birth like mine occurs only once in a million years.¹³⁴

What has been written in this chapter about the unity of humanity and divinity in the human heart, a unity represented by the phrase 'my heart is your heart', and about the quality of action-through-inaction daoist passivity which Su-un shared with the deity, have definite implications for the attempt to understand the image which Su-un had of himself, particularly in the final moments of his life on earth. This self-image, intimately linked with the yeongbu, came to the fore in the last moments of his life. As Su-un faced imminent death, his actions and, equally importantly, his non-action reflected a person who was of one heart with his Lord, in whose providence he placed himself, calmly and completely.

The examination of the Jumun in the following chapter will test these implications.

¹³³ John Duncan, 'The Emergence of the Tonghak religion', in Peter Lee (ed.), *The Sourcebook of Korean Civilization*, vol 2, New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), p. 314.

¹³⁴ *YDG*, Ch. 3, lines 6–9 and Ch. 4, lines 5–6.

Chapter 5

The Sacred incantation

Jumun in Korean history

The term *jumun* (呪文: 주문) is defined as ‘a magic formula (chanting); an incantation; a conjuration; a spell; magic words, a charm’.¹ As noted in Chapter 4, the roots of the Korean *jumun* can be traced back to the *Song of Cheoyong* and other *hyangga* poems which were used as magical talismans to cure disease. The use of a song-chant in association with a drawn *bujeok* thus dates far back into Korean history, to the reign of King Heongang (CE 875–85).²

As the following quotations verify, the chanting of a *jumun* generally precedes the drawing of a *bujeok*:

Take a large piece of paper (of acceptable dimensions) and, when drawing the *bujeok*, recite a thirty-seven character *jumun*.³

As drawing a *bujeok* is a repetitive exercise, memorize a sutra and recite a *jumun*, place the subject of one’s heart’s desire at the crown of one’s head and the spirit waves will run through it. Following this, in receiving the help of the spirit, to be receptive to its efficacy, rapidly recite the verse ‘Attend to this urgent statute’.⁴

Lee Hyeon-chong states that the practice of reciting a *jumun* in preparation for drawing a *bujeok* dates back to the early days of the Three Kingdoms in China. In times of national disturbance in China, bandits used *bujeoks* to attract the support of peasant farmers. Lee gives the example of a person named Janggak who called himself ‘great benevolent teacher’. Janggak took a nine-knot stick of bamboo, memorized a *jumun*, made a *bujeok* and, after encouraging the sick to make a confession, he made them burn the *bujeok* and drink the ashes with water. When they were cured, many people came to believe. This practice of making a *bujeok*

¹ *Dong-A’s Prime Korean-English Dictionary*, 3rd edn, Seoul: Dooosan Corporation, 2003, p. 1650. The term is both a singular and a plural noun.

² Ilyeon, *Samguk Yusa: Legends and History of the Three Kingdoms of Ancient Korea*, trans. Ha Tae-hung and Grafton K. Mintz, Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 1972, p. 126.

³ Lee Byong-su, *Poppi Chintaek Ryeongbu Sacheon*, [Dictionary of Yeongbu Attached to Houses], Seoul: Poyeongak, 1968), p. 13.

⁴ Kim Min-ki, *Hanguk-eui Buchak [Korean Talisman Composition]*, Seoul: Porimsa, 1987, p. 85.

attracted hundreds of thousands of people for decades to the provinces of Habuk, Sandong and Ha'nam.⁵

The conclusion of the *Compendium on the Secrets of the Yeongbu* gives the following instruction regarding the drawing of the symbol: 'if possible, the person creating the *bujeok* should, at midnight, fully dressed, burn incense, recite a jumun or the appropriate part of a buddhist sutra, and then, dipping the brush in cinnabar, draw the required *bujeok*.'⁶

The first chapter of the *10,000 Ways of Forming Yeongbu*,⁷ from page 8 to page 26, is devoted entirely to listing the appropriate jumun for a particular occasion

The following two *jumun* are taken from this section of the book.⁸

(instruction: Wash the ink slab clean, place it on the table and memorize and chant the following jumun.)

The Jade Emperor [The Great Emperor] orders the four square ink slab to contain gold, wood, water, fire, earth and thunder, wind, rain and lightning, and through this ink to eliminate the frivolous devil by thunder and lightning.
a tend to this urgent statute.⁹

(instruction: The following jumun is to be memorized and chanted when the *bujeok* is drawn on the paper.)

five things living in harmony—Thunder, God, General, lightning, light—
receive flowers [this *bujeok*] and protect life in one ascendant body, and bind all vicious demons and totally eliminate them. This is the way of longevity.
a tend to this urgent statute.¹⁰

The following jumun is taken from the *Great Encyclopedia of Yeongbu*:

(instruction: rise early in the morning, wash your face, change into clean clothes, face in an easterly direction, offer pure water, bow, pound a stick of bamboo three times and then chant.)

⁵ Lee, Hyeon-chong, (ed.), *Namhae Dos Chibang-eui Bujeok Yeongu* [*Bujeok Research on the Islands of the Southern Province*], yeosu: yeosu Cultural institute, 1987, p. 21. The reference is to the three Chinese provinces of Hebei, Shandong and Henan.

⁶ Kim Hyeon-seok, *Yeongbu Bicheon-seo* [*Compendium on the Secrets of the Yeongbu*], Seoul: yeokseo bokupsa, 1976, p. 320.

⁷ Seong m-un-jae (compiler), *Manbeop Yeongbu Picheon* [*10,000 Ways of Forming Yeongbu*], Seoul: Seongmun bokyowon 1974, pp. 8–26,

⁸ it should be kept in mind that the language of the jumun is symbolic in nature, often ambiguous and open to various interpretations.

⁹ Seong m-un-jae, *Manbeop Yeongbu Picheon* (above, n. 7), p. 9.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 10.

radiant and vast Eastern sunrise, give generous support to the unfortunate
 person who is seriously afflicted.
 Shine your light on the entrance to the village.
 messenger from heaven, meet with a powerful scholar. break disease with soiled
 traces of unyielding gold. Make wicked things surrender and make beneficial
 things happen.
 attend to this urgent statute.¹¹

Several conclusions can be drawn from the material above.

First, as the use of the *bujeok* developed and became more widespread, the jumun took on a more ancillary function in relation to it. For example, the reference above from the *10,000 Ways of Forming Yeongbu*, in which it was noted that eighteen pages at the beginning of the book are devoted to detailing a variety of jumun, is indicative of the position which a jumun occupies generally in relation to a yeongbu: it precedes the latter and prepares for its drawing.

Second, the jumun above, which are typical representations of their kind, are in the nature of petition to superior powers. One of the purposes of chanting them is to summon the powers of heaven, earth and nature so that they will subdue evil forces and ensure the effectiveness of the symbol which is being drawn.

Third, as the jumun had to be memorized and then chanted before, or during, the drawing of the *bujeok*, it can be deduced that the purpose of chanting the jumun is to focus the mind of the practitioner who is drawing the symbol.

Fourth, each jumun concludes with the formula: 'attend to this urgent statute.' The way of attending to the urgent statute is to ensure that the powers of heaven, earth and nature are contained in the symbol being drawn.

In all of these conclusions, it is the *bujeok* that is the main focus of the exercise. The purpose and function of the jumun is to ensure the *bujeok's* eventual effectiveness. The *bujeok* remains in physical form, to be applied for the purpose for which it was created. Conversely, once its ancillary purpose is accomplished, the jumun dissipates with the echo of its words.

The Donghak Sacred Incantation

Kim Ku (1876–1949), the famous Korean patriot and nationalist leader (who also commanded a donghak army regiment in the 1894 Peasant rebellion), gives the following description of his initial encounter with the donghak religion:¹²

¹¹ Han Chung-chu, *Yeongbu Jeok Taejeon [The Great Encyclopaedia of Yeongbu]*, Seoul: myeongmun-dong, n.d., p. 6.

¹² As it refers to his initial encounter with donghak, it is likely that this occurred in the mid to late 1880s.

it was rumored at that time that o u ng-son, who lived in Kaetogol, about twenty *ri* south of my village, and Ch'oe Hyon, who lived in the next village, had been learning Tonghak principles. [...] it was said that in going in and out of houses they did not use doors; they appeared or disappeared instantaneously; they could walk in the sky and go to visit Ch'oe To-myong, the leader in Chungchong Province, within a night. i began to have curiosity about Tonghak and decided to visit them.

a s instructed by others, i did not eat any odorous foods, and i bathed clean and wore new clothing to go to see them. i heard that one could not be received otherwise. [...] a s i approached mr o 's house, i could hear people reading something aloud. it was different from the tone of chanting b uddhist sutras or other poems and sounded rather like singing songs in harmony.¹³

Kim Ku did not specify that what he heard as he approached mr o 's house was the d onghak practice of singing/chanting the Jumun.¹⁴ However, his experience is similar to my own when i attended a forty-nine-day spring prayer service at the Cheondo-gyo central church in Seoul in 1998. Kim Ku's description, 'singing songs in harmony', accurately reflects the harmonious, ethereal sound created by a church full of individuals as they sung/chanted the Jumun, each according to his or her own rhythm.

The d onghak Sacred incantation, the Jumun, differs from Su-un's other symbolic 'gift' from the l ord of Heaven, the yeongbu, in a number of ways. most importantly to note at this stage is that, unlike the yeongbu, there is a number of extant Jumun which present themselves for examination. These Jumun date back to the very origins of the d onghak religion, and are still practised collectively in Cheondo-gyo services.

five distinct Jumun are contained in *Donggyeong Daejeon* [*The Great Collection of Eastern Scriptures*] under the section-heading 'Jumun'.¹⁵ These are divided into two categories. one category, the master's incantation, contains two Jumun. The other category, the d isciples' incantation, contains three. a s some of the following Jumun bear an identical title, they will be identified by a distinguishing subtitle.

¹³ *Paekbom ilgi; Kim ku chasojon* [*Memoirs of Paekbom: Autobiography of Kim Ku*], Seoul: Koryo Songbongsa, 1947, pp. 26–33. Quoted in I ee Chong-sik, *The Politics of Korean Nationalism*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1965, p. 24.

¹⁴ a s with the yeongbu, the d onghak Jumun will be capitalized.

¹⁵ *Jumun*, in *DGDJ, CGGJ*, pp. 69–70.

(I) The Master's Incantation [Seon-saeng Jumun]

(1) descent of the divine Spirit incantation [*Ganglyeong Jumun*]
(Master's 1)

至氣今至四月來

Chi ki keum chi sa weol lae

[ultimate energy now within, descended in the fourth month]

(2) original incantation [*Pon Jumun*]
(Master's 2)

侍天主令我長生
無窮無窮萬事知

*Si Cheonju yeong a chang sang
mu gung mu gung man sa chi*

[bearing the Lord of Heaven

I am granted everlasting life

and can discern the essence of all things]

(II) The Disciples' Incantation [Che-ja Jumun]

(1) beginners' incantation [*Chohak Jumun*]
(Disciples' Original)

爲天主顧我情永世不忘萬事宜

Wi Choenju ko a cheong yeong se bul mang man sa ui

[I revere the Lord of Heaven and He regards me with affection

Remembering (the Lord) forever, all things shall benefit me.]

(2) descent of the divine Spirit incantation [*Ganglyeong Jumun*]
(Disciples' 1)

至氣今至願爲大降

Chi ki keum chi weon wi dae gang

[ultimate energy now within, I long for it to pour into all living things]

(3) original incantation [*Pon Jumun*]
(Disciples' 2)

侍天主造化定永世不忘萬事知

*Si Cheonju cho hwa cheong
yeong se bul mang man sa chi*[bearing¹⁶ the Lord of Heaven, I shall become one with all creation
remembering (the Lord) forever, I shall discern the essence of all things].

The titles of the two categories of Jumun might be interpreted to mean that the master's incantation was practiced by Su-un himself, and his disciples utilized the three Jumun from the disciples' incantation section. However, there is no evidence to support such a proposition.

What is the exact nature of the sacred Donghak Sacred incantation? How is it similar to, and different from, the traditional Korean jumun? How does it relate to the other heavenly 'gift', the yeongbu? and what part did it play in the formation of Su-un's self-image? These questions will be considered now.

The Meaning of the Jumun

As mentioned in Chapter 3, Su-un gives two accounts of the origin of the Jumun. In one account he relates that both the Jumun and the yeongbu were received directly from the Lord of Heaven.¹⁷ In the other account he states:

I meditated on these words for a year, and realized the natural principle. I composed the Sacred formula and perfected the technique of making the Spirit descend. I wrote the verses about 'not forgetting' [the Lord of Heaven]. The

¹⁶ The character 侍 (*si*) can be translated as both 'serving' and 'bearing'. The translation team chose the latter, as we considered that it more accurately represents Su-un's intention, which was to signify that the Lord of Heaven is present in the believer and that this presence establishes a close affinity between the Lord of Heaven, humanity and the whole of creation. This translation is in accord with Su-un's 'my-heart-is-your-heart' relationship with the Lord of Heaven. It is also the translation favoured by Kim Yong-choon in *The Ch'ondo-gyo Concept of Man*, Seoul: Pan Korea Book Corporation, 1989, pp. 21 and 35. Kim (p. 35) refers to Paek Sae-myeong's definition of *si* as 'accompanying someone who is higher in position than oneself' (see also Paek Sae-myeong, *Donghak Kyongjon Hae-eui [An Interpretation of Donghak Scriptures]*, Seoul: Hanguk Sasang yonguhoe, 1963, p. 63). Susan Shin ('The Tonghak movement: from Enlightenment to revolution', *Korean Studies Forum*, no. 5, Winter/Spring 1978-9, p. 16), and Choe Dong-hui ('Tonghak Thought and modernization' (1), *Korea Journal*, vol. 13, no. 10, 1973, p. 5), however, choose 'Serve' and 'attending' respectively.

¹⁷ PDM, Ch. 6.

procedure for practicing the law is contained in the Sacred formula of twenty-one characters.¹⁸

it is in relation to this second account that Su-un offers the following explanation to a group of scholars who had asked him about the meaning of the Jumun:

‘What is the meaning of the incantation?’ they inquired.

‘its words embody the highest reverence for the Lord of Heaven,’ i replied.

‘The Lord of Heaven is revealed in its words as in the ancient writings.’

‘What is the meaning of your Sacred formula which refers to the descent of the Spirit?’

i answered:

‘Chi’ (至) means the ultimate, that which has nothing to precede it, and is therefore worthy of ultimate respect.

‘Ki’ (氣) is Energy, Spiritual and Infinite. It pervades all things and directs all things. It is formless and therefore difficult to describe, although sometimes it can almost be heard. it is the ultimate, original Energy of the universe.

‘Keumchi’ (今至), the present encounter, refers to initiation into the Way, the initial encounter with the ultimate Energy.

‘Weonwi’ (願爲) means petitioning through prayer for the descent of the spirit.

‘daegang’ (大降) refers to the Great descent of the Spirit, pouring energy into and transforming creation.

‘Si’ (侍) means serving or bearing the divine Spirit and channeling the ultimate Energy externally so that the Spirit can be universally recognized and respected.

‘Ju’ (主) means serving the Lord (of Heaven), who is to be treated with utmost respect and served, as one would one’s parents.

‘Chohwa’ (造化) means being in complete harmony with creation, being fused with, and effortlessly serving, the Spirit.

‘Cheong’ (定) means participating in the divine Virtue, focusing one’s energy and coming to a decision.

‘yeongse’ (永世) means ‘forever’, the term of one’s natural life.

‘bulmang’ (不忘) means not forgetting, always and constantly remembering.

‘mansa’ (萬事) refers to innumerable things, that is, to all creation.

‘Chi’ (知) means to know, to realize the truth and to receive wisdom.

if you contemplate the divine Energy and do not forget it, you shall attain union with the ultimate Energy and shall aspire to true holiness.¹⁹

an examination of the key characters in the above explanation as well as of the meaning and purpose of the Jumun will be undertaken at a later stage in this chapter. for the present, several general observations will be made.

¹⁸ *NHM*, Ch. 7.

¹⁹ *NHM*, Chs 11, 12 and 13.

First, in his explanation, Su-un combines two Jumun taken from the disciples' Incantation section, specifically *Ganglyeong* (disciples' 1) and *Pon* (disciples' 2), which have eight and thirteen characters respectively. He offers no explanation for his choice of these two Jumun over the two identically titled ones in the master's incantation section, or over a combination of other Jumun.

Su-un speaks of disciples' 1 and 2 as if they are one Jumun. This amalgamation is verified further in other passages, for example:

The procedure of practicing the Way is contained in the Sacred formula of twenty-one characters.²⁰

I memorized the incantation of immortality, the Sacred formula of twenty-one characters.²¹

I, too, have cultivated the Infinite Great Way in this world and instructed all people who come to me in the twenty-one characters of the Sacred formula.²²

In his Scriptures Su-un does not always refer to a twenty-one-character Jumun. In *Gyohun-ga* [*Song of Instruction*] he writes: 'if you are earnest in contemplating the thirteen characters of the incantation, it is better than reading a thousand volumes.'²³ It is unclear from the context whether Su-un is referring here to the two Jumun which contain thirteen characters—that is, disciples' original and disciples' 2—or to just one of these. As disciples' 2 is an integral part of the Sacred formula which Su-un explains to the learned scholars, it can be surmised that he is referring to this Jumun when he speaks of the thirteen characters of the incantation.

Second, in his explanation of (the combined) Jumun, Su-un omits any reference to the character 天 (*Cheon*, 'Heaven'). He gives no reason for this. The omission of this central character may be due to the fact that this term is easily understood from the context, as 天主 (*Cheonju*) is used frequently in Su-un's writings, including in three of the five Jumun.²⁴

Third, the two *Ganglyeong Jumun* (master's 1 and disciples' 1) differ in their configuration, as do the two *Pon Jumun* (master's 2 and disciples' 2). Master's 1 is composed of seven characters and disciples' 1 of eight. Master's 2 is composed of fourteen characters and disciples' 2 of thirteen. As noted above, their content

²⁰ *NHM*, Ch. 7.

²¹ *SDM*, Ch. 8. The wording Su-un uses is here is 三七其字 (*sam-jil ki ja*): 'three-seven characters'. This description does not appear to relate to a specific Jumun, as only one of the five Jumun contains seven characters (*Ganglyeong*, master's 1).

²² *Dosu-sa* [*Song of Cultivating the Way*], Ch. 7, line 12. As with the previous quotation, Su-un refers to three-seven characters.

²³ *GHG*, Ch. 11, line 38.

²⁴ master's 2, disciples' original and disciples' 2.

also differs. Although they share the same title, the various Jumun are clearly and significantly different.

The question arises: Why did Su-un choose disciples' 1 and disciples' 2 to explain the meaning of his incantation to the exclusion of the other Jumun? One possible answer is that the various Jumun were composed for different purposes, and disciples' 1 and disciples' 2, in combination, best represented what Su-un considered to be essential to propagating his message and best served his stated purpose for the Jumun: to make the divine Spirit descend.

Yet further questions result from this conclusion. Why did Su-un consider disciples' 1 and disciples' 2, in combination, to encapsulate the core message of his fledgling religion and to serve its objectives best? Did Disciples' 1 and disciples' 2 represent a development of earlier Jumun? If so, did they mark a significant change in Su-un's thinking and in the image he had of himself in relation to the deity? The answer may lie in a Jumun which does not appear in the Donghak/Cheondo-gyo canon of scripture and which, according to my reading of scholarly studies on the religion, has played no part in the interpretation or analysis of the Donghak Jumun. This particular Jumun is found in a source which has already proved to be fertile ground in providing key insights into Su-un's thinking: the underutilized *Ilseong-nok*.

Jumun in *Ilseong-nok*

Three Jumun are recorded in *Ilseong-nok*. Two of these, disciples' original and disciples' 1, are identical to those in the Gyeongju r issue referred to in Chapter 1 and in the *Cheondo-gyo Gyeongjeon* (as recorded earlier in the present chapter). The third Jumun, which I will henceforth refer to as the *Ilseong-nok* variant, appears in the section of *Ilseong-nok* which was examined in relation to theyeongbu, that is, the section dealing with Su-un's trial.

