



Views on the Spirituality and Sanctification of Personality in Cheondogyo in the Early 20th-Century: Focusing on Son Byeong-hui's Theory of Mind-Nature

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Abstract

This study analyzes the concepts of the threefold heavens, threefold spiritual natures, and three minds in Son Byeong-hui's thought and examines their interrelations. Son classified the inner Heaven of human beings into Formless Heaven (無形天), Sentient Heaven (有情天), and Habitual Heaven (習慣天), and correspondingly identified threefold spiritual capacities: Wongakseong (圓覺性), Bigakseong (比覺性), and Hyeolgakseong (血覺性). This structure shows that the spirituality of Heaven may manifest transparently in accordance with its essence or appear in a distorted form. Drawing on Neo-Confucian notions of seongni 性理 and simgi 心氣 and the Buddhist idea of tranquil state of emptiness, freedom, and equality. Son systematized the process by which spirituality becomes actualized through the workings of the mind. He also clarified the distinction between seongni and simgi through the dictum "cultivating both nature and mind" (性心雙修) and presented the transformation of the body (以身換性) as the path to a sanctified personality grounded in desirelessness and the principle of non-action. This article argues that such spiritual-philosophical dimensions of Son's thought reveal the modern significance of Donghak, contributing to a reinterpretation of the intersection between religion and philosophy in modern Korean intellectual history.

Keywords: Son Byeong-hui, Donghak, spirituality, Neo-Confucianism, Buddhism, sanctification of personality

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Introduction

The early 20th-century was a period in which the Korean Empire gradually lost its national sovereignty to Japanese imperialists. However, those who faced a crisis of survival during this period of political upheaval were not limited to individuals who risked their lives in the national salvation and independence movements. Most Koreans endured extreme suffering in their daily lives due to severe economic exploitation, restrictions on educational and employment opportunities, and the suppression of political and ideological expression.

Notably, history shows that the greater the suffering in life, the more people seek solace or solutions to their problems through religion. While science and philosophy have inherent limitations in addressing fundamental questions about death and suffering, religions have provided systematic doctrines that offer their own profound answers.

During this period, Cheondogyo 天道教 played this role most effectively in Korea. As is well known, in the 1900s, Donghak 東學 led enlightenment movements such as the Gapjin 甲辰 Enlightenment Movement (1904). In the 1910s, Cheondogyo played a leading role in preparing for the March First Independence Movement (1919). These social movements for national sovereignty and modernization were fundamentally driven by the religious philosophy of *innaecheon* 人乃天 (humans are Heaven). Moreover, such efforts were mainly led by Uiam Son Byeong-hui (1861–1922).

This study aims to examine the religious spirituality that Son Byeong-hui proposed as a spiritual leader of Cheondogyo in the early 20th-century, as well as his teachings on sanctified personality based on that spirituality. Furthermore, it seeks to clarify the religious and philosophical significance of these ideas.

In Korean academia, most existing research on Son Byeong-hui's thought has focused on his ideology of independence movements, while studies on his religious philosophy remain relatively scarce.¹ However, significant

1. In the Korean academic field, scholars such as Kim Yonghwi, Oh Moonhwan, Jung Hyejung, and Cho Sunghwan have produced several meaningful research outcomes regarding Son Byeong-hui's theories of mind-nature and self-cultivation. Kim (2019) offered a

progress has been made in exploring topics such as the relationship between the *innaecheon* ideology and enlightenment movements, as well as the characteristics and meaning of his *seongnyeong* 性靈 (spiritual nature) theory. Unfortunately, research on one of the most crucial aspects of his religious philosophy—his theory of mind-nature—remains underdeveloped. In particular, there has been a lack of systematic studies on his *Muche beopgyeong* 無體法經 (Scripture of Formless Law), which encapsulates his mature reflections on the theory of mind-nature. This article seeks to address this gap by providing a structured examination of Son Byeong-hui's theory of mind-nature.

When attempting to understand Son Byeong-hui's theory of mind-nature, the greatest challenge lies in the fact that, while fundamentally inheriting the ideas of Choe Je-u and Choe Si-hyeong, the two representative figures of 19th-century Donghak, he also incorporated numerous concepts from Neo-Confucianism and Buddhism to express his own views on the mind-nature. In other words, certain level of knowledge about all three traditions (Donghak, Neo-Confucianism, and Buddhism) is necessary for a precise understanding. Based on this observation, this paper aims to clearly identify which aspects of Choe Je-u and Choe Si-hyeong's thought were inherited and developed in Son Byeong-hui's theory of mind-nature. Furthermore, by succinctly explaining how various concepts related to Hanul, *seongnyeong*, and mind exhibit a syncretic character of Confucianism and Buddhism, this study seeks to address the existing gaps in the understanding of his theory.

In specific, this study discusses the following three aspects in sequence. First, it examines how Cheondogyo's *innaecheon* ideology inherits the *sicheonju* 侍天主 (serving the Lord of Heaven) ideology of Donghak. Based on this, the observation demonstrates how Son Byeong-hui's concept of the Threefold Heaven and Threefold Spirituality are structurally and conceptually identical. Second, it explores how Son Byeong-hui explained the relationship

comprehensive discussion of Son Byeong-hui's views on mind-nature and self-cultivation. Oh (2006) conducted a relatively in-depth analysis of Son's theory of mind-nature centered on the *Muche beopgyeong*. Meanwhile, Jung (2007) explored the relationship between Son's theory of mind-nature and Buddhist thought. Cho (2024) has clarified how Son's theory of the emergence of the spirit is connected to 19th-century Donghak thought.

between spirituality and the mind by utilizing the Neo-Confucian frameworks of the theory of mind-nature and the theory of *li* and *qi* (*qi* in Chinese). Moreover, it analyzes the methods of mental training he proposed to achieve the goal of self-cultivation, which he described as transforming the body through spirituality (以身換性). Finally, it investigates how Son Byeong-hui explained the state of sanctified personality that individuals attain through sufficient practice, using Buddhist concepts. Through this, it clarifies that he pursued the ideals of equality and freedom, which were fundamental to both Donghak and Buddhism.

Spirituality and Its Division

Choe Je-u (1824–1864) established Donghak in 1861 after experiencing a revelation from a transcendent personal deity who commanded him to spread the faith. Over the course of nearly a year, he organized his intense religious experiences into a structured doctrine, with its core ideology often summarized as serving the Lord of Heaven, as evident in the following statement, “If one serves the Lord of Heaven, the principle of creation is established, and if one never forgets it, all things will be known” (侍天主, 造化定, 永世不忘, 萬事知).² At first glance, this would suggest an affinity between Donghak and Catholicism, and such an impression would be partly correct. In fact, through explanations of the differences between Donghak and Western teachings, it is easy to see that Choe Je-u himself acknowledged this affinity.

