

## Article

# A Study on the Possibility of Religious Governance of New Religions in Korea: Focusing on the Ecological Worldview of Donghak and Won Buddhism

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**Abstract:** The most serious threats to humankind today are environmental and ecological problems. The global warming in particular is generally perceived as a serious threat to the survival of humanity and this sense of urgency has given us a chance to consider our place in the ecosystem and question our anthropocentrism. Various faiths acknowledge human obligations to protect the environment and preserve biodiversity. In the Korean context, while the eco-friendly worldviews of Buddhism are well-known, very little is known about other Korean religions' views on the environment. This paper examines whether representative new religions of Korea, namely Donghak and Won Buddhism, can contribute as "religious mechanisms" in alleviating ecological problems. The paper particularly focuses on the former's doctrine of *samgyeong* or "the Threefold Respect" and the latter's philosophy of *saeun* or "the Fourfold Grace," examining their relevance for religious governance. The paper argues that these two doctrines are permeated with an ecological view implying the need for all living things, including humans, animals and plants as well as the natural environment, to coexist. The paper also argues that these two religions, complete with guidelines for actions or practices, provide a path for building the possibility of religious governance through religious awakening of believers, mutual respect and mutual trust, and mutual communication and reflective cooperation.

**Keywords:** Donghak (Eastern Learning); Cheondogyo; Won Buddhism; *samgyeong* (the Threefold Respect); *saeun* (the Fourfold Grace); religious governance; ecology; neo-humanism; ecojustice; deep ecology



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## 1. Introduction

Many discussions in sociology define modern society as a risk society (Beck 1992; Davis 1999; Denney 2005; Orange 2007). The most serious threat to humankind today can be said to be ecological problems, particularly the global warming and its related natural disasters that is threatening the survival of species themselves. As Rittel and Webber's comparison of "tame problems" and "wicked problems" reveals, ecological crises are increasing day by day, and environmental problems are becoming a wicked problem on a global scale (Rittel and Webber 1973). Minjung theologian Myung-soo Kim (M.-s. Kim 1992, p. 393) agrees, as he sees the destruction of the ecosystem by "global warming, destruction of the ozone layer in the atmosphere, resource depletion, pollution, and environmental pollution brought on by growth-first policy" as a threat to the survival of all living things on earth, including humans. While disputed by some (see Lahsen 2013; Ojala 2015; Oreskes and Conway 2011), it can be agreed that humans are the main culprit of this destruction of the earth's ecosystem. Humans, in their incessant pursuit for profit and growth, have continuously exploited nature, driving the earth to an extremely dangerous stage.

Environmental issues have become increasingly important in various scholarly disciplines. Additionally, religion is no exception. There has been an impressive growth in the

scholarly and theological attempts to explore not only the teachings of different faiths on the environment but also their practices which can be implemented, irrespective of religious affiliation, as a way of responding to the ecological crisis (see [Bratton 2020](#); [Palmer and Finlay 2003](#); [Gottlieb 2009](#); [Richter 2020](#); [Taylor 2005](#)). In fact, religion and environmentalism has emerged as an interdisciplinary subfield in, among others, theology, religious studies, and the sociology of religion. There is a growing consensus among the existing interdisciplinary research that technical solutions alone cannot adequately solve the challenge posed by environmental change, and that human behavior and attitudes as well as consumption patterns will play a significant part in reducing environmental degradation ([The Royal Society 2012](#); cited from [Skirbekk et al. 2020b](#), p. 239). The latter point is particularly important, as social and psychological barriers related to culture, values, and beliefs can either support or hinder appropriate environmental reactions ([Markowitz and Shariff 2012](#)). Additionally, a holistic approach is necessary in dealing with the issue of environmental degradation, and an all-round method to tackling environmental problems prescribes that “social dimensions are given a vital role, not only in understanding human motivations, but also addressing normative issues,” i.e., the solution to climate risks lies with normative change ([Skirbekk et al. 2020b](#), p. 239; see [Vinhagen 2013](#)). Religion is a significant normative element in the lives of many people, complete with rules of behavior related to desired values, and it can have an impact on their life objectives and behavioral decisions, including those which have impact on the environment.

The interface among religion, governance and the environment also deserves mention. That is because there is an important connection between religion, how it is practiced (governance) and the attitudes toward the environment. Governance can be defined as the “processes and institutions, formal and informal, whereby rules are created, compliance is elicited. . . . in pursuit of collective goals” ([Hale and Held 2011](#), p. 12). Governance can also be defined as “the system by which an organization is controlled and operates, and the mechanisms by which it, and its people, are held to account. Ethics, risk management, compliance and administration are all elements of governance” ([Governance Institute of Australia 2022](#); see [Young 1999](#)). An application of this definition to religion or religious organization leads to a working definition of religious governance as the system of ethics, rules and practices by which a religious organization is controlled and operates. The system of rules and practices by which religious organizations have operated has led the latter to play various functions for both individual and society, although its role in bringing about social change has been dubious at best. Positive contributions made by religious organizations include the promotion of public education and the provision of medical services and welfare services, including orphanages and shelters for the homeless. However, the role of religion in promoting human rights and democracy has been less consistent. The role of religion in advancing environmental awareness has also been generally negligible. However, we cannot be faulted for being hopeful. Given the fact that religious organizations as a whole are arguably the most powerful NGO in the world and that their leaders possess moral authority to speak out in demanding and promoting positive social changes, religion can exert powerful influences on our struggle to contain environmental destructions and alleviate global warming. Throughout history, indeed, religion has often incubated and nurtured ideas for social change ([Weber 1930](#); [Maduro 1982](#); [Fawcett 2016](#); [Falk 2018](#)). The fact that religious organizations operate a large proportion of all the schools in the world makes the role of religion in the humankind’s fight against environmental destruction that much more crucial. According to Gary Lewis, Director of Policy and Programme Division at UN Environment, “About half of the schools on our planet are owned by faith-based institutions, therefore they play a crucial role in arming the society with knowledge about the damage we are doing to our environment and how we can turn things around” ([UN Environment Programme 2019](#)). Given the possibility that the world can actually become more religious in the face of intensifying climate change—the share of those with religious affiliation among the world population is expected to increase to 87 percent by 2050 from 2010’s figure of 84 percent ([Skirbekk et al. 2020b](#), p. 239)—the role

of religion in influencing people's behavior in regard to the environment can become even more important in the future.