The context of their appearance is as follows: Evidence is given at Su-un's trial by a former government official named Cho, who had converted to the Donghak religion.²⁵ This witness states that a person brought a sick relative to Su-un to be cured. The sick person was instructed to study 'the thirteen characters' and to practise their message.²⁶ The thirteen characters quoted at this point in *Ilseong-nok* constitute disciples' original. However, the chanting of this Jumun failed to heal the sick person, who was then given further instructions by Su-un. Specifically,

²⁵ *Ilseong-nok. Records of (the King's) Daily Reflection*, Section 5, Kojong 1st year (*kapja*), 2nd month, 29th day (Seoul national university Gyujanggak archives, vol. 65, p. 159). Cho is the primary witness at the trial.

²⁶ When reference is made to the Donghak Jumun in *Ilseong-nok*, the phrase *sip-sam cha* ('thirteen characters') is used. This expression appears four times. There is no reference in the document to a twenty-one-character Jumun.

he was requested to refine his spirit, practise good deeds,²⁷ and use the following combination of Jumun:

Disciples' 1 and *Ilseong-nok* variant

至氣今至願爲大降 又曰²⁸ 爲 天主願我 誠永世不忘萬事知

Chi ki keum chi weon wi dae gang Wi Cheonju ko a seong yeong se pul mang man sa chi

[ultimate energy now within, i long for it to pour into all living things

i revere the Lord of Heaven and he regards me with sincerity

remembering (the Lord) forever i shall discern the essence of all things.

in other words, the sick person was advised by Su-un to use a combination of Disciples' 1 and an alternative thirteen character Jumun. This combination is presented as being more efficacious and, by implication, more advanced than Disciples' Original.

Considering Su-un's explanation of the Jumun to visiting scholars, which was outlined previously, one would expect Disciples' 1 and Disciples' 2 to be linked in *Ilseong-nok*—an account written immediately before Su-un's death, at a time when the Donghak scriptural canon had been completed. Curiously, this is not the case. The Disciples' 2 *Pon Jumun* does not appear in *Ilseong-nok*. Another pair of questions arises: Why was the combination Disciples' 1/*Ilseong-nok* variant considered to be more efficacious than Disciples' Original? And why did not the combination Disciples' 1/Disciples' 2 appear in *Ilseong-nok*? These paired topics will now be examined, first by comparing and contrasting Disciples' Original with its 'replacement', the *Ilseong-nok* variant, and then by comparing the *Ilseong-nok* variant with its 'replacement', Disciples' 2.

Comparison between Disciples' Original and the Ilseong-nok Variant

The Jumun appear as follows in *Ilseong-nok*:

²⁷ in *ISN*, p. 160, in a separate passage, Su-un is quoted as saying that one must worship the Lord of Heaven wholeheartedly and sincerely, prepare one's heart, be good to one's parents, wife, children and friends, be humble and respectful to the elderly, set an example for younger people, and act fairly and justly. If one lives in harmony with one's associates in this way, all will be well. The use of the Jumun is regarded as an affirmation of one's life and of its practices. The implication is that the Jumun in any of its forms is not to be regarded as a panacea for illness, and is not effective isolated from praxis.

²⁸ in the document, the characters 又曰 ('also say' or 'in addition say') appear between the two Jumun, indicating their distinct yet connected nature.

Disciples' Original

爲 天主願我 情永世不忘萬事宜

*Wi Choenju ko a **cheong** (情) yeong se pul mang man sa **ui** (宜)*
 [i revere the Lord of Heaven and He regards me with **affection**
 remembering (the Lord) forever, all things shall **bene.t** me]

Ilseong-nok variant

爲 天主願我 誠永世不忘萬事知

*Wi Choenju ko a **seong** (誠) yeong se pul mang man sa **chi** (知)*
 [i revere the Lord of Heaven and he regards me with **sincerity**
 remembering (the Lord) forever, i shall **discern** the essence of all things.]

Disciples' original and the *Ilseong-nok* variant are identical, with the exception of their sixth and thirteenth characters. The sixth character in Disciples' original is 情(*cheong*): 'affection/feelings'. The sixth character in the *Ilseong-nok* variant is 誠(*seong*): 'sincere'. The thirteenth character in Disciples' original is 宜(*ui*): 'right, fitting'. The thirteenth character in the *Ilseong-nok* variant is 知(*chi*): 'know, discern'. These differences are significant, as they alter the meaning of these Jumun considerably.

Specifically, Disciples' Original promotes a belief that revering and remembering the Lord of Heaven results in the Lord regarding the believer with affection and bestowing on the believer the benefits of all creation. In contrast, in the *Ilseong-nok* variant the Lord of Heaven regards the believer with 'sincerity', a primary neo-Confucian value, and with an ability to 'discern the essence of all things'. Discerning the essence of all things can rightly be seen as spiritual enlightenment. Thus a definite progression is noted in this comparison, specifically, from the promise of material reward (Disciples' original), to that of spiritual enlightenment (*Ilseong-nok* variant). Su-un's advice to the sick person as recorded in *Ilseong-nok* implies that a more effective and more 'enlightened' approach to a cure is warranted, one that does not emphasize material reward, but rather spiritual transformation, from which other benefits may flow.

Comparison between the ilseong-nok Variant and Disciples' 2

As noted, Disciples' 2 does not appear in *Ilseong-nok*, and thus it does not appear with Disciples' 1, its natural partner in the Donghak/Cheondo-gyo tradition. This position was usurped, at least temporarily, by the much less heralded *Ilseong-nok* variant. A comparison of the two Jumun is instructive.

Ilseong-nok variant

爲 天主顧我 誠永世不忘萬事知

*Wi **Cheonju** ko a seong **yeong se pul mang man sa chi***

[i revere the l ord of Heaven and he regards me with sincerity
r emembering the l ord forever i shall discern the essence of all things].

Disciples' 2

侍天主造化定永世不忘萬事知

*Si **Cheonju** cho hwa cheong **yeong se pul mang man sa chi***

[bearing the l ord of Heaven, i shall become one with all creation
r emembering (the l ord) forever i shall discern the essence of all things].

Comparing the first six characters of the *Ilseong-nok* variant with those of d isciples' 2, one finds only two characters, 天主(*Cheonju*) in common. (With a difference of just one character in its first line, the *Ilseong-nok* variant is much closer in its initial stages, in both form and meaning, to d isciples' o riginal than to d isciples' 2.) However, the final seven characters of the *Ilseong-nok* variant and d isciples' 2 are not only similar, but identical.

Conclusions from the Comparisons of Jumun in ilseong-nok

because the initial six characters of the *Ilseong-nok* variant and d isciples' o riginal are so similar, and because the latter seven characters of the *Ilseong-nok* variant and d isciples' 2 are identical, the *Ilseong-nok* variant can be regarded as an intermediate stage in the development of the d onghak Jumun. This progression indicates that the neo-Confucian values expressed in the *Ilseong-nok* variant and Disciples' 2 became increasingly influential in Su-un's cosmic outlook and in his quest for spiritual rather than material benefit.

The fact that the *Ilseong-nok* variant is not mentioned in the d onghak canon of scriptures, plays no part in d onghak worship and is not referred to in historical, political and religious studies of the d onghak/Cheondo-gyo religion indicates that it was replaced by d isciples' 2 as Su-un's concept of the Jumun evolved from a prayer for material benefit to a quest for, and a means of, spiritual enlightenment. in relation to this evolution, Cho's memory of chanting the Jumun may well refer back to a time when the Jumun was still in the process of development and Su-un had not yet decided on a final form which adequately reflected his relationship with the l ord of Heaven and with all creation. a nother possibility is that Su-un used different Jumun at the various stages of an initiate's education into d onghak principles, and that Cho (the witness) participated only in the initial stages of the d onghak initiation and education process.

On the basis of the evidence in *Ilseong-nok*, it is reasonable to deduce that Su-un experimented with various combinations of Jumun before arriving at one he deemed acceptable, that is, the combination he used to explain d onghak principles to visiting scholars: the combination of d isciples' 1 and 2. He may also have used a variety of Jumun, and a variety of combinations of Jumun, for different purposes.

It is also possible that a number of early Jumun was lost to history. For this reason, the *Ilseong-nok* variant should be treasured, recognized and incorporated into the study of Su-un's two symbols in the development of the d onghak religion.

Key Relations within the Jumun

Comment has already been made about the relationship between the Lord of Heaven and the practitioner/believer in various Jumun. There is, however, another relationship in the Jumun: one between two ultimate forces, the presence of which may have influenced Su-un in choosing a final formula to promulgate his religion. These forces are: Ki, 'ultimate Energy'; and Cheonju, 'the Lord of Heaven'. In choosing the combination of d isciples' 1 and 2, Su-un may have been attempting to reconcile these forces in a way which flowed naturally and honoured both, and which did not occur in other combinations of Jumun.

For example, it is possible that Su-un became aware of a tension, implicit in the combination between Chi Ki and Wi Cheonju, which occurred in the combination between d isciples' 1 and the *Ilseong-nok* variant. There is a subtle yet important distinction between being filled with Ultimate Energy and *Revering* the Lord of Heaven (d isciples' 1 and the *Ilseong-nok* variant), and being filled with Ultimate Energy and *Bearing* the Lord of Heaven (d isciples' 1 and d isciples' 2). The latter combination is more compatible. In other words, a link is established between ultimate Energy and the Lord of Heaven, both being present in the individual, with the result that this dual presence has a profound effect both on the individual and on creation.

However, in the combination between d isciples' 1 and the *Ilseong-nok* variant, unless Ultimate Energy is identified with the Lord of Heaven, a tension exists between being filled with one all-powerful entity—ChiKi and revering another—Cheonju. Such a tension would undermine Su-un's apparent intention to present a cohesive formula for explicating the fundamental beliefs of his religion, presented in the d isciples' 1 and d isciples' 2 combination of the 'incantation of immortality'.²⁹

The relationship between these two 'omnipotent' forces will now be examined, as an understanding of how Su-un viewed them may be expected to clarify how he viewed himself in relation to them and to all creation.

²⁹ *SDM*, Ch. 8.

Examination of the Key Concepts in the Jumun: ChiKi and Cheonju

The character 氣, pronounced *ki* in Korean and *ch'i* in Chinese, denotes one of the central metaphysical, philosophical and religious concepts in neo-Confucian cosmology.³⁰ John m. Koller explains this term and its correlative *li* (理) thus:

The Great ultimate, which produces all things and determines their functions, is a combination of stuff (*ch'i*) and principle (*li*). The nature of things is the result of what they are and how they function. The stuff of which they are made is their matter, or *ch'i*, and their function is their principle, or *li*. When *ch'i* and *li* are in harmony, things are in order and there is a grand harmony. Since the Great ultimate represents a harmony of *ch'i* and *li*, order is the law of the universe.³¹

Lee Ki-baik comments as follows on the relationship between *i* (*li*) and *ki*:

neo-Confucians divide all existence into two inseparable components, *i* and *ki* (*li* and *ch'i* in Chinese). The one, *i*, is a patterning or formative element that accounts for what things are and how they behave, or normatively should behave, while the other, *ki*, is the concretizing and energizing element. The two are interdependent and inseparable, since *i* could not exist concretely without *ki* and *ki* would be but formless and directionless energy without *i*.³²

References to *ki* in Su-un's writings are concentrated almost exclusively in one book, *Nonhak-mun*, where it occurs twelve times.³³ *Ki* is not used in *Podeok-mun* or in *Bulyeon Giyeon* and occurs only once in *Sudeok-mun*. Ten of the twelve occurrences in *Nonhak-mun* are contained in Su-un's explanation of the Jumun.³⁴ Su-un's first reference in *Nonhak-mun* reveals his initial encounter with *ki*:

it is not possible to express my feelings adequately at this time. I shrank in fear and sighed at this pitiful situation and my late birth into it, a chill swept through my body and I felt a vital force [*ki*: 氣], a divine power descend into me. a mysterious teaching suddenly came to me.

³⁰ Chung Yunghan lists 70 references to the term in the index of his second volume of the *History of Chinese Philosophy*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1952–3, p. 758.

³¹ John m. Koller, *Oriental Philosophies*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1985, p. 260. Chung Yunghan, *History of Chinese Philosophy* (above, n. 30), vol. 2, p. 444 describes *ch'i* as 'ether' or 'matter'.

³² Lee Ki-baik, *A New History of Korea*, trans. Edgar W. Wagner, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984, p. 217.

³³ *NHM*, Ch. 5 (2); Ch. 9 (2); Ch. 12 (4); Ch. 13 (2); Ch. 14 (2).

³⁴ *ibid.*, Chs 9, 12, 13, 14.

i heard an inner revelatory voice. i looked but could see no one; listened but could not hear anything. I felt perplexed and mystified³⁵

In his explanation of the Jumun to visiting scholars, Su-un gives a definition of *ki* which affords an insight into the mysterious force which he believed descended into him. ‘*Ki* [氣] is Energy, Spiritual and Infinite ... It is the Ultimate, Original Energy of the universe.’³⁶ In this definition Su-un prefaces the character *ki* (氣) with *chi* (至), meaning ‘ultimate’ or ‘original’. For him these two terms appear to be essentially linked.³⁷ Su-un makes no mention of *li* (‘principle’). Rather, in linking *ki* with *chi*, he elevates the concept of *ki* from a formless and directionless energizing force, as described by Lee Ki-baik, to 至氣(*chiki*), the original, ultimate power in the universe.

Ultimate Energy exercises a definitive role in Su-un’s cosmology. For Su-un, an individual’s virtue and righteousness are judged by the person’s being or not being in harmony with the energy of the universe.³⁸ Thus this energy is essential in determining the true worth of a person, yet this energy is not something to be sought after and possessed by an individual as an end in itself. Rather it is to be passed on, or poured into the rest of creation, as the words *Daegang* and *Si* of disciples’ 1 and disciples’ 2 indicate. In his explanation of these terms, Su-un states that the Great descent (*Daegang*) of the Spirit pours energy into, and transforms, creation; this is achieved by the external channeling of ultimate Energy from individuals into the rest of creation (*Si*).³⁹ In the cosmic hierarchy, therefore, humans hold a superior position over the rest of creation and play a vital role in energizing it with the ultimate, original energy of the universe.

How, then, did Su-un, the first one to experience the infusion of this infinite energy,⁴⁰ view himself in relation to the rest of creation, including other human beings? For it was immediately following the descent of this ultimate power that Kwisin, the Spiritual being, promised Su-un that he would realize the eternal truth and achieve immortality.⁴¹ What was Su-un’s image of himself at this point of illumination, at the apex not only of his own existence, but, in his opinion, of all creation? When this question is addressed in the concluding chapter, due consideration will be given to the dynamic principle, *ChiKi*, the ultimate Energy

³⁵ *ibid.*, Ch. 5.

³⁶ *ibid.*, Ch. 12.

³⁷ In linking these terms, it may have been Su-un’s intention to distinguish ‘ultimate Energy’, 至氣, from another Korean term: 地氣(*chiki*, ‘earth energy’). Although 至氣 and 地氣 have the same pronunciation in Korean, i.e. *chiki*, their philosophical implications are quite distinct.

³⁸ *NHM*, Ch. 14.

³⁹ *ibid.*, Ch. 13.

⁴⁰ *YDG*, Ch. 3, lines 6–8.

⁴¹ *NHM*, Ch. 6.

of the universe, and to the transforming effect Su-un believed that this force had on his life.

Cheonju

As mentioned at the beginning of Chapter 3 in the comparison between the accounts of Su-un's revelation, 'Cheonju' is one of four terms Su-un uses for the deity in his scriptures, the others being 'Kwisin', 'Sangje' and 'Hanul-Nim'. A fifth term for the deity, 'Sinlyeong' ('divine Spirit'), appears in Su-un's explanation of the Jumun.⁴²

Since Su-un was so careful in distinguishing his religion from Catholicism to the extent of naming the former *donghak* ('Eastern Learning'), as distinct from and opposed to *Seohak* ('Western Learning', that is, Catholicism), it is curious that on many occasions he chose the term 'Cheonju' to represent the deity, given this term's close association with Catholicism. 'Cheonju' (天主), Lord of Heaven, is identified with Catholicism in Korea and China; in Korea, Catholicism is called *Cheonju-gyo*, 'the teaching of the Lord of Heaven'. 'Cheonju' is not a Korean term. Kim yong-choon comments: 'The early Ch'ondo-gyo leaders used various terms to designate God; namely *Hannulnim*, *Ch'onju* and *Sangje*. The first two mean the Heavenly Lord: *Hannulnim* being original Korean and *Ch'onju* simply the Koreanization (in pronunciation) of the Chinese term.'⁴³

Su-un uses the term 'Cheonju' fourteen times in *Donggyeong Daejeon*. It does not occur at all in *Yongdam Yusa*. Its use is primarily concentrated in *Nonhak-mun*, where the term appears nine times.⁴⁴ It is used twice in *Podeok-mun*⁴⁵ and three times in *Jumun*.⁴⁶ It is also used in the *Ilseong-nok* variant.

The term 'Cheonju' does not appear in either *Sudeok-mun* or *Bulyeon Giyeon*, which together with *Nonhak-mun* and *Podeok-mun* form the main body of *Donggyeong Daejeon*. The lack of any reference to Cheonju, the Lord of Heaven, or for that matter to Kwisin or Sangje, in *Sudeok-mun* and *Bulyeon Giyeon*, which were composed later than *Nonhak-mun* and *Podeok-mun*, lends weight to Susan Shin's theory that Su-un moved away from the concept of an anthropomorphic deity towards a more practice-oriented, neo-Confucian spirituality as his religion developed.⁴⁷ *Sudeok-mun*, in particular, is a neo-Confucian tract in which Su-un extols the virtues of benevolence, right conduct, decorum, sincerity and faith,⁴⁸

⁴² *ibid.*, Ch 13.

⁴³ Kim yong-choon, 'A nalyis of Early Ch'ondo-gyo Thought', *Korea Journal*, vol. 17, no. 10, 1977, p. 42.

⁴⁴ *NHM*, Chs 3, 4, 9 (3 times), 11, 13, 15 and 17.

⁴⁵ *PDM*, Chs 1 and 7.

⁴⁶ *master's 2, disciples' original and disciples' 2.*

⁴⁷ Susan Shin, 'The Tonghak movement' (above, n. 16), p. 16.

⁴⁸ *SDM*, Chs 9 and 12.

and compares himself (and his teaching) to Confucius.⁴⁹ While there are no explicit references to the deity in *Sudeok-mun*, there are eleven references to the neo-Confucian/daoist concept 道(*Dao*), ‘the Way’.⁵⁰

The references to Cheonju in *Podeok-mun* and *Nonhak-mun* can be summarized in three broad categories:

1. The Lord of Heaven, who controls the cycle of the seasons and the three dimensions of existence: Heaven, Earth and Humankind.⁵¹
2. The Lord of Heaven, of whose spirituality and vital force the westerners, and in particular Catholics, are ignorant or unappreciative.⁵²
3. The Lord of Heaven, with whom a respectful and reverential relationship is essential for following the Heavenly Way of the Donghak religion.⁵³

(The three remaining references are contained in the previously mentioned three *Jumun*).

Several conclusions can be drawn from the above categorization.

First, categories 1 and 3 are closely related in their respect for, and awe of, the Lord of Heaven. This attitude is summed up in the reference from *Podeok-mun* to the efficacy of the Yeongbu: ‘I realized that the faithful who followed Cheonju were healed, but the disobedient were not. Therefore, cure depends on the sincerity and faith of the recipient.’⁵⁴

Second, in regard to the previous discussion on the influence of ‘Western Learning’ or Catholicism on Su-un, the four references in the second category explicitly state his opposition to, and lack of respect for, the western religion. A clearer picture of Su-un’s attitude to Catholicism in contrast to his own creed appears in *Nonhak-mun* (Chs 8 and 9), in response to a question from his learned visitors.