Western studies may seem like our Dao, but there are differences. They appear to have incantations yet lack substance. However, fate is the same, the Dao is the same, but the principle is not (洋學如斯而有異, 如呪而無實, 然而運則一也, 道則同也, 理則非也).³

2. *Donggyeong daejeon* 東經大全 (Great Compendium of the Eastern Scripture), “Jumun” 呪文 (Incantations).

3. *Donggyeong daejeon*, “Nonhangmun” 論學文 (Discourse on Learning).

As Choe Je-u stated, “the Dao is the same”, he believed that the deity worshiped in Donghak was not fundamentally different from the God of Catholicism. However, he also clearly recognized that “the principle is not the same” between Donghak and Western studies. The most critical distinction he perceived is evident in the following passage, which further elaborates on the meaning of serving the Lord of Heaven: “To serve means that within, there is a *sillyeong* 神靈 (divine spirit), and without, there is the *gihwa* 氣化 (transformation of *gi*). The people of an era each understand this unchanging principle” (侍者, 內有神靈, 外有氣化, 一世之人, 各知不移者也).⁴ This passage reveals a fundamental aspect of Donghak’s concept of divinity: the divine is not only transcendent but also immanent. In other words, God exists internally as a spirit within individuals and externally as the transformation of *gi*, a non-personal force. This strong emphasis on the immanence of divinity is a key characteristic distinguishing Donghak’s theological perspective from that of Western Christianity.

A noteworthy point is that within the historical flow of Donghak thought, the tendency to emphasize the immanence of divinity became increasingly pronounced. This is most clearly evidenced by the fact that in the early 20th century, when Donghak was renamed Cheondogyo, its central doctrine was also declared to be *innaecheon* rather than *sicheonju*. Of course, the foreshadowing of *innaecheon* can also be seen in the statements of Choe Si-hyeong (1827–1898), the second patriarch of Donghak:

Humans are Heaven, and Heaven is humans. There is no Heaven outside of humans, and there are no humans outside of Heaven (人是天, 天是人。人外無天, 天外無人).⁵

He further states:

4. *Donggyeong daejeon*, “Nonhangmun” (Discourse on Learning).

5. *Haewol sinsa beopseol* 海月神師法說 (Dharma Discourses of the Divine Master Haewol), “Cheonji gwisin eum-yang” 天地鬼神陰陽 (Heaven and Earth, Spirits and Deities, Yin and Yang).

Where is the mind? It is in Heaven. Where is Heaven? It is in the mind. Therefore, the mind is Heaven, and Heaven is the mind. There is no mind outside of Heaven, and there is no Heaven outside of the mind. Heaven and the mind are, by nature, not two separate entities (心在何方? 在於天. 天在何方? 在於心. 故心即天, 天即心. 心外無天, 天外無心. 天與心本無二物).⁶

However, overall, Choe Si-hyeong placed greater emphasis on the natural immanence of divinity. He elucidated that the Donghak concept of *gihwa* carries the implication that the Lord of Heaven bestows His energy in a self-sacrificial manner to nourish and sustain all life. Based on this understanding, he emphasized reverence for Heaven and Earth—that is, nature as a whole—as one would revere one’s parents, and he also advocated for respect toward individual natural beings. In comparison, while Son Byeong-hui did not deny the natural immanence of divinity, he did not emphasize it as much as Choe Si-hyeong. Instead, he devoted himself to contemplating and teaching how divinity operates within the human body and mind. In short, among the two aspects of divine existence that Choe Je-u presented—divine spirit and vital energy transformation—Choe Si-hyeong deeply explored the dimension of *gihwa*, whereas Son Byeong-hui systematically explained the workings of *sillyeong*.

Previous studies have revealed that Son Byeong-hui’s intense focus on the issue of spirit was triggered by a religious mystical experience he had in 1910. As Kim Yonghwi noted, “The most significant event for Son Byeong-hui was his so-called Great Enlightenment of the Way in February 1910, when he experienced the Holy Spirit of Choe Je-u. From this experience, he derived a new concept called “spiritual emergence” (*seongnyeong chulse* 性靈出世)” (Kim 2019, 53). As Son himself later describes this experience:

When I was practicing at Tongdosa Temple in Yangsan long ago, I suddenly gained insight into the verse: “I saw this place in the past, and today I see it once again.” This signifies that the past of the Great Master and my present share the same mind-law in terms of spiritual nature. Since the Great

6. *Haewol sinsa beopseol*, “Cheonji gwisin eum-yang.”

Master emerged in the world through the spirit, then all things and all minds are nothing other than expressions of this very emergence of the spirit (余嘗梁山修煉之時，豁然得昔時此地見今日又看看之詩句，是大神師之昔時余今日性靈上同一心法立言。大神師既爲性靈出世矣，一切物物心心皆不無此性靈之出世之表現也)。⁷

After completing 49 days of training in Yangsan, Son Byeong-hui visited Jeokmyeol Cave 寂滅窟, where Choe Je-u had once practiced. There, he experienced what felt like the descent of Choe Je-u's spirit into his own body. He later generalized this unique experience, concluding that it was not only Choe Je-u's spirit that manifested in the world, but that all phenomena in the universe were manifestations of spiritual nature.⁸

The cosmological implications of Son Byeong-hui's concept of spiritual nature become even clearer in the following passages: "Here, something exists, and following it, the activity of the spiritual nature suddenly arises. This is the crystallization of the spirit, which organizes things, and through the organization of things, the spirit is expressed" (茲有一物，從之而忽有靈性之活動，是以靈之結晶生物之組織也，以物之組織又生靈之表顯也)。⁹ If the cosmic spirit concentrates its power to organize and generate things, then all created things are, in essence, expressions of the spirit. Son further elaborates on the relationship between spirit and things, as follows:

There are no things apart from the spirit, and there is no spirit apart from things, nor is there a world separate from them. Ultimately, the spirit

7. *Uiam seongsa beopseol* 義菴聖師法說 (Teachings of Sacred Master Uiam), "Seongnyeong chulse seol" 性靈出世說 (On Spiritual Emergence).