All the major religions of the world, including Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, Islam, and Christianity as well as various faiths have norms and teachings requiring humans to respect and protect the environment and other life forms. The problem is, as many theologians point out, that these principles of "environmental theology" are often ignored, as they are seldom observed or practiced (see [Hessel and Ruether 2000](#); [Castillo 2019](#)). Faced with urgent ecological crisis, they argue that these teachings are more pertinent today than ever before. That is why representatives of nearly all major religions are working together to increase public awareness of the importance of conservation and eco-friendly practices ([UN Environment Programme 2019](#)). Needless to say, such effort should not be limited to major religions, but expanded to encompass all faiths, including new religious movements. The interfaith movement for environmentalism has a great potential to safeguard the environment and the welfare of people by igniting a global ecological ethic that is religiously based. Such effort is important, because religion, as mentioned above, regulates the behaviors of its followers in its own way, at least informally, and provides the basic principles for norms, i.e., guidelines and rules of behavior, to its followers, including those toward the natural environment. Religion also contains taboos which are used to guide human conduct. As the role of religion in shaping human behavior is paramount, it can thus affect the individual's consumption patterns, energy use, greenhouse gas emissions, and willingness to pay for climate-change mitigation or adaptation initiatives.

What is also noteworthy is that there has been an increasing collaboration between religious organizations and government or inter-governmental organizations in the engagement with environmentalism. For example, in May 2019, in collaboration with UN Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Religions Initiative, Africa, and the All African Conference of Churches (AACC) organized an Interfaith World Environment Day celebration in Nairobi, Kenya. The campaign called for worldwide awareness and action on the theme of "Faiths for Earth—We Stand Together to Save Mother Earth and Together We Can Beat Air Pollution," advocating "the Green Rule" ("Treat nature as you would like to be treated") ([UN Environment Programme 2019](#)).

Religious organizations may promote pro-environmental actions for a variety of causes and religious beliefs may affect how people perceive and respond to environmental concerns ([Newman and Fernandes 2016](#); cited from [Skirbekk et al. 2020b](#), p. 242). For example, according to the 2010 US General Social Survey, the degree of religiosity among Christians is found to be positively correlated with pro-environmental behaviors but not with environmental attitudes ([Clements et al. 2014](#)). However, a different US poll observes a negative correlation between religious membership and environmental concern ([Jones et al. 2014](#)). Another finding argues that those who believe that environmental change is due to forces outside their own control, i.e., the result of chance or fate, are likely to engage less in pro-environmental behaviors ([Kalamas et al. 2014](#)). Religious affiliation can also have an impact on a person's normative goals, which in turn can affect his or her greater propensity to acknowledge environmental problems and adopt environmentally responsible practices ([Liobikienė and Juknys 2016](#)). [Sherkat and Ellison \(2007\)](#), in contrast, report that conservative Protestant Christians in the United States are less likely to be involved in behaviors related with environmental activism. Religious convictions also influence many other environmentally relevant behaviors:

Previous research has found that religion influences many aspects of lifestyle that affect the environment, including childbearing decisions and the use of contraceptives (and resulting effects on population growth); risk behaviors and use of health services (which affect life expectancy); whether people see climatic change as human-caused, or related to forces beyond human control; consumption patterns, and thereby use of natural resources and emissions of greenhouse gases; and willingness to take actions to abate environmental degradation. ([Skirbekk et al. 2020a](#); see [Skirbekk et al. 2020b](#))

According to Skirbekk et al. (2020a), moreover, nations whose inhabitants are less religious tend to use more resources and produce more emissions; yet, they are also better prepared to deal with resulting environmental challenges, because they are wealthier. On the other hand, nations whose populations are more religious tend to use fewer resources; yet at the same time, they have less capacity to meet environmental challenges, and are subject to more adverse outcomes, in part due to their high levels of poverty and continuing population growth.

It must be noted that while more research is being carried out on a global scale, the existing literature on the impact of religion on environmental behavior is disproportionately concentrated on Christianity and Western countries (Jones et al. 2014; Taylor 2010; Lykes 2016). According to a study that used representative data from 91 countries gathered between 1989 and 2014 as part of the World Values Survey, religion is linked to a greater willingness to pay for environmental protection. The survey also finds that religion is also linked to a higher likelihood of people donating to environmental causes or participating in environmental protests, and that the willingness to contribute to environmental protection is more pronounced among respondents living in the low-income nation categories (Zemo and Nigus 2020).

The above discussion leads us to the following observations: that religion has a role to play in combatting environmental degradation; that this sense of responsibility applies not only to major religions of the world but also to all faiths, irrespective of the place of origin; and that there is a need for inter-faith recognition and appreciation for environmentally friendly teachings and practices, i.e., one does not have to be Buddhist to appreciate its doctrine on “the Noble Eightfold Paths”.<sup>1</sup> The question is: What is the interface connecting religion, governance, and the environment? What role, if any, can new religious movements play in promoting environmental awareness and combatting climate change? What about for representative new religions of Korea, namely Donghak (東學) and Won Buddhism (圓佛教)? Do they contain any teachings which can be used to promote our ethical commitment to protect the environment? In view of these questions, this study intends to approach the ecological problem from the viewpoint of religious governance. In particular, the study begins on the premise that Donghak’s doctrine of *samgyeong* (三敬) or “the Threefold Respect,” i.e., respect for the Lord of Heaven, respect for human beings and respect for all things, and that Won Buddhism’s philosophy of *saeun* (四恩) or “the Fourfold Grace,” which emphasizes the need to express gratitude to *cheonjjeun* (天地恩, “the Grace of Heaven and Earth”), *bumoeun* (父母恩, “Grace of Parents”), *dongpoeun* (同胞恩, “Grace of Brethren”), and *beopryuleun* (法律恩, “Grace of Laws”), can act as a religious mechanism to help alleviate the ecological problems facing humankind. The paper first examines the “ecologism” expressed in *samgyeong* and *saeun*, followed by an exploration of the common ground of the major doctrines of the two religions on the issue of ecology. The paper then assesses these doctrines from the viewpoint of religious governance.