In this passage Su-un shows a grudging respect for the power of the western religion. Yet he is dismissive of its teaching, stating that it lacks even a clear concept of the Lord of Heaven and is ignorant of the ‘spirituality of the vital force’ (*ki*). The fact that Su-un acknowledges a belief in, and proper respect for, these two powerful forces—the Lord of Heaven and *Ki*—as the *sine qua non* of participation in his religion must be taken into consideration when assessing the relationship between the two. However, in this context, Su-un clearly did not consider that he was under the influence of the foreign religion, particularly in regard to its concepts and practice of worshiping the deity.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, Ch. 8.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, Chs 1, 2, 3, 6 (3 times), 9 (twice), 10, 11, 12.

⁵¹ *PDM*, Ch. 1; *NHM*, Chs 3 and 17.

⁵² *NHM*, Chs 4 and 9 (3 references).

⁵³ *PDM*, Ch. 7; *NHM*, Chs 11, 13, 15.

⁵⁴ *PDM*, Ch. 7.

For Su-un, Cheonju, the Lord of Heaven and the controller of the cycle of the seasons and of the three dimensions of existence,⁵⁵ was to be treated with utmost respect and deference. This he spells out clearly in his explanation of the Jumun. In response to a question from his learned visitors regarding the meaning of the incantation, he replies: 'its words embody the highest reverence for the Lord of Heaven.'⁵⁶ And in his explanation of the term 'Ju' (主), which serves as an abbreviation for the term 'Cheonju' (天主), he states: 'Ju' means serving the Lord (of Heaven) who is to be treated with utmost respect and served, as one would one's parents.'⁵⁷

Cheonju, of whom Su-un speaks in the passages already noted, is not likely to be on intimate terms with humans. This being is remote, powerful, and commanding of respect, awe, reverence and service. *Nonhak-mun* contains by far the most numerous references to the Lord of Heaven. However, when Su-un writes in this book of his intimate encounter with the Heavenly being, in the passage where he is told 'my heart is your heart'⁵⁸ the term he uses is 'Kwisin', the Spiritual being, not 'Cheonju', the Lord of Heaven.

In *Nonhak-mun* (Ch. 7), in reference to the Sacred formula, Su-un states that he has 'perfected the technique of making the Spirit descend'. The term he uses there is 'Iyeong' (靈: 'Spirit') not 'Cheonju'.

It is as if Su-un could not bring himself to use the term 'Cheonju' to suggest any level of intimacy with human beings. 'Cheonju' is a title which, for him, emphasizes separation rather than intimacy.⁵⁹

Naming the Numinous

Su-un had a problem. This is evident from the names he uses for the deity whom he encountered on Mt Gumi on the night of the 25 May 1860. As noted, Su-un referred to the deity by five distinct names: 'Cheonju' (Korean rendering of Chinese *T'ien-chu*, Lord of Heaven), 'Kwisin' (Chinese: Spiritual being), 'Sangje' (Chinese: Heavenly Emperor/ruler), 'Hanul-nim' (Korean: Lord of Heaven) and 'Sinlyeong' (Chinese: divine Spirit). None of these terms is original, and four are borrowed, Sino-Korean terms. Each term carries with it a particular nuance, emphasizing a different aspect of the heavenly being. From the preceding discussion, it is apparent that Su-un used these terms hierarchically, 'Cheonju' showing preeminence.

⁵⁵ *NHM*, Chs 1–3.

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, Ch. 11.

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, Ch. 13.

⁵⁸ *ibid.*, Ch. 6.

⁵⁹ This contrasts with more modern developments in the Cheondo-gyo religion in respect to the divine-human relationship, which are specifically expressed in the phrase *In nae Cheon* (人乃天, 'Humans are God').

Su-un's problem was that no one term adequately represented the deity he encountered on mt Gumi. The fact that he recounted this experience in three quite distinct versions, in *Ansim-ga*, *Podeok-mun* and *Nonhak-mun*, also indicates that he struggled to find suitable words and concepts to communicate his ecstatic experience. This struggle would be akin to trying to describe a brilliant opal which flashed all the colours of the rainbow in a world in which there were names for the vibrant colours, but not for an entity which contained them.

As no single term could adequately represent the heavenly being he encountered, Su-un chose to use five. It is possible that Su-un, in using five similar yet distinct terms, was communicating to his followers the inadequacy of each and advising caution in the use of one exclusively. Su-un solved his problem by not solving it. In not attempting to name the numinous by a single term, he acknowledged his and humanity's inadequacy to describe the indescribable, and thereby to contain it.

Su-un is by no means the only person to confront this problem and to seek a solution to it. Rudolf Otto, among many others, grappled with the same issue and posited a distinction between *mysterium tremendum* and *fascinans* in relation to the numinous experience.⁶⁰ Otto links the *mysterium tremendum*, 'the deepest and most fundamental element in all strong and sincerely felt religious emotion',⁶¹ to an aspect of this numinous experience he terms *fascinans*. He states that the daunting or 'majestic element' of the numinous experience combines with a fascination 'in a strange harmony of contrasts'. In this experience the divine 'may appear to the mind an object of horror and dread, but at the same time it is no less something that allures with a potent charm, and the creature, who trembles before it, utterly cowed and cast down, has always at the same time the impulse to turn to it, nay even to make it somehow his own.'⁶² Otto adds that the numinous experience 'evades precise formulation in words [...] We are bound to try, by means of the most precise and unambiguous symbolic and figurative terms that we can find, to discriminate the different elements of the experience so far as we can in a way that can claim general validity.'⁶³

Su-un appears to be in agreement with Otto that the numinous experience 'evades precise formulation in words', and his restricted and respectful use of the term 'Cheonju' could well fall within the parameters of Otto's *mysterium tremendum*. In the use of his two 'gifts' from the Lord of Heaven, the Yeongbu and the Jumun, Su-un could certainly be seen as making the experience of the numinous 'somehow his own'. Also, in using five terms to refer to the deity and two symbols to communicate with the deity, it appears that Su-un did 'discriminate between the different elements of the experience ... in a way that can claim general validity'.

⁶⁰ Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, trans. John W. Harvey, London: Oxford University Press, 1923 (2nd edn 1950, reprinted 1979).

⁶¹ *ibid.*, p. 12.

⁶² *ibid.*, p. 31.

⁶³ *ibid.*, p. 59.

However, the relationship between Su-un and the deity (Kwisin), expressed in *Nonhak-mun*, Chapter 6, through the phrase ‘my heart is your heart’, introduces an element of intimacy not captured in Otto’s distinction between *mysterium tremendum* and *fascinans*. This state of intimate union is closer to the ‘unitive life’ of mystics, described by Evelyn Underhill as follows: ‘The unitive life, though so often lived in the world, is never of it. It belongs to another plane of being, moves securely upon levels unrelated to speech; and hence eludes the measuring powers of humanity.’⁶⁴ Although belonging ‘to another plane of being’ and moving ‘securely upon levels unrelated to speech’, Su-un nevertheless continued to try to articulate his experience and share it with his followers. He did so, I believe, in a creative and subtle way, through his use of the terminology of the Sacred Incantation, the Jumun.

The Cheonju/ChiKi relationship

Although two powers ChiKi and Cheonju exist in close proximity in the combined disciples’ 1 and 2 Jumun (henceforth referred to generically as ‘the Jumun’), Su-un offers no explanation of the relationship between them. In his writings, the two ultimates appear to exist in a complementary relationship. Su-un does not attempt to reconcile their dual presence in the Jumun. Avoiding any abstruse metaphysical explanations, he allows the two ultimates to coexist independently and harmoniously. In either one is given primacy of place.

Yet in the previous sub-section, in the analysis of the term ‘Cheonju’, an ambiguity in Su-un’s attitude to the Lord of Heaven was noted whereby Su-un could not bring himself to consider that he could be on intimate terms with the all-powerful Cheonju. He speaks rather of treating this being with utmost respect and of serving it as one would one’s parents. Su-un’s relationship with Cheonju can thus be described as one of reverential separation.⁶⁵

In his explanation of the Jumun, Su-un refers to the Great Descent of the Spirit (*Daegang*) which is borne within, so that ultimate Energy is channeled into all creation. This explanation implies an intimate bond between Spirit and Energy. The related terms which Su-un uses in his explanation are ‘Kihwa’ (氣化), Transforming Energy and ‘Sinlyeong’ (神靈), divine Spirit.⁶⁶

There is more than mere semantics in Su-un’s choice of titles for the deity in communicating his message. It is apparent from the above examples that he

⁶⁴ Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism*, 13th edn, New York: Doubleday 1990 (original publication 1911), p. 414. For further discussion on the unitive life and its transcendent–metaphysical and intimate–personal forms of expression, see also Ch. X, pp. 412–43.

⁶⁵ The ‘otherness’ of the Lord of Heaven has already been commented upon at the end of Chapter 3. As noted above, when describing the bond of intimacy implied in the ‘my-heart-is-your-heart’ relationship, the term which Su-un twice uses for the deity is Kwisin, not Cheonju.

⁶⁶ *NHM*, Chs 12 and 13.

chooses not to use the term ‘Cheonju’ when he refers to a situation of intimacy with the deity, and yet it is this term ‘Cheonju’ which he chooses to use exclusively in the various Jumun when referring to the deity.⁶⁷ There is no mention in the Jumun of the other terms which Su-un uses for the deity elsewhere.

It is as if in this communication, which is central to his belief and which most closely reflects his epiphany on Mt Gumi, Su-un chooses the term for the deity which, for him, conveys the profoundest respect and evokes in him the greatest awe, and it is precisely because of these sentiments that these statements lack the potency and intimacy of his statements about ChiKi, for example: ‘ultimate Energy now within, I long for it to pour into all living things.’⁶⁸ This Jumun expresses a close affinity between Su-un and the dynamic principle of neo-Confucian spirituality, Ki, an affinity which Su-un does not articulate when referring to Cheonju, the Lord of Heaven.

Is there a reason why Su-un placed the two terms, ‘ChiKi’ and ‘Cheonju’, in such close proximity in the Jumun and in his explanation of the Sacred formula to the visiting scholars? Could it be that, in not distinguishing between, or explaining, the two powerful forces in relation to each other, Su-un was leaving unspoken a connection which he himself may not have been prepared to articulate?

It is as if, in the twenty-one character Jumun, Su-un is on the brink of articulating something which, neo-Confucian as he was in his upbringing and thinking, he found difficult to admit to scholars of a similar background, and indeed even to himself: that it was Cheonju, the Lord of Heaven, not ultimate Energy, who descended into him with such intimacy and dynamism on 25 May 1860 at Yongdam on Mt Gumi.⁶⁹ As a result, Su-un felt himself being used as a conduit to pour his Lord into all creation.

ChiKi—A Linking Principle between Cheonju and Su-un?

It is understandable that Su-un should have wished to convey to his followers, through the Jumun, his conviction that the deity, in its most powerful form, spoke to him and descended into him. Anything less would have diminished this transcendent experience in his and in their eyes. This is apparently why he did not settle for a lesser term for the deity in explicating the Jumun. Yet he was restricted by his own humanity and neo-Confucian upbringing, and by the attitudes of his contemporaries, from naming Cheonju, the all-powerful Lord of Heaven, as being in intimate and ecstatic union with him.

It is my contention that Su-un solved this dilemma by making use of an intermediary force to convey the indescribably profound experience of ecstatic

⁶⁷ master’s 2; disciples’ original and disciples’ 2.

⁶⁸ disciples’ 1.

⁶⁹ as described in master’s 1 and disciples’ 1 Jumun: ‘ultimate energy now within, descended in the fourth month’, and ‘ultimate energy now within, I long for it to pour into all living things’. Both Jumun are entitled *Ganglyeong*: descent of the divine Spirit.

union with Cheonju, the Lord of Heaven. This force is ChiKi, an ultimate principle which expressed certain dynamic qualities, yet lacked other qualities, which inspired awe and respect in Su-un.

In Disciples' 1, which makes up the first eight characters of the twenty-one character combination, it is ChiKi that takes central place. There is no direct mention of Cheonju, yet the title of this Jumun, *Ganglyeong*, means 'descent of the Spirit', not 'descent of ultimate Energy'. There appears to be a very close correlation here between the divine Spirit and ChiKi. Are the two—Sinlyeong (divine Spirit) and ChiKi (ultimate Energy)—identical for Su-un? He gives no indication that they are, yet, in his explanation of *Si* to the visiting scholars, the two are closely linked: 'Si' (侍) means serving or bearing the divine Spirit and channeling the ultimate Energy externally so that the Spirit can be universally recognized and respected.⁷⁰

What, then, is the relationship between ultimate Energy, Spirit and Cheonju in the Jumun? One thing is certain from Su-un's use of the terms 'Ganglyeong' (descent of the Spirit), 'daegang' (Great descent), 'Kihwa' (Transforming Energy) and 'Sinlyeong' (divine Spirit). That is, divine Spirit and Energy serve the same function—one of descending and pouring into all creation—and they are as closely linked as to be identical, even though Su-un did not specifically make this connection. It is as if, in linking divine Spirit and Transforming Energy, Su-un is constructing a bridge of concepts to interlink them with Cheonju, the Lord of Heaven.

As Su-un joined two Jumun into one incantation, the initial section, Disciples' 1: *Ganglyeong*: descent of the Spirit Jumun, can be seen as a precedent for the latter, Disciples' 2: *Pon* Jumun. Disciples' 2, begins with the words 'Si Cheonju', bearing the Lord of Heaven. There is no Great descent of the Lord of Heaven mentioned here. It is apparently not necessary. The Lord is already present. This descent, Su-un suggests but does not state, has already been effected. That is, the Lord of Heaven, in the form of Transforming Energy and divine Spirit, has already descended and is present, ready to be channeled into all creation, thereby sanctifying it. Yet Su-un backs away from stating this explicitly, perhaps because of the radical nature of what he is suggesting.

Earlier in *Nonhak-mun*, Su-un states: 'I meditated on these words for a year and realized the natural principle. I composed the Sacred formula and perfected the technique of making the Spirit descend.'⁷¹ I believe the reason why Su-un uses the term *lyeong* ('Spirit') in this statement rather than 'Cheonju' is clear from the preceding analysis. For in this statement Su-un takes a further radical step, indicating that he has perfected the technique of making this Spirit descend and thereby exercising some control over it. Given what has been written previously, Su-un could not bring himself to state that he exercised any control over Cheonju. Rather, out of respect and deference for his Lord, he had to express this radical step

⁷⁰ *NHM*, Ch. 13.

⁷¹ *ibid.*, Ch. 7.

in words and concepts which he found acceptable, and which would not disturb or cause scandal among his followers or among those who came to him to inquire about his new religion.

I suggest that, in his use of the terms ‘ChiKi’ (ultimate Energy) and ‘Sinlyeong’ (divine Spirit), Su-un implied the term ‘Cheonju’ without formally stating it. Both ‘ChiKi’ and ‘Sinlyeong’ have distinct philosophical and religious meanings, of which Su-un, given his classical education, must have been aware. Yet Su-un used them in place of the term ‘Cheonju’ for the reasons already stated.

In summary, while recognizing the distinct nature of the terms ‘ChiKi’, ‘Sinlyeong’ and ‘Cheonju’ and not specifically equating them, Su-un implied that use of these terms expressed, in their combination, an experience which, he admits, ‘there are no words to describe’.⁷² Thus, while not synonymous for Su-un, the three terms can be considered as referring to different facets of the same reality, namely to the ultimate and most powerful cosmic force in the universe. This is verifiably true in contemporary Cheondo-gyo theology, at least in regard to ChiKi and Cheonju. Kim Kyeong-chaе comments:

ChiKi and Cheonju, from the perspective of Cheondo-gyo belief, are two aspects of the ultimate Entity. ChiKi is the expression which describes the appearance of the deity in the midst of creative activities. . . . Cheonju is the divine character Nim [an honorific suffix in Korean] that responds when we sense and recognize the divinity of ChiKi and devote our entire personality to worship and entreat.⁷³

Kim also states that ChiKi and Cheonju are not independent entities. Although they can be considered a duality, they are integrated as a single unit.⁷⁴

From the previous discussion it is questionable whether Su-un held such an integrated view of ChiKi and Cheonju. He may well have viewed them as facets of the same reality, and even interdependent. His reluctance to use the term ‘Cheonju’ in relation to summoning the deity does indicate a hierarchical distinction in Su-un’s thinking regarding the composition of ultimate reality. In this hierarchical structure, it is ‘Cheonju’, the Lord of Heaven, who holds primacy of place.

Yet it was this ultimate power, this cosmic Lord of the universe, whom Su-un believed he could summon at will. I little wonder that he indicated the inability of human speech to describe this experience and used several names to represent a deity over whom he believed he could exercise control. This person, who could

⁷² GHG Ch. 4, line 6. To paraphrase Evelyn Underhill’s description: belonging to another plane of being, and moving securely upon levels unrelated to speech.

⁷³ Kim, Kyeong-jae, ‘Chiki ilweonron-kwa Si Cheonju Sinang’ [‘ultimate Energy monism and bearing the Lord of Heaven belief’], in Ko, mun-hae (ed.), *Donghak Heokmyeong 100 Junyeon Ginyeom Non Jong* [Collection of Treatises on the Hundredth Anniversary of the Donghak Rebellion = DHJGNJ], vol. 1, Seoul: Taekwang munhwasa, 1994), p. 183.

⁷⁴ *ibid.*, p. 181.

summon the most powerful force in the universe, is far removed from the pitiful individual who lamented:

Reflecting on the past forty years of my life, I was full of regret that I had not been more successful in this world. I did not even own a house. How could I appreciate the vast beauty of the world around me? Things are not working out well for me. I cannot find my proper place.⁷⁵

The conflict in Su-un between having utmost respect for his cosmic Lord and his belief that he could summon this Lord at will has definite implications for Su-un's evolving self-image as he struggled to express the inexpressible: his epiphany on Mt Gumi. One of these implications will now be considered.

Immanence or Transience? Control or Compatibility?

The above discussion, particularly in relation to the quotation from *Nonhak-mun* (Ch. 7), 'I meditated on these words for a year and realized the natural principle. I composed the Sacred formula and perfected the technique of making the Spirit descend', prompts the following question: if Su-un spent a year 'perfecting the technique of making the Spirit descend', did he believe not only that his Lord had to be constantly summoned, but also that he, Su-un, actually had the power to do this?

Another way of asking this question is this: is the chanting of the Jumun, of necessity, performative? That is, does the chanting effect what its words proclaim and bring about the presence of the Lord of Heaven on each occasion within the believer?

Or, conversely, did the purpose of chanting the incantation change during an extended period of trial and reflection by Su-un? Did it evolve over time, as did the exercise of drawing the yeongbu, as is described in the meditative poem *The Way of the Brush Stroke*? If it did change in a similar way, then the ultimate purpose of chanting the Jumun was to effect an awareness of the indwelling of the Lord of Heaven through practice, repetition and refinement of the spirit.

In brief, the difference in the two possibilities is between action and awareness, between making something happen and realizing that it has happened.

Su-un gives no direction regarding resolution of this dilemma. Unlike the yeongbu, there is no clear textual evidence in Su-un's scriptures to infer that the purpose of chanting the Jumun changed as Su-un effected its implementation. The previous examination and comparison between disciples' original, the *Ilseong-nok* variant, and disciples' 2 indicates that textual developments did occur in the composition of the Jumun. As valuable as this examination may be for understanding how and why the Jumun developed through various stages and for identifying a corresponding development in Su-un's own self-understanding in

⁷⁵ *SDM*, Ch. 5.

relationship to, and with, Cheonju, the dilemma surrounding the ultimate purpose of chanting the Jumun remains.

The resolution of this dilemma is an important issue, for it has direct implications for the assessment of Su-un's self-image. Specifically, the image which the passage from *Nonhak-mun* (Ch. 7) presents is that of a person who believes that he can at will summon into his presence the most powerful being in the universe. This projected image also suggests an inconsistency in Su-un's theology and spirituality.

The study of the yeongbu in the previous chapter resulted in presenting the image of a person who experienced transformation through the embrace of his own weakness, in a symbolic way, in the drawing and ingesting of the yeongbu. It presented an image of Su-un being of one heart with the Lord of Heaven and sharing the quality of 'sacred weakness' with his Lord. This image is not consistent with that of a person who, through chanting the Jumun, has power over the Lord of Heaven to the extent that he can effect this Lord's descent into him.