8. Cho Sunghwan revealed that Son Byeong-hui's concept of the spirit (性靈) is rooted in Choe Je-u's notion of the divine spirit (神靈) and Choe Si-hyeong's ideas of mind-spirit (心靈) and nature-spirit (性靈). Based on this analysis, he concluded that the view of human nature in Donghak and Cheondogyo can be characterized as "spiritual": "In Choe Je-u's thought, spirit was used as a concept to explain mystical experiences. However, by the time of Choe Si-hyeong, it had expanded into areas such as theories of mind-nature and epistemology, taking forms like mind-spirit and nature-spirit. This clearly demonstrates Donghak's understanding of human beings as fundamentally spiritual in nature" (Cho 2024, 65).

9. *Uiam seongsa beopseol*, "Seongnyeong chulse seol."

establishes the world, and the world attains the spirit. Each thing realizes its own nature through the mysterious activity of spiritual nature, which responds to all mechanisms and forms. It emerges into the world alongside energy and engages in the work of guiding and nurturing. For example, though nourished by the same rain and dew, a peach tree bears peaches, while an apricot tree bears apricots. This follows the same principle by which infinitely diverse plants produce infinitely diverse fruits (靈移而別無物, 物移而別無靈, 更無世, 究竟靈而需世, 世而得靈. 物物各遂其性, 是神妙之性靈活動應於萬機萬相, 與器數應於出世調攝. 譬如同一雨露, 桃結桃實, 杏結杏子, 是從千差萬別之植物結千差萬別之果實).¹⁰

The spirit is not separated from the things of this world, nor does it exist in some transcendent realm beyond it. Rather, as it creates the world, it naturally resides within it. The activity of this spirit is truly mysterious, as a cosmic spirit interacts with different beings and appropriately responds to the diverse needs of their growth. In other words, the movement of life contains aspects that cannot be fully explained by human reason alone. These lingering uncertainties are only resolved when religious explanations, such as the movement of the spirit, are introduced.

For Son Byeong-hui, spirituality is synonymous with Hanullim, the divine. As discussed earlier, among the two modes of Hanullim's existence, Son focused primarily on elucidating and cultivating the inner Hanullim—the divine spirit, or spirituality. It was precisely this particular focus that led him to reinterpret Choe Je-u's concept of serving the Lord of Heaven as realizing the Lord of Heaven. "The term serving in serving the Lord of Heaven means realizing the Lord of Heaven. The term Lord in Lord of Heaven means the 'master' of my mind. When my mind realizes this, the Supreme Being is none other than my mind, Heaven and Earth are my mind, and all things in the universe are but an extension of my mind" (侍天主之侍字, 卽覺天主之意也, 天主之主字, 我心主之意也. 我心覺之, 上帝卽我心, 天地我心, 森羅萬相皆我心之一物也).¹¹ Of course, recalling the previously discussed cosmological aspects of

10. *Uiam seongsa beopseol*, "Seongnyeong chulse seol."

11. *Muche beopgyeong* 無體法經 (Scripture of Formless Law), "Sintong go" 神通考 (Examination of Spiritual Powers).

spirituality, Son Byeong-hui did not limit Hanullim solely to an inner presence within the mind. However, overall, he far more frequently spoke of Hanullim as residing within the human body and mind. When Hanullim is understood as a spirituality, its meaning becomes much clearer. In other words, realizing Hanullim can be more explicitly understood as awakening to one's inner spirituality.

But what does it mean to say that realizing spirituality allows one's mind to unite with the Supreme Being, Heaven and Earth, and all things in the universe? The following passage helps clarify this idea:

If people truly love one another, they will surely attain the Great Way; therefore, think of this at every moment. If I love all beings, they will walk the Heavenly Path, and the bridge of the spirit will surely be formed. If all beings love me, I will walk the Heavenly Path, and the bridge of the spirit will surely be formed. By caring for and loving one another, we will inevitably achieve results (人必相愛, 大道必得, 念念思之. 我愛衆生, 衆去天路, 靈橋必成, 衆生愛我, 我去天路, 靈橋必成. 眷眷相愛, 必有得果).¹²

This suggests that when people love one another—whether between individuals or between people and all living beings—the power of that love acts as a spiritual bridge leading to a heavenly world on earth. In light of the above passage, the meaning of the earlier passage becomes clearer. That is, when a person becomes aware of the spirit of altruism within their own heart, they recognize it as the very will of the Supreme Being. They then come to understand that this same spirituality pervades Heaven, Earth, and all things in the universe, allowing them to experience a profound sense of unity with all existence.

As seen above, the spirituality of the universe and humanity, as intuitively grasped by Son Byeong-hui, is essentially a spirituality of love. However, the problem lies in the fact that human nature is not always filled with love. Hanullim gathers divine spirit and energy to nurture and care for all beings in an act of love, yet humans do not always follow this divine spirit. Instead, they

12. *Muche beopgyeong*, “Sintong go.”

often engage in selfish actions that contribute to a corrupt and chaotic world.

Son Byeong-hui's thoughts on this issue can be inferred to some extent by analyzing passages in which he explains Heaven and spirituality through a three-layered structure.

The tranquil void of the formless Heaven (無形天), the heaven of sentient beings (有情天), and the habitually clouded Heaven (習慣天), veiled in dust, all exist on the profound and true dual aspects of nature and mind (空空寂寂之無形天, 圓圓充充之有情天, 塵塵濛濛之習慣天, 俱在性心左右之玄真兩方).¹³

If the “formless heaven” were an entity outside of my body, it would refer to a transcendent, invisible divine being. However, in this context, it refers to the pure spirituality that resides within me when the divinity of that Heaven unites with vital energy to create my mind and body, that is, the spiritual force that enables me to maintain a tranquil state of emptiness, undisturbed mind free from all afflictions. The “heaven of sentient beings” refers to the spirituality that fills a person with that pure essence, enabling harmonious communication with all sentient beings. Lastly, the “clouded Heaven” described as “clouded with dust,” appears to signify the self-centered spirituality of sentient beings, which, due to myriad afflictions, fills the world with suffering. Taken together, the first spirituality is the Hanul essence inherent in the human mind, while the second and third spiritualities are the functions of that essence. The reason even the self-centered spirituality is considered a function of the original divine essence is likely because it is understood as a refracted and distorted form of the pure spirit.

The foregoing explanation of the threefold Hanul is not without basis; this becomes even clearer when we consider the following passage, which likewise describes the capacity for spiritual enlightenment in three layers.