## 2. The Ecological View and the Possibility of Religious Governance in the Philosophy of *Samgyeong* and *Saeun*

### 2.1. *Donghak* and the Philosophy of *Samgyeong*

Donghak was founded in 1860 at Yongdamjeong, Gumi Mountain, Gyeongju, when its founder Choe Je-u (1824–1864),<sup>2</sup> also known by his venerable name Suun, experienced a spiritual encounter with Hanulnim,<sup>3</sup> literally the “Heavenly Lord,” a supreme being who oversees the affairs of the universe and to whom Koreans have traditionally entreated (see Yun 2004).<sup>4</sup> Choe was succeeded by Choe Si-hyeong (1827–1898), the second leader of Donghak who is also known by his venerable name Haewol, and by Son Byeong-hui (1861–1922), the third leader of the movement who oversaw the transition of Donghak into a bona fide religion, complete with a name change to Cheondogyo (天道教, “Religion of the Heavenly Way”) in 1905.

Donghak, literally meaning “Eastern learning,” first arose as a reaction to Seohak, meaning “Western Learning,” e.g., Catholicism and foreign knowledge.<sup>5</sup> The main doc-



trines of Donghak are found in the two scriptures written by Suun, namely *Donggyeongdaejeon* (東經大全, “Great Scripture of Eastern Learning”) and *Yongdamyusa* (龍潭遺詞, “Memorial Songs of Dragon Pool”). The novel ideas of Donghak contained in these two books present drastically different and unique views on human beings, nature, and the universe. A central tenet of Donghak is *sicheonju* (侍天主), meaning “bearing God within” or “serving God within me,” i.e., “having Heaven enshrined inside oneself, which again can be interpreted as Heaven has come into oneself and is living and breathing within oneself” (Y. Hong 2015, p. 115). A related meaning of *sicheonju* is that anyone who has Heaven inside her/himself can become Heaven itself (Y. Hong 2015, p. 115). There are also other concepts of Donghak which share similarities with *sicheonju*, namely *innaecheon* (人乃天, literally meaning “the Heavenly Lord within human”), meaning “God is found within human beings” or “humans are Heaven” (Choi 2012, p. 298), and *insicheon* (人是天, literally meaning “human in God or Heaven”). In particular, the concept of *insicheon*, which was conceived by Haewol, makes a radical assertion affirming the essential oneness of God and the human being.

Heaven, earth, and man, all follow one principle and one energy. Man is a lump of Heaven, and Heaven is the Spirit of all things.

Man is Heaven (God), and Heaven is man. Therefore, outside man, there is no Heaven, and outside Heaven, there is no man. (Cheondogyo Central Church Headquarters 1992; cited from Y. C. Kim 1977, p. 43)

The essential unity of God and the human being is also expressed as follows:

Where is mind? It is in Heaven (God).

Where is Heaven? It is in the mind.

Therefore, mind is Heaven, and Heaven is mind.

Outside mind there is no Heaven, and outside Heaven there is no mind.

Therefore, Heaven and mind originally are not two things. (Cheondogyo Central Church Headquarters 1992; cited from Y. C. Kim 1977, p. 43)

Cheondogyo thus expresses a monistic view regarding humans’ relation with God, for the latter is not portrayed as a distantly transcendental being, but as an immanent being who is present in all the activities of human beings (Y. C. Kim 1977, p. 43). Such a view has led to the development of an important ethical doctrine of Cheondogyo called *sainyeocheon* (事人如天), meaning “respect others as you respect Heaven.” That is, since humans are essentially divine in their nature, they should be treated as gods: To treat others as gods implies the treatment of others with the utmost respect and dignity, irrespective of their age, gender and social status (Y. C. Kim 1977, p. 44).

A review of Donghak’s core doctrines actually reveals that God, human beings, and all other existences are inextricably linked. Nature and living things are both concrete embodiments of the formless God and an incarnation of the infinite sacred God. In fact, the philosophy of *sicheonju* is expanded by Haewol to include all species and is further refined in the following way:

We, humans, are born bearing the sacred spirit of God and live on with God’s sacred spirit in us. However, how can we say that humans alone bear God? There is not a thing in the universe which does not bear God. The bird’s chirping is also God’s voice. . . . Every life is born only after it receives this mind and energy. All creation in the universe is penetrated by the same energy and mind. (cited from C. S. Kim 2002, p. 170)

The concept of *sicheonju* is also intimately linked to the doctrine of *samgyeong*, comprising *gyeongcheon* (敬天, “respect for heaven”), *gyeongin* (敬人, “respect for fellow human beings”), and *gyeongmul* (敬物, “respect for all things”), which forms a key teaching of Donghak.

Firstly, humans must honor God. This is the first principle of the Way expounded by the late Great Teacher [Suun]. One who does not know why one must honor God does not know how to love the truth. This is because God is at the center of the truth. Honoring God does not mean honoring a higher being in an empty space. Honoring one's own mind is the right way of honoring God. . . .