A possible solution to this dilemma may be sought in the dating of the relevant texts. As the dating of the books of *Cheondo-gyo Gyeongjeon* in Chapter 1 indicates, the composition of the Jumun is dated to the period 1860–61.⁷⁶ *Nonhak-mun*, and Su-un's reference in it to developing the technique of making the Spirit descend, is also generally dated to the end of 1861. *Pilbeop* was composed in early 1863, over one year after the composition of the Jumun and of *Nonhak-mun*, if not longer. By the time *Pilbeop* was composed, Su-un's attitude to the Jumun may well have undergone a transition similar to that seen in his attitude toward the yeongbu. In other words, he may have come to consider chanting the Jumun to be a meditative exercise to assist believers in becoming aware of the indwelling of the Lord of Heaven in their hearts, rather than as a performative exercise designed to bring about the descent of the Lord. That is, in line with Su-un's 'my-heart-is-your-heart' spirituality, his purpose in chanting the Jumun would be, not to control the Lord of Heaven, but rather to become aware of the deity's presence and of his oneness of heart with his Lord.

This theory could well be expressed in the words of the Jumun:

ultimate energy now within
 I long for it to pour into all living things.
 bearing the Lord of Heaven, I shall become one with all creation
 remembering (the Lord) forever
 I shall discern the essence of all things.

These words could be interpreted to mean that the Lord of Heaven's presence in the believer is permanent rather than transitory, and that the relationship between Su-un and his Lord is one of compatibility rather than control. Yet the words do

⁷⁶ Pak Chang-geon and Hong Jang-hwa both cite 1860. Kim Ki-seon cites a pril 1861. Susan Shin cites December 1861.

not clearly signify that this permanence is a reality. as a result of this ambiguity, the theory of a possible development in Su-un's view of the Jumun which would parallel the development in his view of the yeongbu, logical as it may appear, must remain a theory because of lack of textual evidence.

Consequently, there remains an apparent inconsistency in Su-un's theology and spirituality, which has implications for any attempt to arrive at an accurate description of his self-image. for while Su-un believed that he had the power to summon the Lord of Heaven and that he bore the Lord within, he did not perceive himself as being equal to the cosmic Lord. Had he done so, it would not have been necessary to summon his Lord.

it is uncertain why Su-un believed that he had within him the power to summon this all-powerful deity. for, in each of the three accounts of his encounter with the Lord of Heaven, it is the deity who chooses Su-un, initiates the encounters and brings them to a conclusion. in each of these encounters Su-un is in awe, even in fear, of the deity. in the account in *Ansim-ga*, Sangje says: 'do not be afraid. do not fear.' Su-un merely obeys and does not even speak back.⁷⁷ in the *Podeok-mun* account, Sangje, seeing that Su-un is startled, says 'do not be afraid' and indicates that Su-un has been chosen for a specific purpose, 'to teach humankind my Law'.⁷⁸ in *Nonhak-mun*, Su-un is perplexed and mystified until he is told by Kwisin that they are of one heart.⁷⁹

in each of these encounters the deity is in absolute control. Su-un's role is one of total subservience. any power that he has is given him by the Spiritual being, who says:

now you shall realize the Eternal Way, cultivate it, study it, record it, and teach it to all humankind. you shall set down the Law's practices and propagate its virtue. Then you too shall be immortal. you shall prosper in this life and virtue shall be propagated throughout the world.⁸⁰

Through the intervention of the deity, Su-un is transformed from a powerless outcast into a conveyer of divine wisdom. yet, in the presence of the deity, his attitude is uniformly a combination of subservience and awe. How, then, did Su-un, in the space of one year's meditation and refinement, make the transition from subservience to control over the deity to the extent that he could make the Spirit descend?⁸¹ Su-un does not explain.

yet it is in this interval of one year that Su-un's image of himself was transformed, from that of a powerless outcast in a society which did not recognize his existence to that of an obedient servant of the Lord of Heaven, then to that of

⁷⁷ *ASG*, Ch 4 line 12.

⁷⁸ *PDM*, Ch. 6.

⁷⁹ *NHM*, Chs 5–6.

⁸⁰ *ibid.*, Ch. 6.

⁸¹ *ibid.*, Ch. 7.

an active partner with and agent of the Lord of Heaven in energizing all creation. Su-un may not have considered himself to be on equal terms with the deity. yet, as will be examined in Chapters 7 and 8, this progression, once begun, did not cease with Su-un's demise.

it is clearly not possible to determine exactly what changes occurred in Su-un following his epiphany on mt Gumi. by his own account, his sickness dissipated and he glowed with health. These changes appear to have been spiritual as much as physical.⁸²

What is certain is that, over time, Su-un's self-image underwent the transformation outlined above and, while not considering himself to be equal with the Lord of Heaven, Su-un did believe himself capable of summoning this Lord at will, even if he could not bring himself to utter the name 'Cheonju' in connection with this process. What is also clear from the examination in this section is that the formation of Su-un's self-image was an evolving process and that, as this image changed, so did his opinion of, and relationship with, the Lord of Heaven.

Summary

What description befits a person who, following an epiphany with the Lord of Heaven, adopted and adapted two symbols from folk and traditional religions—the Jumun and the yeongbu—and through the chanting of the Jumun and the meditative drawing of the yeongbu initiated his followers into the awareness of an intimate union with the cosmic Lord of the universe?

Su-un himself uses two words to describe this kind of person: *kunja*, a Confucian term meaning 'superior being',⁸³ and *chisang sinseon*, which designates a Taoist immortal living on earth. Su-un uses these terms as follows: 'if you write about the truth and teach it to others, they will become *superior individuals* following the law of nature and *will live divine lives on earth*.'⁸⁴

How did Su-un envisage himself in this new order of peace and harmony in the world expressed in the principle *Dong-gwi Il-che*,⁸⁵ which was accessed not only through chanting the Jumun but also through living the principles which it enunciated? did he envisage himself as a combination of *kunja* and *chisang*

⁸² ASG, Ch. 5.

⁸³ Bruce Grant, *A Guide to Korean Characters*, Seoul: Hollym Corporation, 1986, p. 80, defines the term *kunja* as 'superior man, the Confucian gentleman'. it is a Koreanization of the Chinese term *chün-tzu*, 'nobleman'; see Kim Sung-hae, *The Righteous and the Sage*, Seoul: Sogang University Press, 1985, p. 127. Kim notes that the traditional characteristic of the nobleman according to Confucius is that he displays a perfect harmony of *jen* ('benevolence') and *li* ('propriety') (p. 135).

⁸⁴ GHG, Ch. 5, lines 37–8.

⁸⁵ 'a ll people evolve towards unity': See Chapter 8 for an explanation of this phrase.

sinseon, as the quotation from *Gyohun-ga* indicates? or are the other possibilities, outlined at the end of Chapter 4, more accurate indicators of Su-un's self-image?

Before an attempt is made to define Su-un's self-image, a further link between the Jumun and the yeongbu needs to be noted. Su-un's struggle to express his encounter with the divinity in symbolic form, through the Jumun, in a way which could inspire others and lead them to enlightenment, is mirrored in his struggle to communicate the meaning and the purpose of the yeongbu.⁸⁶ Like the yeongbu, the Jumun was also misunderstood and misused by Su-un's contemporaries, as the following passage from *Sudeok-mun* indicates: 'in order to understand the Way and cultivate morality, sincerity and guidance are essential. Some, however, believe in rumors and memorize false incantations. This is such a pity! I agonize over this continually, fearing that some harm may come to our holy Way.'⁸⁷ As with the yeongbu, this misunderstanding and misuse may have resulted in Su-un's re-evaluation of the meaning and the purpose of the Jumun.

What was Su-un's attitude towards the Jumun in the final stages of his life? Did it undergo a change similar to that towards the yeongbu? In the months leading up to his death, and in accord with the concepts expressed in *Pilbeop*, did Su-un believe that the chanting of the Jumun and the drawing of the Yeongbu fulfilled an identical purpose, namely to effect an awareness of the indwelling of the Lord of Heaven? Although a definitive answer to these questions may not be possible, a confident one in the affirmative, based on the presentation of the following logical scenario, definitely is.

What in all probability did happen is that the two symbols existed side by side and underwent a symbiotic development during Su-un's lifetime. The 'skill' they taught was the creation of an awareness of the permanent 'my-heart-is-your-heart' reality. The Jumun, with its pedagogical content, was probably also used to communicate the core of donghak belief and lent itself, through chanting, to communal activity. The Yeongbu's redefinition as a meditative exercise implies that it was directed more towards individual development in the donghak Way. Although the symbols were created for two audiences, one educated, one less so, their meaning changed and matured harmoniously with the development of the religion and with its founder's growing understanding of his relationship with the Lord of Heaven. As Su-un's image of himself in relation to divinity changed, so too did the theological rationale and the function of his two core symbols.

If, on the contrary, the rationale and function of the Jumun did not evolve correlatively to that of the yeongbu, one would be faced with a situation in which a significant development took place in Su-un's attitude to one of his core symbols but not in his attitude to the other. On grounds of probability, logic and consistency, this is not likely to have happened.

⁸⁶ *ASG*, Ch. 6; *PDM*, Ch. 7.

⁸⁷ *SDM*, Ch 11. The consensus among scholars (Kim Ki-seon, Pak Chong-geon, Susan Shin, Hong Chang-hwa) is that *Sudeok-mun* was composed in 1862, six months to a year after *Nonhak-mun* was written.

The examination of the Jumun and of the yeongbu in this and in the previous chapter supports the theory of an intimate and essential link between Su-un's core symbols and his self-image, which also indicates the interconnected nature of their development. This examination should also prove that any attempt to understand Su-un and the religion he founded must take into account the yeongbu and the Jumun at the various stages of their development.

Ultimately, it may be impossible to ascertain what exactly happened to Su-un on the night of 25 May 1860, in the midst of his family, in the small haven of yongdam Pavilion on Mt Gumi. What we do know is that Su-un was transformed by this experience from a depressed and status-less wanderer into a religious visionary and brilliant innovator, who took two ordinary Korean folk symbols, adapted them and elevated them to a level through which the most disenfranchised and oppressed human beings could become aware of their intrinsic worth through union with the most powerful force in the universe.

In using, refining and disseminating his 'sacred medicine' and incantation of immortality, Su-un challenged his contemporaries at all levels of society to examine the core structures which supported their lives, and the values which underpinned their society and their nation. To some, Su-un was a sign of hope and inspiration; to others, an apostate who threatened the very fabric of the natural order which made sense of, and gave security to, their lives.

What description, indeed, could do justice to such a person?

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Chapter 6

Su-un's final Self-image

The aim of this chapter is to synthesize the findings made in the previous chapters so that a description of Su-un's self-image can be posited. As has been noted, Su-un's self-image changed significantly over the four-year period from the time immediately preceding his encounter with the Lord of Heaven on Mt Gumi to the moment of his execution. The focus will be on Su-un's self-image as he faced imminent death, as this can be considered to be the defining moment in the development of this image.

The analysis will be concentrated in the following areas:

1. Su-un's change of name;
2. Su-un's epiphany;
3. the yeongbu;
4. the Jumun;
5. Su-un and the Lord of Heaven.

These areas have been chosen either because of the essential role they played in the formation of Su-un's self-image or because they are key indicators of this self-image. As much of the material and findings in these sections overlaps, the examination may not adhere strictly to the above categories.

Su-un's Change of Name

As examined in Chapter 2, after years of wandering and after he moved his family to Yongdam Pavilion on Mt Gumi and made a 'great resolution', Su-un changed his name from Je-seon to Che-u, 'saviour of the ignorant'. During a period of pre-revelation contemplation, Su-un had a crucial insight regarding his new name. He came to understand that he was not in a position to 'save' others. In fact, he was just as ignorant and in need of salvation as his compatriots. What separated Su-un from his contemporaries in the eyes of the Lord of Heaven was that, even in his abject condition, spiritually frustrated as he was, unemployed, an outcast with a family to support and no means to do it, Su-un had others' interests at heart rather than his own.

The image which Su-un had of himself immediately before his revelation was of an ignorant, vulnerable ('weak') and abandoned child: disenfranchised, lost and seeking meaning and direction. It was an image which he shared with the majority of his fellow Koreans at a crucial time in their history.

Su-un's Epiphany

Su-un's epiphany at Yongdam Pavilion, Mt Gumi was not only a defining experience in his life; it also shaped the destiny of many of his contemporaries.

Su-un's three accounts of this experience have been examined in Chapter 3. The examination has shown that each account has its own particular nuance, and in each one Su-un presents a different image of himself. These images are closely aligned with the yeongbu and the Jumun.

in the earliest account, in *Ansim-ga*, Su-un describes himself as follows: 'i am like a Taoist master ... i am indeed ageless and immortal.'¹ These words followed his ingestion, over a period of eight months, of hundreds of yeongbu, which Hanulnim had referred to as 'the elixir of immortality'.² Thus, in the earliest account of his reception of the yeongbu, Su-un presents an image of himself as an immortal who has the means of curing illness and effecting immortality in others.

in the *Podeok-mun* account, Su-un relates that sincerity and faith are necessary for a cure to be effected when one consumes the yeongbu. Su-un's image thus changed from that of a person who dispenses magical medicine to that of someone required to nurture faith and sincerity, so that the yeongbu can have the desired effect. This image is in accord with *Ansim-ga* (Ch. 6), in which Su-un reacts against those who view the yeongbu as magical medicine by stating: 'The medicine of immortality will not be given to the foolish and the ignorant.'³ in *Podeok-mun* (Ch. 6), Sangje commands Su-un to '[t]ake this talisman and deliver humanity from sickness'. This statement implies that the yeongbu's function, at this stage, was medicinal. However, immediately following this command, Sangje says, in relation to the Jumun: 'use my sacred formula and teach humankind for me.' Thus this later book in Su-un's canon presents two images of Su-un, in close proximity: that of a dispenser of the medicine of immortality and that of a sage-like teacher.

in the latest account of his epiphany, in *Nonhak-mun* (Chs 5–7), Su-un's image undergoes another significant change. In this account, Kwisin says to Su-un: 'My heart is your heart, yet how could humankind know this?'⁴ The implications of this statement were examined at length in Chapter 3 and in subsequent chapters. The examination in Chapter 3 concluded that Su-un had been chosen as the Spiritual being's intermediary for humankind. Sharing one heart with the most powerful being in the universe, Su-un represented a new creation, a person who is fully alive and immortal. The uniqueness of Su-un's situation was that he was the first to be chosen. yet his exalted status was not to be regarded as exclusive, but rather to be shared with all humanity. following Su-un's initiation into the Way of the Lord of Heaven, this Way was open for others to follow. Su-un viewed his encounter with

¹ *ASG*, Ch. 5, lines 22 and 23.

² *ASG*, Ch. 5, line 13.

³ *ASG*, Ch. 6, line 6.

⁴ *NHN*, Ch. 6.

the Lord of Heaven as the beginning of a new era for humankind, for which he used the term *Kaepyeok-si*: the beginning of the world, or creation.⁵

The accounts in *Ansim-ga*, *Podeok-mun* and *Nonhak-mun* were examined in chronological order. This examination shows that a development in Su-un's self-image occurred during the time the books were composed. Specifically, Su-un's self-image changed from that of an immortal who, through dispensing the yeongbu, was capable of curing others and of effecting immortality in them (if they had the required faith and sincerity) to that of a fully realized human being, who was immortal because he shared one heart with the ultimate power in the universe.

This change of emphasis signals a significant development in Su-un's self-image. This development will now be examined in relation to the two symbols which played a seminal role in Su-un's life and in d onghak theology.

The Yeongbu

The examination of the yeongbu undertaken in Chapter 4 resulted in a number of possibilities regarding Su-un's self-image. The following questions were raised: did Su-un imagine himself to be the new Tangun, a spiritual progenitor of the Korean people after *Kaepyeok-si*, the beginning of a new era for humankind? did he envision himself as the most powerful shamanic deity, one who was capable of exercising control over the cosmos? did he consider himself to be the *Jin-in*, the 'True man' of *Jeonggam-nok*, leading an anguished and disenfranchised populace to a sanctuary which was both everlasting and as close as the human heart? did he see himself as a buddhist bodhisattva or maitreya, as a daoist divine, or perhaps as a neo-Confucian literatus? or did he see himself rather as a composite of all of these?

Central to this discussion was Su-un's change in attitude toward the yeongbu from regarding it as a daoist-like elixir of immortality to seeing it as a meditative process, as expressed in *Pilbeop*, the aim of which was for people to become aware of a 'my-heart-is-your-heart' union with the Lord of Heaven. The quality of this union may have been reflected in the shape of the characters themselves, as was pointed out in Chapter 4. Specifically, Su-un adopted the character 弱, meaning 'weak', and represented it cryptically as 弓弓 (*gung gung*) and 乙乙 (*eul eul*), abbreviated in the form:



figure 6.1 Shape of the d onghak yeongbu

⁵ *ASG*, Ch. 4, line 15.

Considering that the yeongbu played a key role in Su-un's propagation of his religion, it is logical to deduce that changes in his attitude to the former reflect changes in his attitude to himself as a religious leader. In particular, his de-emphasizing of the yeongbu as magical medicine and his later promulgation of the practice of drawing it as a means of raising awareness of an essential part of the human condition, namely the unity of Heaven and humanity, point to an alteration in the way he perceived himself.

As mentioned in the previous section, the seminal 'my-heart-is-your-heart' statement from Chapter 6 of *Nonhak-mun* was written after the revelation accounts in *Ansim-ga* and *Podeok-mun*. In addition, the descriptive poem *Pilbeop*, which detailed the method of achieving awareness of the 'my-heart-is-your-heart' state of existence, was written not long before Su-un's death, and can thus be viewed as one of the final indicators of his attitude to the Yeongbu as well as to himself in relationship to it and to the Lord of Heaven.

The examination in Chapters 3 and 4 indicates that Su-un's self-image developed from that of a Daoist sage-like individual who has at his disposal the panacea for worldly ills to that of a person who shares one heart with the Spiritual being, the Lord of Heaven. It was this union, one of unlimited possibility yet of restrained Daoist passivity, that fashioned the image Su-un had of himself as he faced imminent death. This image, intimately linked with the yeongbu as half of the character 弱, came to the fore in the final hours of Su-un's life. It is likely that his self-image at the point of death was shaped by his relationship with, and by his image of, the Lord of Heaven. On the basis of the examination undertaken in Chapter 4, particularly in relation to the shape of the yeongbu, Su-un may well have envisioned himself at this time as a fully realized human being, dwelling at the very apex of creation despite his dire situation, and as an enlightened individual who was at one with the Lord of Heaven, whose power and 'sacred weakness' he shared.

The possible images Su-un had of himself, outlined at the beginning of this section, undoubtedly all played a part in moulding his final self-image. As was pointed out in Chapter 4, Su-un adopted images and doctrines from a variety of sources and adapted them to express the principles of his religion. He utilized the principle of adoption and adaptation because, as he said of his ecstatic experience at Yongdam Pavilion, 'there are no words to describe it'.⁶ Su-un repeats the difficulty of expressing this experience in *Sudeok-mun* when he says: 'This experience was like a dream. It is difficult to describe.'⁷ Consequently he used a variety of methods to communicate this experience to his followers. The imagery he chose suited his needs at a particular time. For example, it is difficult to imagine Su-un utilizing the shamanistic imagery of *Geom-Gyeol* [*Song of the Sword*], which he wrote relatively soon after his epiphany, at a later point in his life—for example, when he composed *Pilbeop*. By this stage he had reflected deeply on the meaning of

⁶ GHG, Ch. 4, line 6.

⁷ SDM, Ch. 6.

his two symbols and on his developing relationship with the Lord of Heaven. As a consequence, the *jeju* ('skill') he speaks of in *Pilbeop* relating to the meditative drawing of the yeongbu is distinctly different from the skills displayed by a shaman—albeit an extremely powerful one, as described in *Geom-Gyeol*.