In what I regard as essence and function, there are truly three types of spiritual nature. First is Wongakseong 圓覺性 (the spiritual capacity for

13. *Muche beopgyeong*, “Sintong go.”

complete enlightenment); second is Bigakseong 比覺性 (the spiritual capacity for inferential enlightenment); third is Hyeolgakseong 血覺性 (the spiritual capacity for instinctual enlightenment). Wongakseong holds that the causality of all things is accomplished through non-action. Therefore, those who cultivate the mind and refine the spirit will find it difficult to attain good results unless they gain the cause and effect of the Dharma-body. Bigakseong holds that the causes and effects of all phenomena appear in infinite manifestations. Those who cultivate their mind to realize their true nature must engage in proper contemplation and reflection, or else they will fail to attain the true realm. Hyeolgakseong holds that the causes and effects of fortune and misfortune are divided between good and evil and constantly stand in opposition. Those who practice virtues to achieve success in the world choose good and auspicious topics (*hwadu*) (我體用之, 實有三性. 一曰圓覺性, 二曰比覺性, 三曰血覺性. 圓覺性以爲萬法因果無爲而爲. 故守心煉性者, 不得法體因果, 難得善果. 比覺性以爲萬相因果有現無量. 修心見性者若非正觀思量, 不得真境. 血覺性以爲禍福因果有善有惡, 而無時相視. 爲其善而世得果者, 擇其好好話頭).¹⁴

The “spiritual capacity for complete enlightenment” refers to the spirituality that enables one’s mind to fully realize the cosmic essence, that is, the ability to awaken to the pure spirituality mentioned above. A person who has attained a state of spirituality free from afflictions and imbued with tranquility realizes that the Dharma-body—the essence of all things—operates according to the principle of non-action. Consequently, the practitioner lives in accordance with the attitude of freedom from desire and the same principle of non-action. Notably, Choe Je-u characterized the Dao of Donghak as a “transformation through non-action” (吾道無爲而化矣).¹⁵ Though Son Byeong-hui extensively adopts Buddhist terminology and modes of thought, this shows that his teachings did not stray from the fundamental tenets of Donghak. The “spiritual capacity for inferential enlightenment” refers to the ability to realize the cosmic essence underlying phenomena by observing and reflecting upon

14. *Muche beopgyeong*, “Samseong gwa” 三性科 (Threefold Nature).

15. *Donggyeong daejeon*, “Nonhangmun.”

the complex causal relations of the phenomenal world. This signifies the attainment of the spirituality that enables harmonious communication with sentient beings, as mentioned above. Whether through sensory perception or rational thought, the goal of such awareness is to facilitate communication with living beings; therefore, the cultivation of this spirituality must be grounded in compassion for all sentient beings. Lastly, the “spiritual capacity for instinctual enlightenment” refers to a spirituality that, although self-centered or ego-attached, enables human beings to discern good and evil in the world. As beings endowed with blood and energy, humans instinctively strive for self-preservation, leading to deeply ingrained ego-attachment. Consequently, people come to believe that good or bad consequences follow from their virtuous or immoral actions. While this kind of spirituality may not lead to the highest level of enlightenment, those who pursue good deeds within this framework still strive to realize goodness in the world. Thus, individuals working along this path should possess a sincere sense of ethical concern for both life and society.

In sum, the concepts of the threefold Heaven and the threefold spiritual enlightenment indicate that the spirituality of Hanul, dwelling within the human body, may manifest transparently in accordance with its essence, but conversely may also appear in a distorted form. By depicting this fragmentation of spirituality, Son Byeong-hui sought to explain how purity and defilement, altruistic tendencies and self-centered inclinations coexist within the human mind.

The Relationship Between Spirituality and the Mind

From the perspective of the sanctification of character, Son Byeong-hui asserts that the human mind is capable of fully embodying the spirituality of Heavenly Lord. However, the average person cannot attain such spirituality without considerable effort. This highlights the necessity of self-cultivation. In explaining the relationship between spirituality and the mind, he developed a theory of self-discipline.

When spirituality is closed, it becomes the fundamental basis of all principles and events; when spirituality is opened, it becomes an excellent mirror of all principles and events. When all principles and events enter this mirror, the faculty that operates them is called the mind (性闔則爲萬理萬事之原素, 性開則爲萬理萬事之良鏡. 萬理萬事入鏡中, 能運用曰心).¹⁶

The meaning of spirituality being closed or opened can be better understood through the following passage: “When the mind clouds spirituality, it is said to be closed; when spirituality gives rise to the mind, it is said to be open” (心幻性曰闔, 性生心曰開).¹⁷

From this passage, it becomes clear that “spirituality is closed” refers to a state in which the mind is clouded by greed or prejudice, making one unaware of one’s inner spirituality. On the other hand, “spirituality is opened” refers to an awakening to the inner spirituality of Hanullim, which leads to a mind free of greed and full of peace. Thus, the meaning of the earlier quote can be summarized as follows: even if a clouded mind conceals spirituality, spirituality itself remains the fundamental source that brings about all events and forms all principles in the world. Conversely, when one becomes aware of their spirituality, the mind aligns with pure spirituality and comes to perceive all events and principles exactly as they are—like reflections in a mirror.

Son Byeong-hui often referred to the awakening to the spiritual nature using the Buddhist term *gyeonseong* 見性 (seeing one’s true nature). This expression carries the same meaning as the previously mentioned phrase “awaken to Hanullim” (覺天). But why did Son go so far as to use Buddhist terminology to emphasize the realization of the spiritual nature? The following paragraph helps to answer this question.

Some say, “Place Hanullim outside the mind and simply devote yourself with utmost sincerity to receive inspiration and attain the Way.” Others say, “Hanullim is within me—what is there to look up to or place faith in? I only look up to myself, trust myself, and awaken to myself.” As a result, layers

16. *Muche beopgyeong*, “Seongsim byeon” 性心辨 (Discerning Nature and Mind).

17. *Muche beopgyeong*, “Seongsim byeon” 性心辨 (Discerning Nature and Mind).

upon layers of clouds of doubt arise in the minds of practitioners, casting uncertainty on both directions of spiritual focus, and making the path toward seeing one's true nature and awakening the mind seem obscure (或曰, '置天於心外, 但盡至誠, 受感化而得道' 又曰, '天在於我, 仰之何處, 信之何處? 但我仰我, 我信我, 我覺我' 使修者心頭兩方疑雲萬疊, 爲見性覺心者之前路茫茫).¹⁸

Some regard Hanullim as a transcendent being and seek to experience the presence of the Spirit through chanting or prayer, believing and worshiping Hanullim through such mystical encounters. However, this type of faith often focuses solely on revering a divine being external to the self, neglecting the crucial realization that the divine Spirit also dwells within. Consequently, it leads to a serious issue: a lack of concern for living a holy life in alignment with that inner spirituality in daily existence. Of course, this does not mean Son Byeong-hui advocated completely abandoning religious practices that depend on a transcendent Hanullim.