Secondly, honor fellow human beings. Honoring God comes in effect through honoring human beings. If one honors God but not one's fellow human beings, it is the same as knowing the principles of farming but not sowing the seeds. . . . If one abandons humans and venerates only God, it is the same as dumping water and wanting to be relieved from drought. . . .

Thirdly, honor things. One cannot reach the highest stage of virtue by only honoring human beings. One can unite with the virtue of connecting with heaven and earth only by honoring things (Cheondogyo Central Church Headquarters 1992, pp. 354–58; cited from C. S. Kim 2002, p. 171).

*Samgyeong* is consistent with the phrase *inodongpo murodongpo* (人吾同胞 物吾同胞), literally meaning that “all the other humans and all things are brothers and sisters of mine” (Y. Hong 2015, p. 121; see C. S. Kim 2000; Seong 2020, 2021). *Samgyeong* thus represents a radical perspective in which all life forms are valued and respected as equal members of the entire universe, differing significantly from the modern, anthropocentric worldview in which human beings alone are considered to be the most significant entity of the universe.

All of this shows that the doctrine of *sicheonju* is applied not only to human beings but also to everything in the universe.<sup>6</sup> Inherent in *samgyeong* is the idea that “the Threefold Venerations are completed only when the respect for things is done properly” (Choi 2007, p. 215). As such, the respect for all things forms an intersection with ecological discourse. In this vein, one of the key ideas that best expresses the philosophy of Donghak is *mugeuk daedo* (無極大道, the Great Cosmic Way), through which the sanctification of life can be achieved, i.e., through the recognition of the presence of Heaven in all life forms, “individuals can serve other humans along with all life forms in the world as if they were Heaven itself” (Y. Hong 2015, p. 106).

Among the Threefold Respect, it is the philosophy of *gyeongmul* (“respect for things”), particularly Haewol's ideas, which is most relevant to ecology or an ecological view. As an extension of the doctrines of *innaecheon* (“God is found within human beings”) and *insicheon* (“human in God or Heaven”), Haewol elaborated on the concepts of *mulmulcheon* (物物天), meaning that “within all things is Heaven” or “all things are heavenly,” which insinuates that we cannot but respect all the things that are heavenly, and *sasacheon* (事事天), meaning that “within all matters is Heaven” or “all matters are heavenly” (H. Y. Lee 2020, p. 459). Because all things are heavenly—i.e., heaven exists not only within all human beings but also in all things—people and natural life should be treated with respect and be regarded as being as precious as Heaven (Huh 2003, p. 452). Such a view is well manifested in the following saying by Haewol: “Man [Human beings] cannot achieve the Way by simply serving other men; only by going further and respecting even things shall he [they] become one with the Way” (D.-h. Yi 1933, p. 78; cited from Y. Hong 2015, p. 127). According to Haewol, moreover,

Since there is no thing that does not have the Heavenly Lord in them, knowing this makes killing naturally forbidden, even if it is not explicitly so. [...] Each winged animal has its own kind, and each insect has its own life, so respecting things brings virtue to the whole world. (G. Yi 2011, p. 154; cited from Cho 2022, p. 37)

Humans cannot achieve the culmination of ethics simply by respecting humans, but one can be united with the virtue of the transformation of Heaven and Earth only upon reaching the point of respecting all things. (G. Yi 2011, p. 194; cited from Cho 2022, p. 37)

By extending the object of veneration from Heaven and human beings to all beings, animate and inanimate, Haewol shows a “life-integrated worldview” that does not dualize human life and cosmic life. Haewol’s view of the religious world is consistent with Donghak’s cosmic view, regarding inorganic objects as not dead objects but as living and forming organic life communities. Such a view, of course, is exactly in line with the ecological worldview in the modern sense (Shin and Seok 2015, pp. 149–50). This is especially true in the sense that Haewol “views the universe itself as a huge living organism in which all things are organically interrelated and are essentially ‘compatriots’ rooted in the same origin” (Yun 2004, p. 210). Haewol’s idea of *gyeongmul* thus insinuates that since all things are heavenly, they are equal and should be the object of respect (Huh 2003, p. 455). Haewol’s “religious view” of ecology respects humans, cherishes nature as a basic premise for realizing the new world, recognizes the need for human beings and other life forms as well as the natural environment to coexist, and emphasizes putting such view into practice in life, as Donghak encompasses a set of specific practices or commandments, namely *sipmucheon*, which is discussed in greater detail below. Additionally, the last point is particularly important: the new world in which all beings of the universe coexist cannot be achieved at any moment by the power of the transcendent, but is possible only when the way of dealing with all things in the life of ordinary people fundamentally changes in accordance with the principles of *gyeongmul* (Yu 2013, pp. 244–45).

## 2.2. Won Buddhism and the Philosophy of Saeun

*Wonbulgyo* or Won Buddhism is a compound of the Korean word *won*, meaning “circle,” symbolizing the ultimate reality or our true nature, and *bulgyo* (Buddhism). It is an indigenous, new religion of Korea which can be said to have begun on 28 April 1916 when its founder Park Chung-bin (1891–1943) experienced an awakening to “the truth”. After attaining spiritual enlightenment, Park made the following statement to describe his understanding of the ultimate reality of the universe:

All things in the universe are of unitary noumenal nature and all dharmas are of unitary source, amongst which the way of neither arising nor ceasing and the principle of cause-effect response, being mutually grounded on each other, have formed a round framework. (Chung 2003, p. 167; cited from Krageloh et al. 2022, p. 1334)

Known to his followers as Venerable Sotaesan, Park began his religious mission upon realization that the advancing materialism of modernity was beginning to enslave humans and that the only way for people to overcome this problem was by increasing spiritual power through belief in true, genuine religion and by training in ethical norms and sound morality. Park’s main doctrines can be found in *Bulgyo jeongjeon* (The Correct Canon of Buddhism), published in 1943. Another key figure of Won Buddhism is the second patriarch of the religion, Song-gyu (1900–1962), also known as Jeongsan, who laid the foundation for the modern day Won Buddhism. He published a new canon in 1962, namely *Wonbulgyo gyojeon* (The Scriptures of Won Buddhism).