Su-un's eclecticism indicates that no one image he borrowed from other religious traditions could adequately describe his experience on Mt Gumi, his maturing self-image, his relationship with the Lord of Heaven, or the core principles of his religion. This is most evident in his adoption of the traditional Korean *bujeok* and in his development of it into the Donghak yeongbu, or in his corresponding adoption and adaptation of the traditional Korean chant, the jumun, which he changed from an ancillary role in the drawing of a *bujeok* to a central, performative role for the Donghak faithful: namely, of facilitating in the faithful an awareness of the presence of the deity.

The Jumun

Examination of six Jumun in Chapter 5 revealed Su-un's ongoing struggle to define his intimate/respectful relationship with Cheonju, the Lord of Heaven. The changing terminology in three Jumun—disciples' original, the *Ilseong-nok* variant and disciples' 2—indicates that a progression took place in Su-un's understanding of his relationship with the Lord of Heaven and, correspondingly, in his self-image. This progression, expressed in neo-Confucian terminology, took the form of 'a quest for enlightenment' as distinct from an earlier request for material benefit.

In addition, comparison of the disciples' 1 and disciples' 2 combination with other Jumun indicated that, as Su-un settled on the final expression of his twenty-one character Sacred Incantation, he also arrived at a deeper and more spiritual understanding of himself in relation to the other entities represented in it, namely ChiKi/Cheonju and the rest of creation.

Despite an apparent ambiguity in Su-un's theology regarding his ability to summon the Divine Spirit/Cheonju and thus to exercise control over the deity, the conclusion was reached that Su-un's belief in the permanent presence of the Lord within ultimately determined his attitude to the Jumun. That is, Su-un came to believe that the chanting of the Jumun and the meditative drawing of the yeongbu fulfilled an identical purpose: to affect an awareness of the 'my-heart-is-your-heart' principle of the indwelling of divinity in the human heart.

This growth in Su-un's understanding of the Jumun, of the yeongbu and of the coalescing of their purpose indicates a change not only in his self-image, but also in his perceived relationship with the Lord of Heaven. Su-un's initial image of himself is one of uniqueness, of being the first one chosen in fifty thousand years:⁸

⁸ YDG, Ch 3, lines 8–9.

the one chosen to receive the elixir of immortality from Hanul-n im.⁹ His portrayal of the deity in these early passages is stern and authoritarian. This portrayal gives way in his later writings to the description of a deity who is intimate and compassionate.¹⁰

The change in Su-un's attitude to his two seminal symbols, together with the change in his perceived relationship with the deity, implies an associated change in his self-image: from a subservient, silent recipient of divine gifts, to someone who shared one heart with Cheonju, the ultimate power in the universe.

At the conclusion to Chapter 5 it was noted that Su-un used two terms to describe a person who has achieved this state of union. The terms are *kunja*, a superior individual according to Confucian ideals, and *chisang sinseon*,¹¹ a Taoist immortal living on earth. These terms appear in *Gyohun-ga*, which was written when Su-un's self-image was in a state of transition, and therefore they do not entirely represent the image he had of himself at the time immediately preceding his death. Yet the fact that, even at the intermediary stage, Su-un used terms from two religious traditions to describe an individual who had been especially chosen by the Lord of Heaven to inform humanity of his Way indicates that, for Su-un, traditional terminology was inadequate to describe his exalted status. New religious imagery and symbolism were called for.

What, then, can be deduced about Su-un's final self-image from the examination of his various Jumun? The image that emerges from this examination is similar to the one which resulted from the examination of the yeongbu. This image is of a new being, of a new creation, fully realized in his humanity through a dynamic union with the divinity, the result of which is the pouring of energy into, and revitalization of, all creation. It is this image that is expressed in the combined disciples' 1 and 2 Jumun, in the phrases *Chi ki keum chi, si Cheonju* as well as in the concept *Dong-gwi Il-che*.

This self-image also indicates a close, interdependent, even symbiotic relationship between the yeongbu and the Jumun. Although the chanting of the Jumun was a communal activity and the drawing of the yeongbu was practiced by individuals, the function of the two symbols was identical; that is, to enlighten Su-un's followers to the fundamental, egalitarian principle of the Donghak religion—namely that all humans are of one heart with the most powerful, yet vulnerable, force in the universe.

It is also clear from the examination of the yeongbu and of the Jumun that Su-un's self-image changed as he reflected on, and re-evaluated, his two symbols and as he struggled to understand his developing relationship with Cheonju, his Lord.

⁹ ASG, Ch. 5.

¹⁰ NHM, Ch. 6.

¹¹ GHG, Ch. 5, lines 37 and 38.

Su-un and the Lord of Heaven

Su-un's attempts to define his relationship with the Lord of Heaven have been mentioned frequently throughout this and the previous chapters. This material will not be repeated here.

What can be stated is that it was through the maturing of his relationship with his Lord that Su-un's purpose in life became increasingly clear. That is, as a result of constant and deep reflection on his human experience and on his experience of the divine, Su-un came to understand that his vocation as 'savior of the ignorant'—which was also the rationale for founding a new religion—was to inform all people, regardless of social status, gender, age, occupation or education, that, if they followed the precepts communicated to him by the Lord of Heaven and followed the Donghak Way, then they, like himself, could achieve peace, spiritual fulfillment and immortality.¹²

Su-un's relationship with the Lord of Heaven was such that he was not possessive about the knowledge and the status which, he believed, had been afforded him by his Lord. Had he been possessive about it, the authenticity of the 'my-heart-is-your-heart' relationship he espoused, and the verification of the principles he promoted through his two key symbols, would have come under serious question. Su-un's compassion for his fellow humans was a reflection of his relationship with his Lord. One suspects that, in his final days, Su-un had achieved a deep and lasting peace in this relationship, and that this state was reflected in his final self-image.

At the time of his voluntary arrest, the image which Su-un had of himself allowed him to face death with equanimity, as he believed himself to be infinitely powerful through union with the Lord of Heaven. Yet this image also allowed him to choose 'weakness' over strength and, like his Lord, to exercise complete and passive restraint. His final symbolic gesture, a prayerful offering of *cheong-su*, pure water, showed that he was totally prepared—in body, spirit, heart and mind—to embrace death freely and without restraint, confident that this embrace, through and with his Lord, would energize the universe and all creation.

In this context, how appropriate are the words of the Jumun:

¹² Kim yong-choon explains that eternal life, or immortality, in this context would be regarded not as something belonging to the province of heaven or hell, but rather as 'the never-ending embrace of a person with honor in the minds of mankind': Kim yong-choon, 'an analysis of Early Ch'ondogyo Thought', *Korea Journal*, vol. 17, no. 10, 1977, p. 45. See also the discussion on Cheondo-gyo views of life and death in Chapter 8 ('Jisang Cheonguk: The Kingdom of Heaven on Earth').

ultimate energy now within
 i long for it to pour into all living things
 bearing the l ord of Heaven,
 i shall become one with all creation
 remembering (the l ord) forever
 i shall discern the essence of all things.

it is also appropriate to postulate that Su-un was chanting the Jumun as he stepped forward to face his executioner.

Su-un's Final Self-Image

on the basis of the preceding study, the image of himself which Su-un projected was of a new creation, the like of which the world had never before experienced. Su-un saw himself finally as humanity's potential fully realized, a being who was in complete harmony with all creation and with the l ord of Heaven, with whom he shared one heart. in this manner he viewed himself as immortal, that is, as one who had achieved unity with divinity and who, correspondingly, was fully cognizant of the incapacity of earthly powers to diminish or destroy this exalted status.

Su-un's final self-image was shaped by his evolving understanding of the two symbols, the yeongbu and the Jumun, through which he communicated the meaning of his ecstatic encounter with the l ord of Heaven at yongdam Pavilion, mt Gumi, on 25 may 1860. Su-un's eclectic principle of adopting and adapting symbols, images and even the names of the deity from other religious traditions, most evident in the creation of the yeongbu and the Jumun, indicates an understanding of himself as a creative religious innovator who believed that his experience of the l ord of Heaven was unique, and who required new symbols and new images to communicate it.

While Su-un may have considered his experience of the l ord of Heaven to be unique, he did not accord himself the same status. rather than clinging possessively to his blessings and good fortune, he attempted through the yeongbu, the Jumun, his scriptures and his personal example to share these gifts with others, regardless of their social status, gender, age or education. This suggests that the image he had of himself was that of a *primus inter pares*, 'first among equals'. This is verified by the phrase *Dong-gwi Il-che*, through which Su-un indicated that, together with him, all people were 'to return together to one body' that is, 'evolve towards unity'. in communicating this message of hope in desperate times, Su-un viewed himself as the l ord of Heaven's intermediary and emissary, uniting in his person both divine and human aspirations. This is evident in the way he conducted himself following his epiphany on mt Gumi and the physical and spiritual transformation which resulted from it: namely, as a living sign of his l ord's intervention in human history. for Su-un, it was no accident that this intervention occurred at a location which he considered sacred, in a country which, in spite of its destabilizing internal

struggles and looming threats from abroad, he believed was the new spiritual axis of the East, a locus where the divine and the human meet as one.

The way Su-un faced imminent death, brutal and humiliating as he knew it would be, with self-assurance and confidence is evidence of a person who is at peace with the universe and at one with the Lord who rules over it with infinite power and infinite restraint. This is the image of a person who believes that he has lived up to his chosen name: Che-u, 'savior of the ignorant'. n o longer ignorant, he himself is the first of many to be saved through adherence to the principles of the d onghak Way. Consequently, the words he spoke following his epiphany may describe his state of mind as he faced death with dignity and equanimity, setting a final example for his disciples to follow:

How fortunate am i to be immortal and everlasting.
i would not exchange this for gold or silver.¹³

In conclusion, I suggest that the final image that Su-un had of himself is of a person who, although he is about to die, knows that his spirit will live on in his teachings and in his relationship with the Lord of Heaven, with whom he shares one heart and through whom he beckons all humanity to discover the sacred refuge which lies within.

¹³ *ASG*, Ch. 5, lines 26–8.

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Chapter 7

Haewol and the unity of a ll Creation

Following Su-un's execution, the Tonghak organization was dissolved by the government, and Su-un's followers, persecuted and demoralized, sought refuge in the mountains or other areas remote from the authorities' gaze. The dispirited group was not large, probably numbering a few score, or at most a few hundred members. One consequence of their dispersion was that the simple organizational structure which Su-un instituted and which consisted of *jeop* [local units], *jeopju* [unit leaders] and *jeopsa* [administrators/clerks] collapsed.¹ Susan Shin makes the following comment on the Su-un's death and its consequences:

His death and official harassment scattered the believers and disrupted what little formal organization there was. Local authorities could rest secure in the belief that Tonghak was moribund. There was, in fact, very little in this obscure sect to suggest the moral force that would shake the dynasty.²

Organizational Reconstruction under Haewol

Tonghak—proscribed, outlawed and all but a spent force—may well have disappeared at this stage, had it not been for the tenacity and commitment of a single individual: Choe Si-hyeong, Haewol, the *Sinsa* ('divine Teacher'), the religion's second leader. Impressed by Haewol's commitment to the Tonghak Way and to its teachings, which entailed his labouring during the day and studying and training at night, Su-un chose him as his successor in the autumn of 1863.³ Haewol's period of apprenticeship under Su-un was to last only a few months.

The restructuring of the tiny, fractured organization took time. Following Su-un's execution, Haewol in particular, as leader of an outlawed movement, was sought by government authorities and had to flee civilization and hide in the forests and valleys of the Taebaek and Sobaek ranges to evade capture. Haewol spent several decades in hiding, traveling in disguise to support the small dispirited

¹ Shin Yong-ha, 'Conjunction of Tonghak and the Peasant War of 1894', *Korea Journal*, vol. 34, no. 4, 1994, p. 67.

² Susan S. Shin, 'The Tonghak movement: from Enlightenment to revolution', *Korean Studies Forum*, no. 5, Winter/Spring 1978–9, pp. 30–31.

³ Yoon Suk-san, *Chondogyo*, 2nd printing, Seoul: Cheondo-gyo Central Headquarters, 2005, p. 17.

remnant of Donghak believers.⁴ It was during this period that he was given the nickname Pottari ('bundle') by the Donghak faithful: a nickname descriptive of a person continually on the move who, being as easily transportable as a bundle of sticks, never settled for more than two or three days in any one place as he rallied and encouraged Su-un's scattered followers.⁵

Haewol gradually began to rebuild the Donghak organization along the lines of Su-un's simple structure, the form of which he had originally suggested to Su-un.⁶ In 1884 Haewol elaborated on this system by introducing the *Yugim Jaedo* ('Six responsibilities'), which are as follows:

Gyojang: Chief inspector
Gyosu: Teacher
Dojip: Chief administrator
Jipgang: Judge
Daejeong: Counselor
Geonjeong: Censor⁷

This structure was replicated in local congregations. In 1893, Haewol established a leadership structure to augment the Six responsibilities system, with a central headquarters, *Taodoso*, administered by Haewol himself and overseeing district units, *P'o*, which were broken down into smaller local units, *Jeop*.⁸

It was through this decentralized administrative structure that the organization communicated with their leader, Haewol, and vice versa. The structure was made more cohesive and vibrant through the introduction of regular *Gaejeop* (worship) services in each local congregation.⁹ In this way Donghak not only survived, but grew.

⁴ Shin Yong-ha, 'Conjunction of Tonghak and the Peasant War of 1894' (above, n. 1), p. 67.

⁵ Yi Ton-hwa (ed.), *Cheondo-gyo Changgeonsasa II [History of the Establishment of Cheondo-gyo, Part 2]*, Seoul: Taedong Press, 1933, p. 35, quoted in B. Weems, *Reform, Rebellion and the Heavenly Way*, Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1964, p. 16.

⁶ Shin Yong-ha, 'Conjunction of Tonghak and the Peasant War of 1894' (above, n. 1), p. 67.

⁷ Quoted in Weems, *Reform, Rebellion and the Heavenly Way* (above, n. 5), p. 18.

⁸ Shin Yong-ha, 'Conjunction of Tonghak and the Peasant War of 1894' (above, n. 1), p. 70.

⁹ The worship service was refined by the third leader of Donghak/Cheondo-gyo, Son Byeong-hi (Uiam) in 1906 to include: chanting of the Jumun; the administration of *cheongsu* (pure water); the presentation of *seongmi* (sincerity rice); and *kido* (prayer). For a comparison with contemporary Cheondo-gyo liturgical practice, see Kobyoungchul, 'The Religion of the Heavenly Way's Sunday Service in Korea: its meaning and Structure', *The Review of Korean Studies*, Vol. 10, no. 1, March 2007, pp. 33-49.

Spiritual Reconstruction under Haewol

As noted in the introduction, as well as reviving and restructuring the Donghak organization, Haewol reconstituted Su-un's scriptures and had them published, printed and disseminated, which laid a solid foundation for a spiritual revival of the religion. In addition to his organizational and publishing activities, Haewol continued to reflect on and to develop the traditions which he inherited from the founder, particularly those which were central to the threatened creed. Haewol was a prolific writer and produced thirty-seven literary works, primarily in Chinese characters, but also in Korean script; these were collected in a volume entitled *Haewol Sinsa Bopseol* [*The Divine Teacher Haewol's Sermons on the Law*].

On the basis of a notation in *Cheondo-gyo Changgeonsa*,¹⁰ a number of scholars write of Haewol as having been a person of low birth and very little learning, and consequently incapable of rewriting the Donghak scriptures without considerable assistance from more learned colleagues.¹¹ However, an alternative view of Haewol's scholarly ability is offered by Choe Chong-gan in his book *Members of Choe Si-hyeong's Family*. In this work, the author verifies Haewol's literary ability by quoting Kim Kye-sa, a contemporary and fellow student of Haewol who categorically stated that the rumour that Haewol could not read Chinese or Korean characters was, from first-hand experience, totally false.¹²

One of Haewol's works is entitled *Yeongbu Jumun*. The fact that Haewol devoted one book exclusively to the yeongbu and the Jumun is indicative of their importance to him and of the close relationship between the two symbols. The following are extracts from this book.

Haewol's Reflection on the Yeongbu: Union of Humanity and Divinity in the Human Heart

The heart is the essential Heaven in your body and the entire creation is of one heart. The heart is innate in humans and post-natal energy is innate, yet also acquired. Creation's heart is the Heavenly Spirit and Creation's energy is clear and bright. This energy and heart spread over the entire universe.

Scripture says: 'I have a spiritual talisman in the shape of *gung gung*, the great moral principle, the essence of all things in the universe. Take this talisman and deliver humanity from sickness.'

Therefore the shape of *gung eul* is that of the heart.

If your heart and energy are in harmony, you will be in harmony with Heaven. *Gung* is the Heavenly *gung* and *eul* is the Heavenly *eul*. Therefore *gung*

¹⁰ Weems, *Reform, Rebellion and the Heavenly Way* (above, n. 5), p. 15.

¹¹ Choe Dong-hui, 'The Life and Thought of Ch'oe Che-u', *Korea Journal*, vol. 11, 1971, p. 26. Weems, *Reform, Rebellion and the Heavenly Way* (above, n. 5), p. 15.

¹² Choe Chong-gan, *Haewol Choe Si-hyeong-ga-eui Salam-tul* [*Members of Haewol Choe Si-hyeong's Family*], Seoul: Ungjin Publishers, 1994, p. 44.

eul is our Way's yeongbu, and is also the shape of all creation. if a holy person takes *gung eul* and behaves according to the Way of Heaven, all living things can be saved.

The Great absolute is abstruse reason. if you are aware of this truth, it is a panacea for all ills.

These days people know only of medicine that can cure bodily ills, but they do not know that if they regulate their hearts they can cure themselves. How can they take medicine without regulating their hearts? They believe only in the medicine and not in Heaven.

if my heart causes you distress, this will result in illness. but i can heal, if my heart is regulated. if you do not clearly distinguish the reason for this, you will be unable to make our followers distinguish it either. following your discussions, say to the faithful: 'if you regulate your heart and focus your mind and energy, even if you drink only a glass of cold water, it will act as medicine.'¹³

in this passage, Haewol develops the theme proclaimed by his predecessor Su-un by stating that *gung* and *eul*, which reside in the heart, represent the Great moral Principle (Taeguk), and the physical manifestation of this reality is the yeongbu. ('The shape of *gung* and *eul* is that of the heart ... *gung* and *eul* is our Way's yeongbu and is also the shape of all creation.') Haewol takes an additional step when he states that the effectiveness of the yeongbu, or of any medicine for that matter, depends on whether or not individuals have regulated their hearts. His final statement that a glass of cold water can act as medicine if one's heart is regulated and one's mind and energy are focused, is the final step away from any attempt to attribute magical properties to the yeongbu.

in other words, even the yeongbu, which contains the 'shape of all creation', is of little use if a person's heart is not in the proper state. This is a definite shift in emphasis from the yeongbu per se to the human heart as the principle by which healing, both spiritual and physical, is effected. yet, for Haewol, the yeongbu retains its primacy within the donghak religion, as it symbolizes the life force of the universe contained in the human heart.

Haewol's Reflection on the Jumun: Service with Humility

Haewol writes:

The Jumun's twenty-one characters explicate the Great universe, the Great Spirit and the Great life.

¹³ Haewol, *YBJM, HWSSBS, CGGJ*, pp. 289–91. (This reference is to the volume *Yeongbu Jumun*, which forms part of the section *Haewol Sinsa Bopseol* [*The Divine Teacher Haewol's Sermons on the Law*], which in turn forms part of *Cheondo-gyo Gyeongjeon* [*Compilation of Cheondo-gyo Scriptures*]).

Si Cheonju Chohwa Cheong refers to the fundamental transformation of all things.

Yeongse Bulmang Mansa Chi refers to the original sustenance of life.

The Chinese classics state that ‘attending’ (*Si*) means the spirit is inside and energy is outside, so that all people are aware of this immutability. The spirit inside refers to the heart of a new-born baby when it first enters the world.

o utside energy means that at the time of conception it is the principle of energy’s material response in bodily form.

Chi Ki Keum Chi Won Wi Dae Gang is an explanation of the preceding statements.