When Hanul is seen as the subject, then I become the object; when I am seen as the subject, then Hanul becomes the object. If one cannot distinguish this, it is neither principle nor the Way (Dao). Therefore, the positions of subject and object are determined in two directions. If human power surpasses Hanul's, then Hanul is under human command; if Hanul's power surpasses human power, then humans are under Hanul's command. These two possibilities depend solely on the balance of power (觀天以主體, 我爲客, 觀我以主體, 天爲客. 不此之辨, 非理非道也. 故主客之位指定于兩方. 人之權能勝天, 天在人之命令下, 天之權能勝人, 人在天之命令下, 此兩端只在權能均衡).¹⁹

For example, a person who has lived an extremely self-centered life and has only just come to believe in the divine is still immature in character. In

18. *Muche beopgyeong*, "Seongsimsin samdan" 性心身三端 (Three Aspects of Nature, Mind, and Body).

19. *Muche beopgyeong*, "Seongsimsin samdan" 性心身三端 (Three Aspects of Nature, Mind, and Body).

such a case, their capability is no match for the authority of Hanullim. Thus, they revere and trust in a transcendent Hanullim through practices such as chanting or prayer, believing that this divine being is guiding their life. However, once their faith deepens, they must begin to actively and continually recognize the presence of Hanullim's spirituality within themselves. This inner awareness should lead to a gradual removal of selfish tendencies and to the practice of using the mind in ways that align with Hanullim's spirit.

The most fundamental aspect of Son Byeong-hui's thought on spiritual cultivation is his belief that, in order for a person to attain a holy character in harmony with the spirituality of Hanullim, two efforts must be pursued in tandem: the continual awareness of one's spirituality and the proper use of the mind. He referred to this dual practice as "cultivating both the spirit and the mind" (性心雙修, 惟知道者能之).²⁰

Those who see *seong* 性 (spiritual nature) cannot see *gi* 氣 (vital energy), and those who see *gi* cannot see *seong*, so the violation of the Way never ceases—how regrettable this is. *Seong* (spiritual nature) is *li* 理 (principle). The *seongni* 性理 (nature-principle) is empty and serene, boundless and immeasurable—a fundamental ground that is neither in motion nor at rest. The mind is *gi*. The *simgi* 心氣 (mind-energy) is full and abundant, vast and vibrant—its movements, stillness, and transformations are always perfectly attuned. Therefore, if either of these two is lacking, it is neither true nature nor true mind (見性者不見氣, 見氣者不見性, 違道不已, 惜乎. 性, 理也. 性理空空寂寂, 無邊無量, 無動無靜之原素而已. 心, 氣也. 心氣圓圓充充, 浩浩潑潑, 動靜變化無時不中者. 所以於斯二者無一, 非性非心也).²¹

Son Byeong-hui sought to more clearly explain the relationship between spirituality and the mind by employing the Neo-Confucian conceptual framework that links mind and nature with principle and vital energy. Of course, even though he used the concepts of *seongni* (nature-principle) and *simgi* (mind-energy), their meanings are not entirely identical to those

20. *Muche beopgyeong*, "Seongsim byeon."

21. *Muche beopgyeong*, "Seongsimsin samdan."

found in Neo-Confucianism. Nevertheless, the concepts are similar for the following two reasons. First, just as *li* is considered more fundamental than *gi* in Neo-Confucianism, in Cheondoism the infinite spiritual essence is more foundational than finite phenomena of consciousness. Second, while the spiritual essence and the workings of the mind are conceptually distinct, they are practically and intimately interconnected—this is strikingly similar to the Neo-Confucian idea of the relationship between *li* and *gi*, which are “not separable yet not mixed” (不相離, 不相雜).²²

In any case, by adopting this Neo-Confucian conceptual framework, Son Byeong-hui explained that one cannot achieve the sanctification of character by focusing solely on the awareness of spirituality or by concentrating only on the proper use of the mind in daily life. As he put it, “Without *seongni* (principle of nature), one is like a soulless wooden puppet; without *simgi* (mind-energy), one is like a fish in a place without water” (無性理, 如無心木人, 無心氣, 如無水魚者).²³ In other words, without spirituality, a person has already lost their vital essence; without the mind, the spirit has no medium through which to manifest itself. One must continually recognize that there is a spiritual presence within that purifies and calms the mind. By maintaining a state of mind that is connected to that pure spirituality, one can consistently engage with others with complete wisdom and abundant love in appropriate and compassionate ways.

However, immature people often forget their spirituality and face the world with ignorance and hatred. Son Byeong-hui identified the primary cause of this as the emotional mind of attachment and aversion toward worldly things—what he called “the emotional mind toward things” (物情心).

There are two minds within me: one is called the mind of attachment, and

22. Some interpret *seongni* (nature-principle) and *simgi* (mind-energy) as existing in a mutually interpenetrating (相即相入) relationship, akin to the Buddhist theory of mind and nature. However, for Son Byeong-hui the two are conceptually and structurally distinct. This is shown by the dictum “cultivating both nature and mind” (性心雙修), for if they were indeed mutually interpenetrating, the very expression “cultivating both” would have been unnecessary.

23. *Muche beopgyeong*, “Seongsimsin samdan.”

the other, the mind of aversion. The two minds—attachment and aversion—veil the true mind like motes of dust. Where do attachment and aversion come from? When all things enter the mind, attachment and aversion naturally arise. These emotions are the reactive mind in response to external things. For example, when an infant sees an object, it feels attachment and smiles with joy, but when the object is taken away, it becomes angry and expresses displeasure. This is called the emotional mind toward things. The emotional mind is like a second nature, and countless people remain trapped in it without escape (我有二心, 一曰愛心, 一曰憎心. 愛憎二心蔽心如塵. 愛憎何所由來? 萬物入心, 自生愛憎. 愛憎, 物之反動心. 譬則乳兒眼見物, 發愛心, 喜而笑, 奪物, 怒而厭. 此曰物情心. 物情心即第二天心, 人人億億皆留不脫).²⁴

The emotional mind toward things refers to excessive feelings of attachment or hatred toward material objects that arise from worldly desires. These emotions darken the pure mind and plunge people into the ocean of suffering. At the root of this problem lies the tendency to objectify things from a self-centered perspective, based on the assumption that there is a distinction between *self* and *other*. People habitually assess the value and meaning of things based on their own desires, interests, and feelings—so when those internal states shift, their emotions and judgments about external objects also change. As a result, such self-centered desires and emotions distort the perception of the true nature of things. Nevertheless, people cannot easily renounce such material desires and intense emotions, for they are rooted in the fundamental self-centeredness of human beings. For this reason, Son Byeong-hui acknowledged that, although the mind of compassion for sentient beings—grounded in the spirituality of Hanullim—is the most essential human nature, self-centeredness is also undeniably part of human nature, albeit a secondary one.