Unlike traditional Buddhism focusing on meditation, Won Buddhism calls itself a Buddhism for everyday life for ordinary people in the contemporary world.<sup>7</sup> That is why it has built its worship halls in urban areas. Another unique aspect of the new religion is that its worship halls enshrine a one-circle symbol instead of Buddha statues or paintings (see K.-s. Park 2003). Believers meditate before, or “focus their spiritual gaze on that circle, which they call ‘Ilwonsang’” (Baker 2008, p. 89).<sup>8</sup> The term *ilwon* is a compound word of “one” (一) and “circle” (圓), implying that “the truth cannot be divided into many, hence is not discriminatory, but is fundamentally one and the ‘shape’ (相) of that oneness is a circle” (C. Lee 2014, p. 86). Ilwonsang (“unitary circular symbol”) is thus a depiction in graphic form of the idea that *ilwon* is the source of all things, both sentient and non-sentient beings, in the universe. Ilwonsang, which is believed to embody the ultimate truth of the universe (see Chung 1984), reminds its believers that “everything in the universe has the same origin

and shares the same basic nature” (Baker 2008, p. 89). According to the scriptures of Won Buddhism, the perfect circle is “the original source of all things in the universe, the mind-seal of all the buddhas and sages, and the original nature of all sentient beings; the realm where there is no discrimination regarding great and small, being and nonbeing; the realm where there is no change amid arising and ceasing, coming and going; the realm where wholesome and unwholesome karmic retribution has ceased; the realm where language, names, and characteristics are utterly void” (cited from Baker 2008, p. 112). In focusing on Ilwonsang, the followers of Won Buddhism are encouraged to look within, i.e., learn to recognize and activate one’s true inner nature in order to cultivate the mind and heart that directs their thoughts and actions (Baker 2008, p. 112).

The worship of *ilwon* is intimately tied to the acknowledgement of our indebtedness to *saeun* or the Fourfold Grace—the Grace of Heaven and Earth, the Grace of Parents, the Grace of Brethren, and the Grace of Laws—which signifies the need to be grateful for various elements in the universe (Chung 2003, pp. 124–31; see K.-s. Park 2005; Hwang 2016; Baek 2013). For Sotaesan, the ideas for *saeun* came about after he experienced a great enlightenment, whereby he realized that he owed his existence to heaven and earth, his parents, his brethren and laws. Through the Fourfold Grace, Won Buddhism “tries to change the world of resentment to that of gratitude; for the world of resentment is a hell and the world of gratitude is a paradise” (Chung 1994, p. 853). Resentment arises in one’s heart when one is not aware of one’s indebtedness to the source of one’s own life. The Fourfold Grace in Won Buddhism also expresses the interdependency and interconnectedness as well as “coexistence” and “oneness” of all things in the universe. The Fourfold Grace is thus a perfect manifestation of Ilwonsang. Don Baker (2008, p. 90) describes the Fourfold Grace in greater detail as follows:

Won Buddhism teaches that, just as children should acknowledge the debt of gratitude they owe the parents who gave them life, so should all human beings acknowledge how much they owe the four forces that underlie their very existence as human beings. We should of course feel grateful to our parents, who brought us into this world, but we should also feel grateful to heaven and earth for providing the air we breathe and the soil on which we stand. We should also recognize that, because we cannot provide everything we need with our own hands, we should be grateful to our fellow human beings, who provide us with such necessities as food, clothing, housing, education, and entertainment. Finally, we should acknowledge that we owe a debt of gratitude to the laws that protect our lives and possessions.

To elaborate more specifically on each of the Fourfold Grace, the Grace of Heaven and Earth maintains that all living beings owe their existence to Heaven and Earth, as exemplified “in the brightness of the sun and the moon that one can discern and know the things in nature” and in “the favor of winds, clouds, rain and dew that myriad things can grow and one can live off their products” (Chung 2003, p. 124). All life forms continue their existence “owing to the great virtues that result from heaven and earth following their ways”:

1. It is owing to air in the sky that one can breathe.
2. It is owing to the ground of the earth that one can support one’s body to live.
3. It is owing to the brightness of the sun and the moon that one can discern and know the things in nature.
4. It is owing to the favor of winds, clouds, rain, and dew that myriad things can grow and one can live off their products.
5. It is owing to the principle of no birth and no death of heaven and earth that one can attain eternal life following the way of no birth and no death (Chung 2003, p. 124).

According to the Grace of Parents, individuals are indebted to their parents in three ways: (1) individuals owe their body to their parents who brought them to this world; (2) their parents have raised and protected them with unlimited love and sacrifice until



the latter grew to be self-reliant; and (3) their parents have taught them about their duties and responsibilities to human society (Chung 2003, p. 127). As a way of “recompensing” the parents for their beneficence, individuals should follow the following four maxims: (1) pursue the ways of moral discipline and humanity; (2) support your parents unreservedly when they are unable to help themselves and help them secure spiritual comfort; (3) support and protect the parents of others as your own whether your parents are living or deceased; and (4) after your parents pass away, remember them by preserving their pictures and biographical records (Chung 2003, p. 127). All of these maxims are based on “the causal law of karmic retribution”, i.e., those who help their parents and/or the parents of others will be helped when they themselves become helpless, while those who are not filial and who do not help the parents of others will not be helped by others when in need (Chung 2003, p. 127–28). Additionally, individuals’ filial act, or lack thereof, will be emulated by their offspring.