Humans are born and live their lives with the d ivine Spirit innate within them. b ut it is not true to state that it is only humans who have the Spirit within. a ll things are infused with the d ivine Spirit. b irdsong also carries aloft the l ord of Heaven ...

a ll things can be created only after being given this heart and this spiritual energy. a ll creation then is pierced through with one heart and one spirit.¹⁴

Comparing Haewol’s with Su-un’s explanation of the characters of the Jumun, it is apparent that Haewol is offering a broad interpretation of the Jumun rather than an explanation of its individual characters. in the quotation above Haewol links two closely interrelated principles: that of the d ivine Spirit being innate in human beings and indeed in all things, and that of all creation being pierced through with one heart and one energy. Haewol also brings clarity to an issue which was addressed but not finally resolved in Chapter 5 regarding Su-un’s attitude to the Jumun in the final stages of his life. Specifically, considering the close relationship which existed between Haewol and Su-un and which no doubt extended to the way they viewed the yeongbu and the Jumun, Haewol’s statement ‘Humans are born and live their lives with the d ivine Spirit innate within them’ strongly supports the proposition made at the end of Chapter 5 that a development did take place in Su-un’s attitude to the Jumun, in that the purpose of its chanting was to raise an awareness of the presence of the d ivine Spirit within, and this purpose was distinct from the performative function of summoning the d ivine Spirit.

The principle of the unity of all things, based as it is on the corresponding principle of the d ivine Spirit’s being innate in them, lays the foundation for Haewol’s statement *in si Cheon* (‘humans are Heaven’).¹⁵ in *Sudo Peop*, Haewol links the concept *in si Cheon* with the Jumun when discussing its actual function.

He states:

¹⁴ Haewol, *YBJM, HWSSBS; CGGJ*, pp. 292–4.

¹⁵ Haewol, *DICM [Interacting Principle Between People and Things]; HWSSBS, CGGJ*, p. 278.

if you only memorize the Jumun without thinking of the Way, it is not right.
 but thinking of the Way without memorizing the Jumun is also not correct.
 Therefore, do not hesitate even for a moment to develop an adoring heart.
 i am Heaven. Heaven is me. Heaven and i are one body.¹⁶

According to Haewol, memorizing the Jumun is essential for practicing the Way of *donghak*. The Jumun and the Way are so intricately linked that concentrating on one without taking the other into consideration is not correct practice. In the above quotations Haewol shifts the emphasis of the Jumun away from the pedagogical purpose which Su-un's discussion with the visiting scholars exemplifies, towards a more functional use of the incantation. Memorizing rather than understanding is stressed. This memorization, together with the consistency of action which accompanies the indwelling of the Lord of Heaven in one's heart, is considered essential to correct practice of the *donghak* Way.

However, Haewol offers words of caution to *donghak* members who might think that their new status as 'Heaven' places them in a position of superiority towards those around them. Haewol writes:

Humans are Heaven and to serve a person is to serve Heaven. many of my followers put on airs and this saddens me. i also had this pride in my heart, but i didn't act it out because the Lord is in my heart and i fear that this feeling is incompatible with the Lord of Heaven's presence.

if people have a proud and indulgent heart, what can they do? i have met many people but i have not found anyone who appreciates learning. Proud people are far from the Way. but upright people are close to the Way. a person who interacts honestly with others is close to the Way.¹⁷

Haewol's entire theological/philosophical/ethical theory is outlined in the first sentence above, the introductory sentence to his work *Daein Cheopmul*. The phrase 'humans are Heaven' is examined immediately below. The sentence's second phrase, *sa in yeo Cheon* (*treat humans as God*), remains today as a guiding principle in Cheondo-gyo ethics.¹⁸

Service with humility is emphasized by Haewol as being fundamental to practicing the Way. Memorizing the Jumun may be essential to practicing the Way, but it must be accompanied by a spirit of service with humility towards one's fellow human beings. Haewol is quite explicit in his emphasis that service with humility must be offered to all, especially to the most vulnerable. His reason for doing so is directly in line with Su-un's principle of *Si Cheonju* ('bearing the Lord of Heaven'). In his book *Nae Sudo-mun* [*Cultivation of the Family*], Haewol

¹⁶ Haewol, *SDP* [*The Practice of Asceticism*], *HWSSBS*; *CGGJ*, p. 335.

¹⁷ Haewol, *DICM*, *HWSSBS*; *CGGJ*, pp. 278–9.

¹⁸ This term is examined in the following chapter.

advises against hitting a child, for Hanul-n im is present in children and to hit a child is to hit the Lord of Heaven.¹⁹

Haewol thus adds a moral imperative to Su-un's phrase 'bearing (serving) the Lord of Heaven' (*si Cheonju*). As noted, Haewol developed this principle into the phrase *in si Cheon*: 人是天 ('humans are Heaven'). Through this development, Haewol signifies a change in the relationship between humans and Cheonju. For Su-un, humans, in 'bearing the Lord of Heaven', become one with all creation, which involves a personal relationship with the deity. Haewol develops this relationship into one which is more all-embracing—'humans are Heaven'—in which humans are identified with the cosmos. This development laid the foundation for a further progression, effected by Son byeong-hi (Uiam), the third leader of Donghak, through the term 人乃天: *in nae Cheon*, 'humans are God'.

While the purpose of this book does not permit a lengthy analysis of the relationship between Heaven and the Lord of Heaven in Korean and Chinese religion and philosophy, it is interesting to note that, in reference to the above, the Chinese character for 'person', with an extra horizontal stroke becomes 'great person', 大, and with one more horizontal stroke placed appropriately above becomes the character for 'heaven', 天. Thus, for those who read Donghak scriptures in their original language, the phrases 人是天 (*in si Cheon*) and 人乃天 (*in nae Cheon*) evidence a pictorial as well as a theological/philosophical relationship, in a way which is lacking in the terms 'humans are Heaven' and 'humans are God'. In this context, the Korean expression *sa go bang sik* ('way of thinking') is applicable in that the structure of language itself facilitates the understanding of a difficult philosophical/theological concept.

Haewol's Reflection on the Unity of All Creation

Haewol continues the theme of unity with, and respect for, all creation in *Cheonji Pumo* [*Heaven, Earth, Father, Mother*].

Heaven and Earth are parents, and parents are Heaven and Earth. Heaven, Earth and parents are a single unity. Nowadays people are only aware²⁰ when parents' conceive. They are not aware of the principle and spirit of the conception of Heaven and earth [...]

For 50,000 years we have been unaware of the principle of Heaven and Earth as parents. If all created things do not recognize Heaven and Earth as parents, how can they respect Heaven and Earth as much as they support and respect their parents? We should remember to treat Heaven, Earth and parents with as much care as when we approach deep water and tread on treacherous ice. We should respect them sincerely and fulfill our filial duty. This is how children are supposed to act [...]

¹⁹ Haewol, *NSDM, HWSBS; CGGJ*, p. 369.

²⁰ *Sc.* 'of the concept and reality of parenthood'.

When we are about to eat we must thank Heaven and Earth for their benefits. This is fundamental. Humans are not the only ones who are clothed and who eat. The sun is also clothed; the moon also eats. Humans cannot be separated from Heaven and Heaven cannot be separated from humans. Therefore, human breath, human movement and human food and clothing are the frame for harmony.

Heaven depends on humans, humans depend on eating. To eat one bowl of rice is to understand all things.

Human dependence on food and clothing assists creation, and Heaven depends on humans to manifest harmony. All human breath, movement, bending and stretching, food and clothing are from the Lord of Heaven's [Cheonju's] harmonious power.

The harmonious frame uniting Heaven and humans cannot be separated for one instant.²¹

Haewol reiterates this message of harmony in *Do Kyeol* [*The Secret Way*]:

The four characters in the term *Cheonji Pumo* are each distinct, yet their meaning is in one character—Heaven. Heaven and Earth are parents and parents are Heaven and Earth. Originally there was no distinction in *Cheonji Pumo*. Life is Heaven and Heaven gives life to all humans.

This is what the ancient sages said: Heaven is called father and Earth is called mother.²²

Regulating the heart, humility with service toward humanity, unity of, and respect for all creation, humans are Heaven—these are the central themes which pervade Haewol's writing. In *Daein Cheopmul* Haewol offers the following advice to the Donghak faithful, in an admonition which cryptically and effectively summarizes his attitude to all life and to all creation. 'When interacting with people and handling things, hide what is evil, praise what is virtuous and revere the Lord.'²³

Summary

The numerical growth and geographical expansion of Donghak under Haewol's leadership are proof that the Sinsa was responsible for the effective reconstruction of the religion following Su-un's execution. Haewol's patient and dedicated leadership resuscitated an all but moribund organism, fashioning it into a vibrant organization, which proved to be an effective tool not only for the development of the religion, but also, albeit unwittingly, for the rebellion which shared the Donghak name.

²¹ Haewol, *CJPM*, *HWSSBS*; *CGGJ*, pp. 249–54.

²² Haewol, *DK*, *HWSSBS*; *CGGJ*, p. 255.

²³ Haewol, *DICM*, *HWSSBS*; *CGGJ*, p. 252.

Haewol is universally recognized as being responsible for the reconstruction and reorganization of d onghak and for the publication of Su-un's scriptures in two volumes, *Donggyeong Daejeon* and *Yongdam Yusa*. However, Haewol's contribution to d onghak theology and spirituality through the publication of thirty-seven reflections on the Daesinsa's writings should not be underestimated. It is no understatement to say that Haewol not only revived the d onghak organization, but also took the founder's teachings to another level, providing a solid platform both for the survival of the religion and for its spiritual growth and development.

What this chapter attempts to emphasize will, hopefully, also prove to be true: namely that the organizational reconstruction of d onghak under its second leader cannot be divorced from its spiritual regeneration under his tutelage. Several brief quotations from Haewol's writings appear in these pages. These spiritual gems give only the merest hint of the treasures that reside in Haewol's spiritual oeuvre. It is the author's hope that the wisdom and spiritual insights contained in Haewol's writings are made available to the much wider audience they unquestionably deserve.

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Chapter 8

Su-un's legacy

Su-un's life and teaching gave birth to a number of foundational religious, philosophical and ethical principles which, as the previous chapter indicates, were further developed by Haewol and today continue to act as guiding principles in the Cheondo-gyo religion as it celebrates the 150th anniversary of Su-un's enlightenment at yongdam on mt Gumi.¹ These principles serve as the foundation for d onghak/Chondo-gyo's religious and social egalitarianism. in late nineteenth-century Korea under the Joseon dynasty, where these concepts were born, promulgated and practiced, they were truly revolutionary. in a more liberal, better educated, technologically astute and democratically aware world, the principles remain radical enough not to be taken for granted.

Consequently, the principles are not the province of Cheondo-gyo alone, but have flowed over into other new religious movements in Korea and beyond, permeating the Korean psyche and altering its self-perception. Some of these principles are elucidated below (the list is representative rather than exhaustive):

O-sim cheuk yeo-sim: 'my-heart-is-your-heart' spirituality (which interrelates with, and permeates)

Si Cheonju: 'bearing the Lord of Heaven';

in si Cheon: 'humans are Heaven'

in nae Cheon: 'humans are God.'²

A note of clarification is required here regarding the etymology of the three phrases listed above. Su-un's term, 侍天主(*Si Cheonju*: 'bearing the Lord of Heaven'), implies a personal relationship with the Lord of Heaven who, as Su-un noted in his explanation of the Jumun in *Nonhak-mun*, 'is to be treated with utmost respect and served, as one would one's parents'.³ His 'my-heart-is-your-heart' spirituality further defines the intimacy of the relationship between humanity and the deity.

Haewol's development of the phrase into *in si Cheon* (人是天), 'humans are Heaven', takes the radical step of equating humans with Cheon, Heaven, and of dropping the character *ju*, 'Lord'. The question arises, do the concepts Cheon and

¹ 1unar Calendar: 5th day, 4th month, 2009. Solar Calendar: 29 April 2009.

² in his years as opposition leader, former President of Korea and Nobel Prize winner Kim Dae-jung had the characters 人乃天 hanging on the wall behind his desk. For his comments on d onghak and its place in Korean history, see Kim Dae-jung, 'is Culture destiny?', *Foreign Affairs*, November–December, 1994, p. 191.

³ *NHM*, Ch. 13.

Cheonju differ significantly? That is, does Haewol distinguish between Heaven and the Lord of Heaven? Haewol uses both terms in his writings, often in close proximity. For example:

all human breath, movement, bending and stretching, food and clothing are from the Lord of Heaven's [Cheonju's] harmonious power. The harmonious frame uniting Heaven [Cheon] and humans cannot be separated for one instant.⁴

a problem which presents itself in attempting to answer these questions is that, unless one has a clear understanding of the Donghak/Cheondo-gyo concept of the deity, one's attempt to answer the question becomes circuitous to the point of losing one's way. Rather than attempt an explanation of this concept, I will refer the reader to Yoon Suk-san's explanation of the deity and the Cosmos in the section below, on *Jisang Cheonguk* (the Kingdom of Heaven on earth).

The point I do wish to examine here is the difference, if any, between 人是天 (*in si Cheon*), 'humans are Heaven' (Haewol), and the phrase used by the third leader of Donghak, Son Uiam (and the one by which the Cheondo-gyo religion is identified): 人乃天 (*in nae Cheon*), 'humans are God'.⁵

Obviously, the first and last characters are the same in both phrases, representing 'humans' and 'Heaven' respectively. If there is a difference, it would be located in the two adjoining copulae, 是 (*nae*) and 乃 (*si*). However, as both share the same meaning, 'is, are, be', it is logical to deduce that the meaning of the terms 人是天 and 人乃天 is identical, namely 'humans are Heaven', and that the translation of the terms into English differs for non-linguistic reasons.

One possible reason for this difference is that westerners in general make a clear distinction between the terms God and Heaven, whereas, as is evident from Haewol's and Uiam's writings and verified by Yoon Suk-san's explanation below, Donghak/Cheondo-gyo philosophy and theology which developed after Su-un's death does not. With the growth of Christianity in twentieth-century Korea, a distinction may have been made within the Cheondo-gyo organization to express the relationship between humans and the deity in a way which could be more easily understood outside its ranks. The result, identification of humans with 'God', carries with it not only the gravitas of the Cheondo-gyo attitude to the deity and to the Cosmos, but expresses for English speakers, Christians, westerners and so on a concept which is lacking in 'humans are Heaven', that is, a relationship which is intimate to the point of identification. Putting it bluntly, the term Heaven has for these categories of people more to do with location than with relationship. In other words, they might very well inquire: 'How could human beings be Heaven and in Heaven at the same time?'

⁴ Haewol, *CJPM, HWSBS, CGGJ*, p. 254.

⁵ The character 人 is usually translated into English as 'man' or 'mankind'. Correspondingly, the phrase 人乃天 usually appears in English as 'man is God'.

Consequently, while the respective meanings of the phrases 人是天 and 人乃天 differ marginally if at all, their translations into English, 'humans are Heaven' and 'humans are God', differ substantially. However, understood correctly and in context, this difference can be considered culturally and theologically appropriate. What is at issue here is different ways of thinking and believing struggling to find common ground in a way which is as respectful, appropriate and as accurate as possible.

i see no problem with 人乃天 being translated into English as 'humans are God' if one remains aware that, while not linguistically accurate, the translation is both a contextually appropriate and a theologically valid way of expressing a concept which ultimately defies human categorization. The quest to construct a linguistic bridge linking separate worlds of faith and ways of perceiving reality, both seen and unseen, is in itself an enlightening and rewarding experience.

Sa in yeo Cheon: To serve a person is to serve Heaven

This statement is a direct quotation from Haewol, as recorded in his work *Daein Cheopmul*: 'Humans are Heaven and to serve a person is to serve Heaven.'⁶ as noted previously, this phrase is more commonly interpreted in the modern Cheondo-gyo era as: 'Treat humans as God.' Kim yong-choon comments:

The doctrine of *sain yoch'on*, which was pronounced by Haewol, the Second Great Leader, was a direct challenge to the age-old system of class or discriminatory ethics. It provided a new revolutionary norm of inter-human relationships and stimulated and awakened the spirit of the masses in regard to the new reality of equality and justice.

Although Haewol, the *Sinsa*, phrased the notion *sain yoch'on*, its essence was already present in the teaching and practice of Suun, the *Taesinsa*. Suun's teaching of man's essential divinity or man's unity with God had rich implications of basic dignity, equality, and justice in inter-human relationships.⁷

Sa in yeo Cheon is the natural consequence of the Donghak/Cheondo-gyo belief in the immanence of the divinity within humans and lays the foundation for the religion's social and ethical policy and practice.

Poguk anmin: Protect the nation, secure peace (for the people)

This saying became a militaristic rallying point in the Donghak Peasant Rebellion. This was definitely not Su-un's intention when he wrote the phrase. This is not to deny that Su-un vociferously opposed Japanese incursions into Korea and the destruction that these caused. Su-un's attitude towards the Japanese is

⁶ Haewol, *DICM, HWSBS, CGGJ*, pp. 278.

⁷ Kim yong-choon, *The Cho'ondogyo Concept of Man*, Seoul: Pan Korea book Corporation, 1989, p. 78.

unambiguous—an attitude he shared with a majority of, if not all, Koreans. in *Ansimga* Su-un states:

The plundering Japanese dogs should rue what they have done. What did they gain by invading our country?⁸ Had there had been no great ministers like o seong [l ee Han-bok 1556–1618] and Hanum (l ee d uk-Hyung, 1556–1613) who could have preserved the sovereignty of our nation? o ur country today has no such wise persons.⁹

yet, on the basis of the evidence presented in previous chapters, Su-un's Way was oriented toward spiritual union with the l ord of Heaven, humanity and all creation, with Korea replacing China as the repository of truth and the locus of heavenly favour and benevolence. it should be remembered that what became a rallying cry during the d onghak r ebellion was originally phrased as a question by Su-un: 'How shall we find a way to protect the nation and secure peace?'¹⁰ His response, the d onghak Way, advocated a spiritual rather than a military solution. a s such, the question and the solution remain equally relevant today.

Dong-gwi Il-che: All people evolve towards unity

Dong-gwi Il-che played a formative role in d onghak/Cheondo-gyo ethical practice. it originates in a rhetorical question which Hanul-n im, the l ord of Heaven, asks Su-un: 'How could you know at the age of forty that countless people would unite as one with the Way?'¹¹ The phrase 'unite as one with the Way' (*Dong-gwi Il-che*) became one of the central tenets on which d onghak/Cheondo-gyo social theory is based. its literal meaning is 'return together to one body'.¹²

in the section following the analysis of the Jumun in the two-volume publication commemorating the centenary of the d onghak Peasant r ebellion, o ik-jae explains the concept of *Dong-gwi Il-che* as follows:

d onghak-gwi il-che means that all people come to the realization that Heaven and humans are one and, returning to the one truth, become united. This means that all people become one, compatriots and all humanity become one, the hearts and minds of all people become one and return to the one truth.

⁸ The reference is to the Hideyoshi invasion by Japan in 1592 and to the subsequent campaign in 1597 which, although ultimately unsuccessful, caused massive destruction in the Korean peninsula.

⁹ *ASG*, Ch. 8, lines 5–9.

¹⁰ *PDM*, Ch. 8.

¹¹ *GHG*, Ch. 5, line 4.

¹² Weems translates the phrase loosely as 'all life evolves toward a social oneness'. b. Weems, *Reform, Rebellion and the Heavenly Way*, Tucson: u niversity of a rizona Press, 1964, p. 10.

All conflict and irrationality is harmoniously resolved and a new unified creation restrains all conflicts and contradictions. It means emerging from a history of divisions and conflict and heading in the direction of peace and unity.

It means disposing of the 'self-sufficient heart' and adopting a 'my-heart-is-your-heart' mentality. Thus even with individual thought and behavior, hearts may be unified for the same purpose.

Dong-gwi Il-che is the ideology of cooperation which unifies and overcomes the extremes of thinking, individualism and totalitarianism, with the fundamentals of Cheon-in Hap-il: 'Heaven and humans are one', and Kae-cheon il-che: 'the one and the many are one'. Dong-gwi il-che is the ideology that overcomes the limitations of individualism and totalitarianism in order to pursue freedom and equality simultaneously.¹³

in a nation such as Korea, which is divided across the centre socially, economically, politically and to some extent culturally, and which has two of the largest standing armies in the world facing each other in an uneasy truce, the principle of *Dong-gwi Il-che* has even more relevance and immediacy.