Whereas those who cannot properly restrain their self-centered desires and emotions trap both themselves and others in suffering, a sanctified person who lives with compassion for sentient beings allows not only others but also

24. *Muche beopgyeong*, “Jinsim bulyeom” 真心不染 (The True Mind Is Untainted).

themselves to experience the highest form of spiritual joy—what is called ultimate bliss.

The mind of a sage, which earnestly cares for others, is in fact a mind that also benefits the self. When the mind to benefit oneself arises, altruism naturally follows. When altruism arises, it gives birth to the mind that seeks harmony with others. From this harmonious mind comes the mind of freedom. And when the mind is truly free, it gives rise to the mind of ultimate joy (聖人之爲爲心卽自利心. 自利心生, 則利他心自生. 利他心生, 則共和心自生. 共和心生, 則自由心自生. 自由心生, 則極樂心自生).²⁵

One who truly understands what is ultimately beneficial for themselves will willingly cultivate altruism. A heart that cares for neighbors and all living beings is a heart that seeks harmony among humans, and between humans and nature. Through the practice of such altruism, one becomes free from attachment to self and worldly things and comes to experience infinite inner freedom and the highest level of happiness.

In this way, Son Byeong-hui emphasized that a practitioner must, on the one hand, continually awaken to their inner spirituality and train themselves to connect that spirituality with their own mind, and on the other hand, with a mind attuned to that spirituality, restrain excessive material desires and emotions, and cultivate compassion for sentient beings in order to engage harmoniously with all things.

The Sanctified State of Character

The core of Son Byeong-hui's theory of mind-nature cultivation, as discussed in the previous section, can be summarized in his statement: "Transform the body into the Spirit" (以身換性).²⁶ This means one must train to shift from

25. *Muche beopgyeong*, "Seongbeom seol" 聖凡說 (On Sages and Ordinary People).

26. *Uiam seongsa beopseol*, "Isin hwanseongseol" 以身換性說 (On Transforming the Body into the Spirit).

a life obsessed with bodily desires and cravings to one that is filled with the Spirit.²⁷ Son Byeong-hui explains that this transformation is necessary in order to attain eternal life.

The body has existed for only about a hundred years, but spiritual nature has existed even before the separation of Heaven and Earth. Its essence is perfectly full and complete—it is neither created nor destroyed, neither increased nor diminished. The spiritual nature is the eternal master of the person, while the body is merely a temporary guest (身은 百年間一物이요 性은 天地未判前에도 固有한 것이라 其體됨이 圓圓充充하여 不生不滅하며 無加無減이니라. 性은 卽人의 永年主體요 身은 卽人의 一時客體니라).²⁸

There is no such thing as an eternal body. Everyone's body is destined to perish. The only thing that is eternal is the spiritual nature, because the spiritual nature is Hanullim itself—transcending birth and death, increase and decrease. Therefore, if one seeks eternal life, they must not follow the desires of the body, but rather walk the path directed by the Spirit—the path of living for the sake of others.

Son Byeong-hui's call to shift from a life driven by bodily desires to one led by the guidance of the spiritual nature does not mean that he regarded the body as worthless—far from it. As he stated, “Without the body, upon what could the spirit rely on to discuss existence or nonexistence? Without the mind, where would the thought of perceiving the spirit arise? Truly, the mind belongs to the body” (無身, 性依何而論有無, 無心, 見性之念起於何處? 夫心, 身之屬也).²⁹ From the perspective of the origin of existence, he also said, “If there is spirit, there is body; if there is body, there is mind” (有性有身, 有身有心).³⁰ As long as a person lives in the body, both the spirit and the mind reside

27. Jo Geukhoon offered a more philosophical explanation of Son Byeong-hui's teaching. He wrote, “By transforming the body into the spirit, objectivity becomes subjectivity, mutability becomes immutability, imperfection becomes perfection, and finitude becomes infinitude” (Jo 2012, 292).

28. *Uiam seongsa beopseol*, “Isin hwanseongseol.”

29. *Muche beopgyeong*, “Seongsimsin samdan.”

30. *Muche beopgyeong*, “Seongsimsin samdan.”

within it. The value of the body lies in its role as the vessel that holds the spirit, enabling the mind to become aware of that spirit and to act in accordance with it.

Even though people may understand that a life connected to the spirit is one of supreme blessings, they still struggle to choose that path easily. This is largely because such a life often involves suffering of the body. As Son Byeong-hui put it, “If the subject (spirit) wishes to attain eternal life, the object—that is, the body—must endure many hardships and sufferings. But if the body seeks comfort, the path of the subject—that is, the spiritual nature—will drift aimlessly. What, then, will you choose?” (主體가 永生코자 할진대 客體 卽 肉體는 險苦 多多하고 客體가 安樂코자 하면 主體 卽 性靈의 前路 泛泛하리니 諸君은 何를 取하겠는고?).³¹ Living in accordance with the spirit is often a life of caring for those who suffer—thus, it is necessarily a life of devotion and self-sacrifice. In contrast, a life that pursues physical comfort may bring temporary bodily pleasure, but because desire inevitably turns into dissatisfaction, it leads to spiritual distress. On the other hand, a life of devotion to others may bring physical discomfort, but it gives rise to inner peace and a wellspring of joy flowing from within. “Only those who have reached the pinnacle of cultivation can find true comfort through hardship, and in doing so, completely forget the comforts of the flesh” (修煉이 極致에 至한 人이라야 險苦로써 安樂하사 肉身의 安樂은 忽然히 忘却하는지라).³²

To elaborate further, the practice of “transforming the body into the spirit” consists of two intertwined efforts, as previously discussed: the continual awareness of one’s inner spirituality, and the active engagement with the external world. Son Byeong-hui described the spiritual state attained through these two forms of cultivation as follows:

When I send my mind beyond things, there is no form, no trace, no above, no below. When I send my mind into things, countless shapes and innumerable specks of dust are all my spirit and my mind. Thus, if the mind is placed beyond things, Hanul is a principle without emotion; if the mind

31. *Uiam seongsa beopseol*, “Isin hwanseongseol.”