The third grace of the Fourfold Grace, i.e., the Grace of Brethren, challenges us to think whether it is possible for us to survive without the assistance of other human beings, animals and plants. In fact, the term “brethren” or *dongpo* (同胞) includes not only fellow human beings but also other creatures, including animals and even plants. Accordingly, all living things in the universe are brothers, sisters and compatriots of life, intertwined with one vital energy, like the stems, branches, and leaves extending from the root of a single tree. The Grace of Brethren thus argues that “birds and beasts, and grass and trees, too, are of help to us” and that “one ought not to destroy grass or trees or take the life of birds or beasts without justifiable reason” (Chung 2003, pp. 128–29). Moreover, among all the life forms in the universe, even what appears as a fierce battle for survival not only among humans but also among other living things should not be seen as a relationship of confrontation and struggle but a relationship of mutual dependence, benefit and prosperity. This is especially true among human beings: people owe their existence to fellow human beings, because they are not self-sufficient and are mutually dependent on one another for the exchange of necessary products and services essential for survival. People are indebted to one another under the principle of mutual benefit, irrespective of the kind of services performed for one another, i.e., we collectively benefit from the products and services provided by human beings of all occupations. Additionally, unless people become grateful to one another and honor the principle of fairness-based mutual benefit, there will be conflicts and animosity among individuals, families, and nations.

In the Grace of Laws, the term “law” includes not only religious and moral teachings, the principles with which human beings live and preserve their lives and advance their knowledge, but also judicial institutions which help preserve justice, punish injustice, and distinguish right from wrong. The term “law” thus connotes the principle of fairness for justice and implies that individuals owe their life to law (Chung 1994, p. 858). The basic principle for recompensing the beneficence of law is that one ought not to do things which are prohibited by laws and that one ought to do things which are reinforced by laws. Additionally, one ought to learn and practice the following: “(i) the way of individual moral cultivation, (ii) the way of regulating one’s family, (iii) the way of harmonizing the society, (iv) the way of governing the state, and (v) the way of putting the world at peace as an individual and as a member of a family, society, nation, and the world, respectively” (Chung 1994, p. 858). The need to be thankful to law can be simply explained: if we are grateful to law and abide by the law, we will be protected, but if we are ungrateful to law and become unaccepting, we will be punished and restrained.

In Won Buddhism, therefore, the old practice of offering prayers in front of Buddha status has been replaced by the practice of recompensing for the Fourfold Grace, the essential ways of which are: (i) practicing, like Heaven and Earth, the virtue of not abiding in the idea of favor after rendering it to others, (ii) protecting the helpless as one was protected by one’s parents when one was helpless, (iii) following the principle of mutual benefit based on fairness, and (iv) doing justice and forsaking injustice” (Chung 1994, p. 859). Important principles underlying these essential ways is to change the life of resentment to that

of gratitude and to actually do what is required by the four maxims. Only by following these maxims one can realize the virtue of the Fourfold Grace in the mundane world.

### 2.3. The Possibilities of Religious Governance

A study which explores the possibility of religious governance through the ecological ideology that is inherent in the philosophy of *samgyeong* and *saeun* is meaningful and timely. Both Donghak and Won Buddhism are religious organizations with unified organizational structure and authority, complete with central religious doctrines which operate as a system of religious teaching in the lives of each believer. The ecological view which is commonly implied by both *samgyeong* and *saeun* is a principle that breaks away from anthropocentrism. For example, Donghak's *samgyeong* (the Threefold Respect), namely *gyeongcheon* (respect for Heaven), *gyeongin* (respect for human beings), and *gyeongmul* (respect for things), insinuates not only that all people worship Heaven, regardless of age, gender, being rich or poor but also that all life forms should be respected as equal members of the whole universe, which diverges significantly from the traditional viewpoint in which either deities or human beings alone "occupy" the center of the cosmos (Y. Hong 2015, p. 121). The philosophy of *samgyeong* shows that Haewol's thought expanded and transitioned to the understanding that life is extant in not only in the human body but also in all other living things, such as animals and plants, as well as in inanimate things (Choi 2012, p. 359). Haewol's thought seems to be based on a monistic worldview that sees humans, animals and plants, trees, rivers, and mountains and fields as forming an organic network of relationships rather than as isolated entities (Kang 2007, p. 365). Haewol recognizes the relationships among Heaven and Earth and all things as follows:

Heaven and earth are our parents and our parents are heaven and earth. Thus, heaven and earth are one with our parents. The womb of parents is the womb of heaven and earth. People know the logic of the womb of parents, but do not know that of heaven and earth. . . . Milk is grain generated from the human body and grain is milk of heaven and earth. The womb of parents is the womb of heaven and earth. A child sucks milk from his mother's breasts, which is the milk of heaven and earth. When the child grows, he eats grains, which is the milk of heaven and earth. (cited from C. S. Kim 2002, p. 172)

Therefore, Haewol's *samgyeong* expresses not only respect and considerateness at the level of humanity but also the spirit of coexistence among all things in the universe to achieve balance and harmony. It can be said to be a vision, and the realization, of a community of life through the coexistence of humans and heaven, earth and nature, individuals and communities and all things, which marks a departure from the frameworks of the "law of the jungle" and the survival of the fittest, which have been the principles of human survival so far (Y. Kim 2012, p. 128). In Donghak, moreover, the philosophies of *mulmulcheon*, meaning "all things are heavenly," and *sasacheon*, meaning "all matters are heavenly," manifest the above view. Both philosophies insist on the need to respect all things in life, living or dead, as we are all connected and interdependent, and on the need to recognize the importance of harmonious coexistence.