Jisang Cheonguk: The kingdom of Heaven on earth

This principle follows logically from, and is intrinsically connected to, the principle of *Dong-gwi Il-che*. For modern Cheondo-gyo believers, Heaven is not something physically and spiritually removed from everyday life and accessed only after death. In order to understand the Cheondo-gyo concept of Heaven, it is essential to understand the Cheondo-gyo concept of the deity. Yoon Suk-san explains the latter as follows:

This God Hanulnim does not reside in a distant heaven far removed from human beings standing with their feet firmly planted on this earth. Rather, Hanulnim fills both heaven and earth. In other words, this God occupies every part of the universe. Hanulnim fills the Cosmos while also being 'concretely enshrined within my body'. This is the Chondogyo concept of God.¹⁴

Correspondingly, life and death for Cheondo-gyo believers can be explained as follows:

As mentioned above ... the vast Cosmos is a divine living organism. It follows, then, that the Chondogyo view on life is that the basis for the existence of all the

¹³ Oik-jae, 'Dong-gwi il-che' ['a ll people evolve towards unity'], in Ko, Mun-hae (ed.), *Donghak Heokmyeong 100 Junyeon Ginyeom Non Jong [Collection of Treatises on the Hundredth Anniversary of the Donghak Rebellion]*, vol. 1 (Seoul: Taekwang munhwasa, 1994), pp. 269–70.

¹⁴ Yoon Suk-san, *Chondogyo*, 2nd printing, Seoul: Cheondo-gyo Central Headquarters, 2005, p. 56.

myriad things of the universe is found in the one vast life that is the Cosmos; in other words, in Hanulnim. That is to say, all life is God and therefore is derived from the life that is the vast Cosmos. Therefore, if something dies, it returns to the vast life that is the Cosmos. in Chondogyo, therefore, dying is referred to as ‘returning to the place of one’s origin’ [*hwanweon*]. it conveys the same meaning of someone dying as the commonly used Korean expression ‘he (or she) returned [*tolagasida*]’.¹⁵

The Kingdom of Heaven on earth, then, can be equated with a cosmic kingdom which is embraced by, flows from and exists with and within the deity, is filled with ChiKi, ultimate energy—‘the vital force of Hanulnim’,¹⁶ is omnipresent, everlasting, and is as close as the human heart; or, as is explained simply and profoundly by Haewol ‘a ll creation then is pierced through with one heart and one spirit’.¹⁷

The Jumun

Chanting of the twenty-one character Jumun continues to play an intrinsic role in Cheondo-gyo public ritual and private practice. The Jumun is one of the five Practices (*O-gwan*) through which contemporary Cheondo-gyo members practice their faith and refine their spirit. These practices, originally formalized in Cheondo-gyo Sunday services in december 1911, are the incantation (*Jumun*), Pure Water (*cheongsu*), Service day (*si-il*), Prayer (*kido*) and Sincerity rice (*seong-mi*).¹⁸ Three out of the five—*Jumun*, *cheongsu* and *kido*—were part of donghak/Cheondo-gyo ritual practices prior to 1905¹⁹ and trace their origins directly back to Su-un. in the modern Sunday liturgical practice, the Jumun is chanted three times at the beginning of the Sunday service and twenty-one or one hundred and five times after the service.²⁰

as it was for Su-un and for Haewol, the Jumun continues to be for contemporary Cheondo-gyo members the means by which one becomes aware of the presence of the Lord of Heaven within one’s heart and within one’s fellow humans. The focus of its chanting is on raising awareness of a state of union with the divine, a union in which it is possible for each person to be of one heart with the Lord of the universe and to be on an equal standing with all human beings.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 68.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 59.

¹⁷ Haewol, *YBJM, HWSSBS, CGGJ*, p. 294.

¹⁸ Ko byoungchul, ‘The religion of the Heavenly Way’s Sunday Service in Korea: its meaning and Structure’, *The Review of Korean Studies*, Volume 10, no. 1, march 2007, p. 34. ‘Service day’ refers to the 11 a.m. Sunday service. ‘Sincerity rice’ is the portion of uncooked rice which Cheondo-gyo members set aside daily for the underprivileged and which is collected once a month by the Church.

¹⁹ *ibid.*, p. 40.

²⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 39 and 45.

Cheongsu: Pure Water

Pure water played an important role in Su-un's life and death. As noted in *Podeokmun*, Chapter 7, and in *Ansim-ga*, Chapter 5, the yeongbu ritual involved burning the mystical talisman, mixing the ashes with water and drinking the sacred medicine. The malleable yet enduring properties of water—a symbol of strength concealed in apparent weakness in Daoist philosophy—and the relationship of this symbolism to the shape of the Yeongbu have been examined in Ch. 4. Su-un's final request before his execution was for a bowl of pure water to be brought to him as he prayerfully composed himself for his execution.

The offering of pure water plays a central role in all Cheondo-gyo public liturgies. Ko Byoungchul describes the offering of pure water—the second part of Cheondo-gyo Sunday service ritual—as follows:

A woman picks up a vessel containing clean water from the church entrance and walks slowly towards the preacher; the choir sings. She puts the vessel on the small desk in front of the preacher and greets the master of the ritual. Then she leaves for the right side. The master of ritual opens the vessel lid.²¹

The master of ceremonies then leads the congregation in prayer. At the end of the service, the lid is placed back on the vessel of water.²² Regarding the symbolic meaning of offering pure water, Ko states: 'The symbolic meaning of offering clean water [...] is understood to be an object of faith, the martyrdom of Choe Jeu, and the root of all things [...] but it is also the a symbol of great enlightenment with the incantation.'²³

The offering of pure water also takes place in a familial setting, which Yoon Suk-san terms the 'Pure Water' practice.²⁴ The ritual involves three of the five above-mentioned Cheondo-gyo practices and was described to me by the Supreme Leader of Cheondo-gyo, the Venerable Kim Dong-hwan, during a visit to the Cheondo-gyo Central Headquarters, Seoul, in September 2007.

The ritual involves the family gathering at the parental home at 9 p.m. and sitting around a table or a small altar on top of which a bowl of pure water is placed.²⁵ The Supreme Leader described how, with his family gathered around

²¹ *ibid.*, p. 40.

²² *ibid.*

²³ *ibid.* Ko uses as references Pak In-ho, *Cheondogyo-sa [History of Cheondo-gyo]*, Seoul: Cheondo-gyo Central Administration, 1921, p. 21; I Yu Byeongdeok, *Donghakkwa Cheondogyo [Eastern Learning and the Heavenly Way]*, Seoul: Siinsa, 1987, p. 391; Im Ungil, *Sudowa insaeng [Spiritual Discipline and Human Life]*, Seoul: Cheondo-gyo Central Administration, 1992, p. 137; and *Cheondogyo Gyeongjeon [The Scriptures of Cheondogyo]*, Seoul: Cheondogyo Central Administration 2001, pp. 36–7, 62.

²⁴ Yoon Suk-san, *Chondogyo* (above, n. 14), p. 81.

²⁵ The instruments used in the Cheondo-gyo Cheongsu ritual are a stainless steel bowl which rests on a stainless steel dish. The lid of the bowl is embossed with the Cheondo-gyo

him, he removes the lid from the bowl and offers the water as a sacred offering. The family prays silently; then he signals the beginning of the next phase of the ritual, in which each member chants the Jumun quietly, 105 times. At the completion of the chanting, he places the lid back on the bowl of pure water, signaling the end of the ritual. The family then disperses quietly and reverently.

The properties of water are described as follows in the *dao de Jing*:

nothing in the world exceeds water in softness and weakness, yet nothing can surpass it in attacking the hard and the strong. nothing can replace it. Weakness overcomes strength. Softness overcomes hardness. This is known to all in the world, though none can practice it.²⁶

Together with the *yeongbu* and the *Jumun*, *cheong-su* can be considered a key symbol in Su-un's theology and cosmology—pure, gentle, powerful, yielding, the origin and the sustainer of life. These three symbols, individually and collectively, mirror an all-powerful, vulnerable being with a human–divine heart, which purifies and sanctifies all life in the universe through its pervasive presence.

Kido/Simgo

Quoting the *donghak*/Cheondo-gyo scholar Yi Ton-hwa, Kim Yong-Choon states: 'Prayer in *Ch'ondogyo* is ... essentially *simgo*, the "heart address"'.²⁷

At the beginning of Chapter 5, reference was made to a forty-nine-day prayer service performed in the spring of 1999 at the Chondo-gyo central church in Seoul, and to the communal chanting of the *Jumun*. It is appropriate to continue the account of this experience now.

After an hour of the communal and ethereal chanting of the *Jumun*, the stentorian voice of the minister in charge cried 'Simgo', signaling the beginning of the Cheondo-gyo practice of 'heart-prayer'. The change was immediate and complete. The packed church became totally silent as each person reflected on the presence of the Lord in their heart. The contrast between the harmonious chanting of the *Jumun* by hundreds of Cheondo-gyo faithful and this absolute silence was palpable.

The silence lasted just as long as the chanting before it. When the voice of the minister signaled that the service was over, each person stood and bowed reverently to the people around them, in recognition of the divine presence within their neighbour. The feelings of acceptance and joy that pervaded the community following the prayer service were obvious and very moving.

symbol at the centre; the symbol is framed by four Chinese characters for Heart, upright/True, Guard/Protect and Energy (Ki). The bowl contains three small stainless steel cups.

²⁶ Saitō, Chō, *Rōshi [Laozi: Dao-de jing]*, Tokyo: Shueisha, Zenshaku Kambun Taikei 15, 1979), Ch. 78.

²⁷ Kim Yong-Choon, *The Ch'ondogyo Concept of Man* (above, n. 7), p. 101 (quoting Yi Ton-hwa, *Ch'ondo Kyori Tokpon [Readings in Chondogyo Doctrine]*, Seoul: Chondogyo Central Headquarters, 1967, p. 75).

Consequent on this experience, it was not difficult for this outsider to believe that Su-un is still vibrantly alive in his scriptures, in the principles enumerated above, which flow from them, in the lives of the Cheondo-gyo believers and of those sympathetic to Su-un's teaching and his example, and, perhaps most importantly, in the cosmic embrace of the Lord of Heaven in the most intimate union of heart and mind.

The Locus of the Sacred

What, then, is Su-un's lasting legacy? The question could be answered in multiple ways—historically, philosophically, theologically, geo-politically, socio-culturally—and opinions within these categories would vary considerably, depending on one's particular school of thought. But if one had the opportunity to ask Su-un this question directly, what would his response be? I expect it would be something simple, along the lines of 'be constantly aware of the presence of the Lord of Heaven in your heart, and act accordingly'.

This is, I believe, Su-un's lasting legacy: his becoming aware, on 25 May 1860, of the presence of his Lord within his heart, and then his radiating this awareness in practical ways onto his followers. In Su-un's 'Eastern Learning' each individual has the opportunity to become the locus of the energizing force of the universe—a force which is, paradoxically, vulnerable in its 'sacred weakness'. Sharing one heart with the Lord of Heaven is, Su-un discovered, a source, not of power, but of service; service to one's fellow humans and to all creation, all of which are to be treated with the utmost respect and reverence. Creation is sanctified where the divine heart and human hearts beat as one; and, wherever this occurs, the ten places of refuge in *Jeonggam-nok* are multiplied accordingly. The result of this 'vulnerable force' radiating respect and reverence throughout creation is indeed *Jisang Cheonguk*, the Kingdom of Heaven on earth.

Su-un's legacy of respect and reverence for all individuals and for all creation had a lasting and formative effect on modern Korea and helped to shape egalitarian and democratic ideals which have served the southern half of the peninsula well into the latter part of the twentieth and early part of the twenty-first century. One hopes that these formative principles will eventually play their part in healing the peninsula when, one day, South and North Korea are united as one.

The water of Yongdam flows
 The source of the four seas.
 Spring returns to mt. Gumi
 a ll creation blossoms.²⁸

²⁸ *Jeol-gu (An Occasional Poem)*, DGDJ, CGGJ, pp. 72–3.

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Chapter 9

d onghak/Cheondo-gyo in Historical Perspective

The d onghak religion grew and expanded after the execution of Su-un due to a variety of reasons, some of which have already been considered. In Korean and East Asian history, however, the term d onghak is not associated solely with Choe Su-un and the d onghak/Cheondo-gyo religion. It is also linked to a rebellion which flowed out of the religion and its egalitarian teachings, yet is distinct from it. The rebellion and its dénouement will be examined briefly in this chapter, as will other historical events which shaped the Korean peninsula in this crucial period of Korea's history. This examination will attempt to place Su-un and the religion he founded in historical perspective, so that the elements which contributed to the emergence of Donghak as a religious and political force can be identified within the context of the national and international events which surrounded them.

Reasons for the Expansion of Donghak

The growth in d onghak following the death of its founder can be attributed to a variety of reasons in addition to the tireless leadership of Haewol and to the organizational and spiritual revival which he instituted within the institution. The core of these reasons can be traced back to the founder Su-un himself and to the principles which underpinned his fledgling religion.

First, while recognizing rather than demeaning, underestimating or, worse still, ignoring the strength of western powers, Su-un offered the oppressed populace of Korea an alternative: an eastern, Korea-centric world-view—the d onghak Way, which was based on a transcendent, all-embracing principle of intimate union with the most powerful entity in the universe, the Lord of Heaven. This afforded d onghak followers not only a new identity, but a new Korean identity, in which the principles of equality, dignity, and mutual respect played an intrinsic role.

Second, the d onghak principles of *O-sim cheuk yeo-sim* (my-heart-is-your-heart), *in si Cheon* (humans are Heaven), *Dong-gwi Il-che* (all people evolve towards unity) and *Jisang Cheonguk* (the Kingdom of Heaven on earth), offered the common people not only dignity through belief in their intrinsic worth, but hope for the future of their country and for justice for all its citizens. In this new society all were to be considered equal, irrespective of age, gender, education or prior status.

Third, the timing was right. H. Byron Earhart, in an article on new religions in Korea,¹ makes the following observations in a section entitled *An Interpretative Framework for New Religious Movements*:

i. background

The notion of new religious movements presupposes a prior tradition (classic or established religious tradition), and significant break therefrom, not just an inner criticism or reform.

ii. Preconditions and Timing

New religious movements arise out of a combination of factors:

- a) when the religious tradition reaches a condition of fossilization or stagnation;
- b) and when non-religious (social, economic, and political) factors reach a condition of crisis, disclosing a lack of confidence in the religious tradition, such that
- c) neither the established religious tradition nor an inner reform is able to speak to the critical and existential situation of the people.²

If one considers Earhart's observations together with the description in Chapter 3 outlining the desperate social and political situation in the first half of the nineteenth century, it is clear that the timing was right for the emergence of a new religion and of a new social order in Korea when Su-un relocated his family at Yongdam, Mt. Gumi and entered an intense period of prayer.

Fourth, fueled by rumours of disturbances of historic proportions in neighbouring China and Japan and of cataclysmic events on the Korean peninsula, apocalyptic literature such as *Jeonggam-nok* pervaded the common psyche, fertilizing it with an expectation that the end times were near and that, in these times of impending war and destruction, a *Jin-in* ('True man') would emerge to establish a just and equitable society on the Korean peninsula.

Fifth, as the Donghak religion and its organizational structure spread across the country and was embraced by the disaffected classes, for the first time in the nation's history a truly national alternative emerged to the status quo of neo-Confucian ethical and governance structures. This force was neither compatible with, nor welcomed by, a dynasty in steep decline. The increasing influence of Donghak offered the Joseon dynasty a final opportunity to exert its dwindling authority over the peasant class. Yet, drained of energy by ongoing power struggles between a powerful queen

¹ H. Byron Earhart, 'The new religions of Korea: a Preliminary interpretation', *Transactions*, vol. 49, 1974, p. 10.

² *ibid.*, p. 10.

on one side and the king's father and regent on the other, the ossifying structures of the Joseon dynasty did not (and probably could not) act decisively. As a result, in the 1880s and early 1890s Korea resembled a tinder-box awaiting a flame. The flame which lit the tinder-box was Donghak ('Eastern Learning').

Change of Focus, Change of Direction

The political focus of the Donghak organization under Haewol's leadership was initially directed towards exerting pressure on the central government to exonerate Su-un and to allow the Donghak faithful to practice their religion openly and without persecution. To this end, Donghak members held a three-day public memorial for Su-un at Ganghwamun in central Seoul, beginning on 11 February 1893. Caught off-guard by the scale and the vociferous nature of the memorial, King Kojong sent a message to the Donghak believers to the effect that he would accede to their requests if they returned quietly to their homes. Taking the king at his word, the assembled mass dispersed. The king promptly dismissed Yi Gyeong-sik, the governor of Jeolla province, for his inaction in not preventing Donghak members from traveling to Seoul, and correspondingly an order was given to clamp down on Donghak activity and prevent similar disturbances.³

As a result of this royal duplicity, a disillusioned Haewol called the Donghak faithful to assemble in Poun, Chungcheong province, for a twenty-one-day meeting beginning on 11 March 1893. It was clear to Haewol that the government's intractability on the issue of exonerating the Donghak founder and its countermeasure of suppressing the religion required a different approach from the organization. The 27,000 people who gathered at Poun took such an approach by calling with a united voice for the eradication of abuse and avarice by local government officials and gentry and for the expulsion of the Japanese and other foreigners from the country. This shift in direction from a failed lobby group to a mass movement with the dual mission of eradicating systemic local abuse and of protecting the nation from foreign influences was significant. It moved Donghak, together with its foundation principles of equality for all people under Heaven and dignity inherent in each individual, into a much larger socio-political framework.

The Poun assembly served not only to re-focus the energies of a religious movement which had suffered considerable and consistent setbacks; it also broadened the religion's agenda, as its key principles developed into socially and politically charged formulae through which the lower classes could vent their frustration and anger against the corruption endemic at every level of society and

³ Shinyong-ha, 'Conjunction of Tonghak and the Peasant War of 1894', *Korea Journal*, vol. 34, no. 4, 1994, p. 68. As mentioned in the introduction, the king simultaneously and urgently petitioned China for military assistance, which brought troops not only from China, but from Japan onto the Korean peninsula.

against the increasing economic and political hegemony of foreign powers, most notably Japan.⁴

Although large and impassioned, the Poun assembly was an orderly event which dispersed peacefully. However, the seeds of an uprising, once planted, could not easily be uprooted. The seeds sewn at Poun were nurtured and grew rapidly within the ready-made Donghak organizational infrastructure, which soon proved that it had the capability to sustain a nation-wide movement.

The transition from a religious organization to a social and political force, however, was by no means seamless, or even assured. It took very little time after the Poun assembly for ideological cracks to appear in the Donghak structure, cracks which originated at the very apex of the organization.

Division within Donghak

Internal division and conflict were conditions not unique to the Korean government at this time. As Donghak grew, so too did the divisions within its ranks. By 1894 the organization had split into two distinct geographical and ideological camps: a more religiously oriented northern assembly, under Haewol, and a more militaristic Southern assembly, under General Jeon bong-jun. The relationship between Haewol and General Jeon became increasingly fractious, as Haewol promoted passive resistance and General Jeon armed rebellion. Growing numbers of disaffected peasants rallied around General Jeon, in protest against brazen abuses of power by local government officials. Early in 1894, the general led a force of peasants which attacked a government office at Kobu in Jeolla province, forcing the local magistrate, Cho byeong-gap, who had a well-earned reputation for unconscionable venality and cruelty toward the peasant class, to flee. Thus began a call to arms to Donghak members and to the peasant class in general to band together in order to rid the country of all those who oppressed the poor and vulnerable in their midst.