32. *Uiam seongsa beopseol*, “Isin hwanseongseol.”

is placed within things, Hanul is a heart full of emotion. Therefore, whether there is emotion or not depends on the very essence of my spirit and mind (我心送物外, 無形無迹, 無上無下. 我心送物內, 億千萬像, 森羅微塵, 皆是我性我心. 故心以物外, 無情理天也, 心以物內, 有情心天也. 然則有情無情, 我性心本體).³³

When my mind turns “outside of things”—that is, inward—and recognizes that the inner space is filled with spirit, the mind becomes detached from all things, leaving no trace of attachment in either body or thought. In this state, one reaches absolute freedom and a condition of absolute equality that harbors no feelings of distinction or hierarchy. On the other hand, when my mind turns “into things”—toward the external world—and communicates with it, I manifest compassion and wisdom that alleviate the sufferings of sentient beings. In this engagement, my mind comes to experience that all things, bearing the same spirit within them, are united in the heart that follows the spirit. In this sense, the detached spirit resembles a transcendent Hanullim, seemingly without emotion, while the compassionate heart resembles the immanent Hanullim who nourishes all beings within the world. Hanullim may appear emotionally detached, yet it is filled with deep compassion for all life. Likewise, the sanctified person who lives in full awareness of this spirit may seem detached, yet possesses boundless compassion.

In this way, Son Byeong-hui described a spiritual state that appears detached from the world yet is filled with the spirit of salvation. He divided this state into three levels according to the stages of spiritual cultivation.

The first level is the state in which, after living a life of suffering, one comes to continually recognize the presence of the spirit within. With a mind connected to that spirit, one can perceive the true nature of things and exercise wisdom without greed.

This first level is called the luminous mind born from emptiness (虛光心)...

The practitioner’s thoughts must always remain at both ends—spirit and mind. Through diligence without rest, wakefulness without confusion, and

33. *Muche beopgyeong*, “Gyeonseong hae” 見性解 (Understanding the Perception of the Spirit).

a tranquil mind unclouded by delusion, a light arises from within the empty mind. At that point, all principles are undoubtedly present, and the formless Dharma-body manifests itself where realization occurs. Regarding the true essence within the world of forms, the light of wisdom reflects and illuminates, leaving nothing unclear and nothing unknown. This is called the power of the luminous mind born from emptiness (一曰, 虛光心. . . 修者念頭必在兩端. 勤勤不息, 惺惺不昧, 寂寂不昏, 虛中生光. 必是萬理具存, 無相法體, 覺所現發, 有相色體, 回光返照, 無所不明, 無所不知. 此曰虛光心力).³⁴

As mentioned earlier, excessive attachment to things—stemming from greed—brings suffering to the mind. To free oneself from this state, one must diligently train to become aware of the spiritual nature whenever self-centered desire arises. Only through this effort can a clear and tranquil state of mind be maintained. It is in such a state that the formless Dharma-body—the spirit unbound by any attachment to appearances—can be connected to the mind and exert its influence. This enables one to clearly perceive the true nature of any object or situation and respond appropriately.

Even someone who is free from greed and acts with wisdom can already be considered a person of refined character. However, Son Byeong-hui believed that such a person's mind might still be inclined toward the worldly, and he encouraged a leap to an even higher state. This second level is a spiritual state in which one's mind becomes fully united with the spiritual nature, transcending the limits of worldly distinctions and responding to all things with serene equanimity. He described it as follows:

The second is the mind of seeing all things equally (如如心). Once one ascends to a higher realm, the mind becomes empty and still—there is nothing to ask, nothing to hear. Everything is like the mind, like the truth. All things in the universe are, by nature, one body with me. There is only oneness, no duality. I and others, good and evil, like and dislike, life and death—all are simply the natural expressions of the Dharma-body. What role has a human played in making them so? (二曰, 如如心. 一超上界, 空空

34. *Muche beopgyeong*, “Samsim gwan” 三心觀 (Contemplating the Three Minds).

寂寂, 無聞無聞. 如心如眞, 森羅萬相, 本吾一體. 唯一無二, 我我彼彼, 善善惡惡, 好好惡惡, 生生死死, 都是法體自用. 人何作成?).³⁵

When a person transcends their self-centeredness and fully realizes the spiritual nature, they are freed from all suffering and attain peace of mind. In this state, one no longer distinguishes between self and other, nor objectifies others from a self-centered perspective. On the contrary, one realizes that all things in the universe—including oneself—are intricately interconnected like a vast web, forming one unified body. The distinction between *I* and *you* dissolves. Not only that, value judgments such as good and evil, or liking and disliking, are no longer made from a self-centered standpoint. Even death is no longer seen as separate from life. All such distinctions—between self and other, good and evil, and so on—are merely natural manifestations of the one Dharma-body, the spiritual nature. They are not absolute differences created by human judgment, nor are they to be treated as fixed or definitive truths.

In the second stage, as described above, one transcends self-centeredness and eliminates discriminatory thinking toward all things, attaining spiritual peace that surpasses the secular world. However, this mental state is somewhat excessively detached from worldly affairs. Thus, Son Byeong-hui proposed a third stage in which the practitioner, without being severely detached from the world, trains to remain at peace—ultimately attaining a state of absolute inner freedom.

The third is the mind of freedom (自由心). Both Hanullim and worldly things are not entirely cut off. How could the Dao end in emptiness? How could things end in severance? The spiritual nature has neither beginning nor end, and principle has neither start nor finish (三曰, 自由心. 天亦不空, 物亦不斷. 道何止空, 物何止斷? 性無本末, 理無始終).³⁶

The Hanullim within me—that is, the spiritual nature—does not remain solely in a state of detachment, free from suffering and disconnected from the

35. *Muche beopgyeong*, “Samsim gwan.”

36. *Muche beopgyeong*, “Samsim gwan.”

world. If we recall that Choe Je-u and Choe Si-hyeong both emphasized that the Divine is not a being residing somewhere beyond this world but one who dwells within it, we can see that Son Byeong-hui's caution against remaining in a purely transcendent state of mind—and his insistence on being engaged with worldly affairs—faithfully inherits the spirit of 19th-century Donghak thought.