Similar thoughts are found in the philosophy of *cheocheobulsang sasabulgong* (處處佛像事事佛供) in Won Buddhism, meaning that "everywhere is a Buddha image and that everything is to be done as an offering to Buddha" (Krageloh et al. 2022, p. 1335; see Chung 2003). This thought implies that we need to be respectful of all things in the universe and be cognizant of the importance of coexistence, which is consistent with the philosophy of *saeun* in Won Buddhism. As insinuated above, *saeun* is a monistic worldview, which is clearly evident in the "truth" of *ilwonsang* (see C. Lee 2014, pp. 88–96). The monistic worldview that appears in *ilwonsang* is that despite the fact that all things in the cosmos are "colorful," from their fundamental standpoint, everything has just one source and one life (Hwang 2016, p. 201). Additionally, when we view things narrowly, we only see, for example, the life of each individual fish, but if things are seen more broadly, we see that the water cannot be separated from the life of fish; similarly, when we look at humans

narrow-mindedly, each individual is the life of a single person, but seen more holistically, we can see the nature of all things (J.-h. [Park 1982](#), pp. 47–48). The “truth” of, and the unity of the noumenal and the phenomenal reality in, *ilwonsang* is evident as follows:

Irwoŋn is the noumenal nature of all beings in the universe, the original nature of all buddhas and patriarchs, and the Buddha-nature of all sentient beings. It is the realm where there is no differentiation of noumenon from phenomenon or being from nonbeing, the realm where there is no change of arising and ceasing or going and coming, the realm where the karmic retribution of good and evil has ceased, and the realm where the verbal, audible, and visible characteristics are utterly void. In accordance with the light of [the mind-essence of] empty and calm, numinous awareness, the differentiation of noumenon from phenomenon, and being from nonbeing appears; wherewith the distinction between good and evil karmic retribution comes into being; and the verbal, audible, and visible characteristics become clear and distinct so that the three worlds in the ten directions appear like a jewel on one’s own palm, and the creative wonder of true emptiness cum marvelous existence freely conceals and reveals through all beings in the universe throughout incalculable aeons without beginning. This is the truth of Irwoŋnsang. ([Chung 2003](#), pp. 120–21)

In this way, Donghak’s *samgyeong* and Won Buddhism’s *saeun* do not hold a dualistic view regarding things of the universe. All things of the universe are one living whole, inseparable and interdependent. Such idea is markedly different from the Western logic of objectifying nature as an object of conquest and control. Therefore, the ecological worldview of *samgyeong* and *saeun* goes to the extent that the damage done to, and the “pain” felt by, heaven and earth is one’s own pain ([Kang 2007](#), pp. 364–65).

It is also worth noting that the ecological worldview implied in the major doctrines of the two religions can actually lead to religious governance, for the philosophies of *samgyeong* and *saeun* are not just ideas or discourses, as they are accompanied by a set of religious practices in which public accountability is secured through the spontaneity of believers’ religious awakening and reflection and the cultivation of “members’ self-regulation and self-control ability” (M.-s. [Lee 2010](#), p. 44). Indeed, both Donghak and Won Buddhism require their followers to put the ideas of *samgyeong* and *saeun* into action in real life: the monistic worldview that is the basis of the ecological ideology of *samgyeong* and *saeun* appears as a set of specific religious practices or commandments, namely *sipmucheon* in Donghak and “the essential dharmas (remedies) of daily practice” in Won Buddhism. Both sets of code of practice, which are specified below, serve as the basis for securing public responsibility.

*Sipmucheon*, literally meaning “ten not-to-do commandments against Hanulnim (the Lord of Heaven),” includes the following:

1. Do not deceive Hanulnim
2. Do not act arrogantly toward Hanulnim
3. Do not hurt Hanulnim
4. Do not confuse Hanulnim
5. Do not let Hanulnim die early
6. Do not defile Hanulnim
7. Do not make Hanulnim starve
8. Do not destroy Hanulnim
9. Do not hate Hanulnim
10. Do not let Hanulnim succumb (see [Huh 2003](#), p. 445).

Hanullim here refers to everything in the universe, including humans, which implies that nature should not be seen simply as an object of conquest. *Sipmucheon* is thus a practical program of respect for all things, and it is applied to humans and nature equally. While the wording of *sipmucheon* does not readily make apparent the true intention of each of the commandment, it can be inferred that all these actions against Hanulnim, e.g., deceiving

Hanulnim, acting arrogantly toward Hanulnim, etc., all amount to actions against the human body and mind as well the natural environment (J. Hong 1993, pp. 180–91). For example, just to name a few, hurting Hanulnim refers to doing harms to other humans and to the environment, letting Hanulnim die early refers to suicide by humans or slaughter of animals, and letting Hanulnim succumb refers to the total destruction of humanity and the environment.

A set of practices advocated by Won Buddhism also show the latter's commitment to eco-friendly social practices. In particular, the Grace of Parents among the Fourfold Graces can serve to mobilize Won Buddhism's ecological worldview into social practice. By nurturing and teaching the helpless children, parents teach the former a great principle that we as human beings ought to observe and practice, particularly "the duty of not just providing for their parents but also to protect the helpless as much as they can" and "repaying for the kindness of one's parents by devoting oneself to helping the helpless" (K.-s. Park 2005, p. 123). Such religious doctrine stems from the recognition that all living spirits are connected by one energy, which is ultimately consistent with the monistic worldview of Won Buddhism (C. Lee 2014, p. 99). As revealed in the teachings of Sotaesan, moreover, one must do everything in life as if to serve Buddha. Won Buddhism encourages its adherents to actively participate in social service and various NGO activities, and Won Buddhists recite the following "remedies for daily practice" and practice "life is Buddhism" in their daily life, proving that their religion is not just a set of religious doctrines but a practical religion that needs to be practiced on a daily basis. The essential dharmas (remedies) of daily practice are as follows:

1. The mind is originally free from disturbance, but disturbances arise in response to sense-objects; let us maintain the Samadhi (a state of meditative consciousness) of our original nature by letting go of those disturbances.
2. The mind is originally free from delusion, but delusions arise in response to sense-objects; let us maintain the wisdom of our original nature, letting go of those delusions.
3. The mind is originally free from wrong-doing, but wrong-doings arise in response to the sense-objects; let us maintain the precepts of our original nature by letting go of those wrong-doings.
4. Let us remove disbelief, greed, laziness, and ignorance by means of belief, zeal, questioning, and dedication.
5. Let us turn a life of resentment into a life of gratitude.
6. Let us turn a life of dependency into a life of self-reliance.
7. Let us turn a reluctance to learn into a willingness to learn well.
8. Let us turn a reluctance to teach into a willingness to teach well.
9. Let us turn a lack of public spirit into an eagerness for the public interest (Won Dharma Center 2022).