Haewol vehemently opposed the call to arms by General Jeon, as he considered a militaristic solution to the nation's problems to be inimical to the teachings of Su-un and to his own principles of passive resistance to the government's persecution of Donghak. Circumstances, however, finally forced Haewol to reconsider his position. Yet it was not until the second phase of the Donghak rebellion that Haewol gave his reluctant support to the rebellion and allowed his northern assembly followers to join General Jeon's forces, as he perceived the Donghak Way to be under grave threat from internal and external forces and as he was no longer able to ignore the rage building within his own ranks following the ruthless

⁴ As noted in Chs 2 and 8, the phrase *Poguk anmin* ('protect the nation, secure peace (for the people)') became a rallying cry of the Donghak Peasant rebellion.

suppression of the Donghak army by Japanese troops.⁵ Haewol's support was not given lightly. It took the negotiating skill of a respected Donghak member, O Chiyong, to mediate an agreement between Haewol and General Jeon.⁶

Yet, as Suh Young-hee points out, the merger did not imply unity of purpose or ideology. It is important to note that Haewol acquiesced only in consideration of the wellbeing of his followers. The commonly held belief that the Second Peasant uprising entailed a united front between the Northern Assembly and the Southern Assembly is a misconception.⁷

Haewol's decision to support an armed rebellion, reluctantly taken though it was, had a defining effect on his future. He was identified by the government as a leader of the Donghak rebellion, a mantle which was surely not worn with ease by this humble man of peace.

The Donghak Peasant Rebellion

The Kobu Peasant uprising, which broke out in January 1894; the various phases of the Donghak Peasant rebellion, which followed; the rebellion's initial victories; and its final defeat by a combination of Japanese and Korean military – have all been covered compendiously, in historical and socio-political studies of Korea and East Asia, and will not be re-examined here.

A question which will be addressed briefly is: What exactly was the relationship between the Donghak Peasant rebellion and the Donghak religion? The following exchange, taken from the interrogation of General Jeon Bong-jun during his trial for creating an armed disturbance, is enlightening on this issue:

Question: What is the main purpose or doctrine of the so-called Tonghak?

Answer: To uphold morality [*susim*], to be guided by the principles of loyalty and filial piety, and to aim at helping the nation and giving peace to the people [*poguk anmin*].

Q.: Are you deeply devoted to the Tonghak teaching?

A.: Tonghak is the way to uphold morality and revere heaven. I am therefore deeply devoted ...

Q.: Are there many in Cholla province who accept the Tonghak teaching?

A.: In the aftermath of the uprisings, many deaths ensued. Now most of them are gone.

Q.: Are all of those whom you led at the beginning of the revolt Tonghaks?

⁵ Suh Young-hee, 'Tracing the Course of the Peasant War of 1894', *Korea Journal*, vol. 34, no. 4, 1994, p. 26.

⁶ b. Weems, *Reform, Rebellion and the Heavenly Way*, Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1964, p. 45.

⁷ Suh Young-hee, 'Tracing the Course of the Peasant War' (above, n. 5), pp. 26–7.

a.: The local leaders called chopchu were all Tonghaks. many men in the ranks, however, were patriotic and righteous persons without Tonghak affiliation ...⁸

The account is instructive in that it indicates a definite distinction between the rebellion and the religion in relation to those who participated in the former. Specifically, a majority of those who took part in the rebellion were not Donghak members, even though donghak ideals inspired and sustained the uprising. However, as General Jeon reports, one consequence of the rebellion and of its suppression was that the ranks of donghak faithful were severely decimated.

The state of the religion became even more parlous when its inspirational leader, Choe Si-hyeong (Haewol), was arrested in december 1898 and was executed for his leadership in the rebellion. His execution and the reason for it carry more than a hint of irony, considering that, like Su-un before him, Haewol was committed to the peaceful and harmonious interaction of all creation, as is attested by his writings. With Haewol's execution donghak was plunged into a crisis similar to the one that followed the execution of Su-un. yet, as will become evident in the following section, Haewol, like Su-un, had planned well for the future.

What should be finally noted here about the Donghak religion and the Donghak rebellion is that, while being separate entities, they had a *leitmotif* of common principles running through them—egalitarianism, equity, the innate dignity of all human beings, nationalism, justice for the oppressed, respect for all creation—which had their origins in an ecstatic experience of a status-less social outcast in a tiny room on a remote mountain side, surrounded by his disturbed family. i think it is fair to state that, on that particular evening, this person had no inkling of the effect that this experience would have on himself, on his family, and on his nation.

Reconstitution under Son Byeong-hi

immediately prior to his death in 1898, Haewol nominated Son byeong-hi (u iam) as the third leader of donghak. as with his predecessor, u iam spent most of his initial years as leader revitalizing and rebuilding the organization. in a deliberate move to expand his education and experience, u iam moved to Japan in the spring of 1901 and remained there until early 1906.

during his sojourn in Japan, u iam met with a number of Korean reformers who were living in exile. discussion with these reformers and exposure to western political, social and economic thought led u iam to the conviction that Korea was in urgent need of reform at all levels of human interaction. in u iam's opinion,

⁸ 'interrogation of Chon Pongjun, Second Session (11 february 1895)', Tonghangnan kirok 2: 532–40, quoted in Peter H. lee (ed.), *Sourcebook of Korean Civilization*, Vol. 2, new york: Columbia u niversity Press, 1996, p. 376. Jeon bong-jun was sentenced to death on 23 april 1895 and was executed immediately.

such reform would place at the centre the Korean people and the nation rather than a small coterie of privileged families. The people would be ruled over by a king whose role was to govern judiciously and thereby strengthen the nation.⁹ Carl Young comments:

Reform in Korea had failed because it had been an elite enterprise that did not enlist much active involvement by the general population. Son¹⁰ seems to have seen this problem and stressed the need to involve the people, who were the root of the nation and the body of Heaven, in reforming Korean society. Tonghak's religious thought came to be reinterpreted and combined new ideas of politics and nation. Cultural renewal and social action became important parts of Tonghak's religious mission of enhancing the 'Way of Heaven' in people and society.¹¹

On 1 December 1905 Uiam changed the name 'Donghak' to 'Cheondo-gyo', 'the religion of the Heavenly Way'.¹² The purpose of the change was to dissociate the religion from the failed military rebellion and to re-focus it on the principles on which it was founded as well as on the principles of reform, on which Uiam had reflected and written during his sojourn in Japan.

Theory into Action: The Independence Movement

Among the main foci of the newly named religion was a passive, yet passionate, opposition to the Japanese occupation of the Korean peninsula. This opposition was shared with other religious groups, notably with the Protestant Christian denominations and with the Buddhists. The opposition reached its peak on 1 March 1919, when a group of religious leaders signed and proclaimed a Korean declaration of independence and were promptly arrested by the Japanese. Fifteen of the thirty-three leaders who signed the declaration were Cheondo-gyo members, sixteen were Christian (nine Methodists, seven Presbyterian) and two were Buddhists. The chief signatory and organizer of the group was the Cheondo-gyo leader, Son Byeong-hi, Uiam.¹³

⁹ Carl Young, 'Tonghak and Son Pyŏng-hŭi's Early Leadership, 1899–1904', *The Review of Korean Studies*, Vol. 5, no. 1, June 2002, pp. 76–7.

¹⁰ Son Byeong-hi (Uiam).

¹¹ Young, 'Tonghak' (above, n. 9), pp. 80–81.

¹² Weems, *Reform, Rebellion and the Heavenly Way* (above, n. 6), pp. 56–7, quoting *Cheondo-gyo Changgeonsasa*, Pt iii, pp. 53 f.

¹³ Kim Han-kyo, 'The nationalist movement', in Peter H. Lee (ed.), *Sourcebook of Korean Civilization*, Vol 2, New York: Columbia University Press, 1996, pp. 430–34. Yoon Suk-san, *Chondogyo*, 2nd printing, Seoul: Cheondo-gyo Central Headquarters, 2005, pp. 106–7.

The signing, proclamation and arrest sparked nationalistic outbreaks in all provinces of Korea, affirming that the Independence movement transcended religious, regional and political affiliations and can therefore be viewed as a truly national quest for autonomy. The following description exemplifies the significance of this event in Korean history:

at noon on 1 march the declaration was read at a large gathering of students in Seoul's Pagoda Park, signaling the beginning of a nation-wide demonstration that mobilized men and women of all ages and social backgrounds. Taken by surprise, the Japanese police and troops reacted with fury. but despite a large number of casualties, the massive wave of demonstrations went on for months. Official Japanese figures listed over one million participants in 3,200 demonstrations, resulting in 20,000 arrests. Korean sources give much higher estimates: more than two million participants in the first three months alone, almost 47,000 arrests, 7,509 deaths and 15,961 injured among the demonstrators.

The impact of the march first movement was profound and long-lasting although it failed to achieve its aim of Korean independence. it was a powerful, if costly, display of Korean nationalism that belied the Japanese profession of benevolence toward the colonized people.¹⁴

A Visit to the Heart of Seoul

Even after ninety years, a visit to independence Park (formerly Pagoda Park) in the centre of Seoul is a sobering, though inspiring, experience. a statue of Son byeong-hi, u iam, stands proudly at the entrance to the Park, and stone and bronze murals from each province of Korea detail the *Samil Undong* (1 march) independence movement and its bloody suppression. The mural which invariably affects me the most is one which depicts Japanese troops boarding up a Christian church packed with worshippers and setting fire to it and the ensuing death of all the men, women and children inside.

What also makes a deep impression on a visitor to independence Park is that it is the daily meeting place for scores of elderly citizens, predominately old men, many of them dressed in traditional costume, who are drawn to this place to renew friendships and be re-inspired by its history. i met there people who had clear memories of 1 march 1919 and who were only too happy to share with me the experiences of their childhood and youth. only rarely did it happen, in my numerous visits to this sacred national shrine, that three or four elderly volunteers did not accompany me around the 'walk of the murals', explaining each one as we went along. i always learned something new and, on leaving the park, i could not but view the ultra-modern city of Seoul from a slightly altered perspective.

¹⁴ Kim Han-kyo, 'The national movement' (above, n. 13), pp. 430–31.

The main reason why I visited Independence Park so frequently was to come into close contact and renew acquaintance with the soul of the nation; because, for me, this is exactly where it resides. In this tiny space in the middle of a bustling megalopolis, a truly national consciousness coalesced for the first time, uniting political, social, religious and regional aspirations in a single word—Korea. I encourage every visitor to Seoul to take the time to visit Independence Park to see, and to experience, the birthplace of the nation.

Donghak/Cheondo-gyo in Historical Perspective

In either this chapter nor the book as a whole attempt to describe in any detail the crucial events, people, and organizations which framed the history of Korea in the latter part of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—a period in which Donghak emerged, struggled, survived, altered its direction and changed its name. In addition to Donghak, the religion and the rebellion, some related events, people and organizations worthy of mention are:

Prince Heungseon, the father of King Kojong, more commonly known as the Daewongun (Prince of the Great Court), and the *de facto* ruler of the kingdom until 1874;

The Daewongun's reforms, his restoration of the monarchy and his isolationist policy (*weijeong choksa*—'defending orthodoxy, rejecting heterodoxy'), and also his long-running and fractious relationship with Queen Min, whom the Daewongun had originally chosen as royal consort for his son;

Queen Min, her powerful influence over the king and her political influence; her staunch admirers and her equally staunch detractors; and her Japanese-authorized assassination on 8 October 1895;

The updating and implementation of the Japanese *sei-Kan-ron* ('defeat Korea policy');

The Sino-Japanese War of 1894;

The Russo-Japanese War of 1905;

The Treaty of Portsmouth between Japan and Russia in September 1905, which cleared the way for Japan's annexation of Korea;

The Taft-Katsura memorandum of July 1905, by which the United States of America agreed to the Japanese domination of Korea as a tacit *quid pro*

quo for the Japanese recognition of u S hegemony over the Philippines;
 The unilateral ‘Treaty’ of 1905, which established Korea as a protectorate
 of Japan;
 The formal annexation of the Korean peninsula by Japan on 22 August
 1910, which lasted until the end of the Second World War;
 Korean nationalist and independence movements, such as:
 the independence Club;
 the righteous army movement;
 the Patriotic Enlightenment movement.

Additionally, the present book, this chapter included, does not attempt to describe
 in any depth the social and cultural contributions which the Cheondo-gyo religion
 made to Korea during and after the Japanese occupation of the country. Worthy of
 note are its youth movement; its publishing movement, represented by the monthly
 journal *Kaepyeok* [*Creation*]; its farmers’, women’s and children’s movements;¹⁵
 its new Education movement and the contribution it made to education in Korea.

This brief mentioning of selected people, events and organizations does not
 attempt to do justice to one of the most important, if not the most important period
 in Korea’s extensive history. I am keenly aware that an attempt to cover in any
 depth such crucial historical events in just a section of a book chapter would do this
 period an injustice which would not be regarded kindly by any serious historian.
 However, when I skim lightly over these events and the people involved in them,
 I hope that the material covered in the rest of the book will arouse the curiosity of
 readers who are unfamiliar with this period in the history of Korea and North East
 Asia to become more acquainted with it. For the events which occurred in China,
 Korea and Japan from the middle to the end of the nineteenth century could not
 be contained in this region and were soon to reverberate across the world stage,
 changing its landscape completely.

Current Status of Cheondo-gyo

Exact statistics on current Cheondo-gyo membership are not easy to assess. For
 example, the data supplied by the various religions and published in the 1995
 year book of Korean religions list Cheondo-gyo membership as 1,127,732. Data
 from the national Census board from the same year list membership as 30,000.
 This discrepancy is also evident in relation to other religious groupings. The total
 number of believers from all religions, as recorded in the year book of Korean
 religions is 65,399,065—which is double the population of South Korea at that
 time. The national Census board lists the total number of believers in any religion

¹⁵ Children’s day, a national holiday in South Korea celebrated on 1 May, had its
 origins in the Cheondo-gyo Children’s movement.

as 22,780,000.¹⁶ This discrepancy is addressed by Donald Baker in his introduction to *Religions of Korea in Practice*:

According to data gathered in the full census of 1995, 23.2 percent of South Koreans self-identified as Buddhists, 19.7 percent are Protestants, 6.6 percent are Roman Catholics, and 1.3 percent are followers of other religions. That leaves 50.1 percent with no religious affiliation, though we know that many of them patronize shamans, visit Buddhist temples, and may even attend a Christian church or Confucian shrine once in a while.

Snapshots of the religious population taken since 1995 tell us that more Koreans are proclaiming a specific religious orientation, but the respective divisions among them remain the same. In 2003 the South Korean government, based on a partial census, estimated that 54 percent of its citizens had a religious affiliation. Of those, 25.3 percent were Buddhist, 19.8 were Protestant, 7.4 percent were Catholic, 0.3 percent called themselves Confucians, 0.21 percent called themselves Won Buddhist (a Korean new religion), and 0.75 percent had another religious affiliation. All three major religious communities had grown over the intervening years, a trend Gallup confirmed in 2004 with a survey of those living in Korea's largest cities. Gallup found 26.8 percent to be Buddhist, 21.6 percent to be Protestants and 8.2 percent to be Catholics.¹⁷

The statistics above indicate that Cheondo-gyo affiliation shares 0.75 percent of the population (0.75 represents 367,500 people on current figures) with other unspecified religions, many of which are classified as new religious movements. Again, an exact figure is difficult to produce, due to the way Koreans view religious practice and religious affiliation. Baker comments:

The term 'religion' (Kor. *chonggyo*) is a relatively new term in Korean, having been imported from Japan as recently as the end of the nineteenth century. As a result, for some Koreans, the word 'religion' does not necessarily embrace all the religious beliefs they hold or apply to all the religious activities in which they engage.¹⁸

¹⁶ Yun Seung-yong, 'Outline of Religious Culture', in *Religious Culture in Korea*, Seoul: Jeongmoon Sa munhwa Co. Ltd., Ministry of Culture and Sports, 1996), p. 9. Comparisons in the yearbook of Korean Religions (Yb Kr) and National Census Board (Ncb) are as follows: Buddhist 22,710,417 (Yb Kr) 10,338,000 (Ncb); Protestant 15,761,329 (Yb Kr) 8,819,000 (Ncb); Catholic 3,374,308 (Yb Kr) 2,988,000 (Ncb); Confucian 10,177,001 (Yb Kr) 193,000 (Ncb).

¹⁷ Donald Baker, 'Introduction', in Robert E. Buswell Jr (ed.), *Religions of Korea in Practice*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2007, p. 3.

¹⁸ Ibid.

in a separate article, Baker makes the following comment relating to religious affiliation in South Korea:

Despite differences in the relative sizes of the various religious communities, both Gallup and the National Statistical Office agree that around 25 million South Koreans out of a population of 46 million, now claim a specific religious affiliation.

Moreover, both Gallup and the National Statistical Office agree that the overwhelming majority of self-identified religious Koreans are either Christian or Buddhist. . . . However, less than 500,000 Koreans said that they were a member of a religious community other than mainstream Buddhism or Christianity. Are indigenous religions such as Cheondogyo, Won Buddhism, Daejonggyo, and Daesum Jinrihoe really as small and as unpopular as that number would suggest? And what about the remaining 46% of South Koreans who say they have no particular religious affiliation? Many of those who do not affirm a religious affiliation when talking with a surveyor may actually be religious (i.e. may believe in supernatural beings) and engage in behavior others would consider religious even though they don't identify with a specific religious community.¹⁹

Consequently, when one takes the above quotations into consideration, it is difficult to arrive at a figure which accurately reflects religious affiliation in general in Korea, and Cheondo-gyo membership in particular. Additionally, Cheondo-gyo is one of the few religions to be sanctioned by the North Korean government and, while figures in this reclusive nation are difficult, if not impossible, to access, they do add to the overall total number of Cheondo-gyo practitioners on the Korean peninsula. A reliable source within the Cheondo-gyo organization informed me that, while government statistics currently estimate Cheondo-gyo membership to be within the range of 50,000–60,000, the organization's own estimate is approximately 200,000 members, a number which includes older, inactive members.

Whatever number one postulates for adherents to the Cheondo-gyo religion, the influence of Su-un and Donghak/Cheondo-gyo reach far beyond the confines of the religion itself. This influence extends not only to other new religious movements in Korea but permeates Korean society in a variety of ways, as has been noted in Chapter 8. For Su-un, his beliefs, his principles and his legacy have left an indelible mark not only on Korean history, but on the lives and the attitudes of the Korean people. One needs only to visit Independence Park in the heart of Seoul to verify this claim.

¹⁹ Donald Baker, 'The Religious Revolution in Modern Korean History: From Ethics to Theology and from Ritual Hegemony to Religious Freedom', *The Review of Korean Studies*, vol. 9, no. 3, September 2006, pp. 254–5.

Conclusion

in conclusion, i reiterate that the purpose of my book is to attempt to describe as accurately as possible the image which Su-un, the founder of donghak, Korea's first indigenous religion, had of himself in the final moments of his life, on the basis of an examination of his scriptures, his two central symbols, and other relevant documents.

yet, as with a snowball rolling down a steep hill, other related facts, events and stories accumulated along the way.

Whether the overall purpose of the book has been achieved or not, my wish is that the material covered in these pages may stimulate an interest in the fascinating, charismatic and complex individual, Choe Che-u, Su-un, the daesinsa, and in the country, culture and time into which he was born and lived. i hope that the journey to this place and to this person, once begun, will continue. and i hope that, in reflecting on the Lord of Heaven's question to Su-un, 'My heart is your heart. Yet how could humankind know this?', we each may come to a deeper understanding and appreciation of our own religious odyssey, expressed in the words of the Sinsa, Choe Haewol; in true Eastasian fashion, these words point not to an answer to the question, but to a Way in which to undertake the quest:

'To eat one bowl of rice is to understand all things.'

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Jeol-gu [An Occasional Poem]

Gang-si [Song of Victory]

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Si-mun [Poetry and Prose]

Gyeol [Secret]

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Ueum (2) [Sudden Inspiration (2)]

Palcheol [Eight Verses (Initial and Additional)]

Je-seo [Petition]

Yeong-so [Evening Reflection]

Pilbeop [The Way of the Brush Stroke]

Yugo-eum [Lofty Flowing Sentiment]

Yongdam Yusa [Reflections of the Dragon Pool]

Gyohun-ga [Song of Instruction]

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