From the perspective of cultivation, a practitioner must not remain in a purely transcendent state. This is because such detachment cannot sustain the peaceful, affliction-free state of mind aimed for in the second stage of practice over the long term. This presents a profound paradox: “If the mind seeks emptiness and stillness, even emptiness and stillness become hindrances; if the mind seeks clarity, even clarity becomes a hindrance” (心欲爲空爲寂, 空寂亦障礙, 心欲明明, 明亦障礙).³⁷ Why does such a paradox arise? It is because traces of intentional control still linger in the use of the mind. What is called the state of mental freedom is realized only through the natural use of the mind, not through force or contrivance.

When the spiritual nature and the mind are free, the Dao will surely have no end. If the world is truly free, then the world will likewise never perish... Whether moving or resting, during everyday life and work, I act with complete freedom. If something is good, I acknowledge it as good; if something is virtuous, I call it virtuous; if anger is appropriate, I become angry; if it is time to live, I live; if it is time to die, I die. Every thought and every action is carried out without attachment, without obstruction. This is called the impartial Dao and impartial action of Hanullin's true essence (性心自由, 道必無終. 世必自由, 世亦不沒. ... 一動一靜, 日用行事, 吾必自由. 好則好, 善則善, 怒則怒, 生則生, 死則死. 每事每用, 無心行, 無碍行. 此之謂天體公道公行).³⁸

In the East Asian philosophical tradition, the concept of freedom is deeply connected with nature. A prime example is Laozi's idea of the Dao, where

37. *Muche beopgyeong*, “Samsim gwan.”

38. *Muche beopgyeong*, “Samsim gwan.”

the term “*ziran*”自然 implies both spontaneity and autonomy. Likewise, the *free mind* that Son Byeong-hui speaks of in the above passage is also a natural mind. Acting according to self-centered desires is not truly acting freely. Only the mind that follows the spiritual nature is genuinely free. When many people live in accordance with spiritual nature, truth will continually be realized in the world, and the world will not perish. This free mind, then, is none other than a natural mind—one free from artificial manipulation. Judgments of good and evil, expressions of joy, anger, sorrow, and pleasure, decisions about life and death—all arise by following the natural course of things.

In short, Son Byeong-hui understood the spiritual progression of a person as a kind of dialectical movement: beginning with a state where one wisely acts without greed in the midst of worldly life, passing through a tranquil and transcendent stage of detachment, and finally returning to the everyday world—where all actions flow naturally and freely from a heart united with the Spirit.

Conclusion

This article first examined how Son Byeong-hui used a threefold concept of Hanul and spirituality to explain the coexistence of self-centered and other-oriented tendencies within human beings. Next, it explored how, for the sanctification of character, he urged Cheondogyo practitioners to continually awaken to the divine spirituality of Hanullim within, training the mind to connect with this spirit, while also removing material desires and emotional attachments through a pure heart—thus cultivating compassion and communicating harmoniously with all beings. Finally, it summarized Son’s view that the spiritual stages of cultivation progress dialectically—from acting with wisdom and without greed in the secular world, through a state of peaceful detachment, and ultimately arriving at a condition of spontaneous, natural freedom while remaining fully engaged in worldly life.

Lastly, this reflection about the religious-philosophical significance of Son Byeong-hui’s view on inner spirituality and the sanctification of character will conclude the study.

First, Son's theory of mind and spiritual cultivation is especially significant when viewed in the context of Donghak's historical development. As mentioned at the beginning, Choe Je-u presented a distinctive Donghak view of the divine, wherein God exists as spirit within the human body and as transformation of *gi* within nature. Choe Si-hyeong further deepened the philosophical exploration of the divine as *gi*-transforming Hanullim. It was with Son Byeong-hui, however, that a more systematic explanation of Hanullim as spirit dwelling in the human interior became possible. As this paper has shown, while grounded in Donghak's theology of immanent divinity, Son integrated concepts from Neo-Confucianism and Buddhism to articulate a relatively systematic and detailed theory of how spirituality becomes differentiated within the human mind, and how one may awaken to it through spiritual training to achieve the sanctification of character.

Second, Son Byeong-hui's theory of spirituality offers a clear doctrinal foundation and religious purpose for leading a sacred life of compassion for others. This provides a basis for serious interfaith dialogue between Cheondogyo and other global religions under a shared religious ethos. As shown in this article, Son emphasized that both self-centeredness and altruism coexist within the human soul, and that the latter more transparently expresses the essence of Hanullim. Based on this, he taught that people must transcend egoistic tendencies and cultivate a heart for the well-being of others. In this regard, Cheondogyo's fundamental view of the human mind and its cultivation shares important common ground with other major world religions such as Buddhism and Christianity. Buddhism encourages the abandonment of attachment to self and external things to treat all beings equally and attain great spiritual freedom. Christianity, too, teaches love that places God at the center, not the self, and urges believers to love their neighbors as themselves. While these religions differ in their objects of faith and theological claims, they share an emphasis on overcoming the ego and promoting altruistic living—providing a meaningful foundation for interreligious dialogue.

Third, from a historical perspective, Son Byeong-hui's theory of spirituality is significant in that it reflects the existential condition of 20th-century humanity within a religious framework—while also revealing certain limitations. The

coexistence of self-centeredness and compassion has existed throughout human history, but different eras have emphasized different aspects. In early 20th-century Korea, as Western-style modernization emerged as an urgent national agenda, self-centeredness was in some ways embraced as a new spirit of the times. Especially given Korea's loss of sovereignty amid stalled economic modernization, national independence and self-strengthening became core values. In this context, Cheondogyo was compelled to accommodate aspects of modernization grounded in industrial capitalism.

Yet, for a religion that genuinely seeks spiritual awakening and the sanctification of character, its role must be to guide people toward a sacred life of compassion for others and for life itself—transcending self-centeredness—while also critiquing materialistic, industrial society and promoting a community of harmony and cooperation among humans and with nature. Son Byeong-hui's spirituality theory is certainly useful for helping individuals reflect inwardly and transcend egoism. However, his ideas alone fall short of bringing about a holistic spiritual transformation of society. Above all, he placed relatively little emphasis on the Donghak teachings—championed by earlier thinkers like Choe Si-hyeong—that, based on the idea of the *gi-transforming* Hanullim, called for reverence toward all things in Heaven and Earth and offered a critique of Western modernity. This shortcoming could be addressed by placing Son Byeong-hui's theory of spirituality into conversation with Choe Si-hyeong's *gihwa* 氣化 philosophy, allowing for a more integrated and comprehensive vision.

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