The essential dharmas (remedies) of daily practice comprise the core of Won Buddhist doctrines and they are collectively characterized as having performative applications for all of the latter's doctrines. For example, among the nine remedies, the first four are ways to promote self-independent wisdom, while the last four refer to ways to obtain compassion for others. These remedies collectively suggest a way for all mankind to live well together (Jeong 2005, p. 89). In particular, the ninth instruction ("Let us turn a lack of public spirit into an eagerness for the public interest") is particularly related to the ecological point of view. Here, the "public spirit" is focused on being beneficial to the public and refers to the mindset that prioritizes others over oneself. The idea of "public interest" can also be extended to the principle of biocentrism, that is, an ecological thinking that the things surrounding human beings are related to them, not separate from them, and that all things in the universe are intertwined and that the value of all life forms is equal. Biocentrism emphasizes the human definition of the ecological environment through which a shift is made from a normative argument to ethical obligations based on a descriptive explanation that life has intrinsic value (Y. Kim 2006, pp. 432–33). Therefore, the ninth remedy



can be understood as the beginning of the code of practice for ecojustice, as Sotaesan's non-dualism has led to the emergence of the Won Buddhist Environmental Movement Solidarity, through which eco-activists have pursued ecojustice in environmental laws and education "for green practice in daily life."

In short, the common ground for exploring the possibility of religious governance through the ecological worldview inherent in Donghak's *samgyeong* and Won Buddhism's *saeun* can be said to be a monistic worldview. The common ecological worldview revealed in the two religious doctrines works as a mechanism to increase the possibility of its role as a religious governance system. The reason is that, first, believers themselves achieve self-cultivation through voluntary self-discipline and reflection, and by nurturing self-regulation and self-control ability, they become motivated to fortify public responsibility, and second, mutual trust can be built around mutual communication, mutual respect, mutual consideration and tolerance. among various members and organizations. Therefore, it can be said that the organic view of ecology implied in Donghak's *samgyeong* and Won Buddhism's *saeun* shows the possibility of religious governance that can overcome the grim ecological crisis of the global village and advance toward coexistence.

In contrast to modern anthropocentrism, which has rationalized the exploitation of nature as a means of advancing civilization, Donghak's *samgyeong* and Won Buddhism's *saeun* both manifest the so-called neo-humanism, which is a philosophy, a practice and a way of life that respects all things of the universe, animate and inanimate, in the belief that all existence is interconnected and bound together. Neo-humanism differs from traditional Western anthropocentrism in that it promotes a universally compassionate ethical stance toward all life, including fellow humans and all other nonhuman existences (Y. Hong 2015, p. 123). Donghak holds that nature is a cosmic world that should be revered, as humanity and all other living things are interconnected. By respecting nonhuman existences, by acknowledging the need for a harmonious relationship between human beings and other nonhuman beings, and by recognizing that dependency is reciprocal, the ecological view of Donghak shares many common characteristics with neo-humanism. For example, the practicability of Donghak's neo-humanistic characteristic is best exemplified by *samgyeong*, particularly *gyeongmul* (respect for all things). Indeed, *gyeongmul* can be said to be an ultimate expression of Donghak's neo-humanistic philosophy since it emphasizes the importance of respecting all nonhuman beings, including inanimate things, as if one were respecting Heaven. Proper application of this message will undoubtedly necessitate a complete transformation of how people interact with nonhuman beings today (Oh 2003, p. 184): "Respecting things means utilizing things in a way to actualize their latent potential. This becomes possible only when a human being strikes up a relationship with other nonhuman beings that aims to achieve a harmonious state of being between oneself and the whole universe" (Y. Hong 2015, p. 127).

The ecological view of Donghak and Won Buddhism also find a parallel in "deep ecology," which was first coined by the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess (1973; see Sessions 1995; Smith 2014). Deep ecology is an environmental philosophy and movement that believes in the inherent value of all living things and that they deserve to be valued and viewed as possessing some fundamental moral and legal rights to exist and grow, regardless of their practical utility for human needs. As such, deep ecology believes that the natural world is a complex web of interdependent interactions in which the survival of organisms depends on the wellbeing of all others in its ecosystem. It contends that non-vital human intervention in, and alteration of or destruction of, the natural world endangers not only humans but also every organism that makes up the natural order.

Another concept closely related to Donghak's and Won Buddhism's view of ecology is ecojustice. As insinuated above, ecojustice contends that "the value of non-human life-forms is independent of the usefulness of the non-human world for human purposes" and that "the categories of ethical and moral reflection relevant to justice should be expanded to encompass nature itself and its constituent parts, and human beings have an obligation to take the inherent value of other living things into consideration whenever these living

things are affected by human actions” (Biskowski 2019; see Jun 2003, pp. 129–32). Ecojustice thus refers to the notion that the wellbeing of human beings is intricately linked to the wellbeing of not only the earth but also all the creatures, both animate and inanimate (Jun 2003, p. 132).

Donghak and Won Buddhism both clearly manifest the characteristics of neo-humanism, deep ecology and ecojustice, which show that these religions can be part of the new ecological consciousness for the 21st century which can contribute to the development of a social principle that allows humanity to pursue a common good for all beings in the universe. In the face of ecological crisis, it is paramount that we find or create a value system for a sustainable global community and both religions offer eco-centered religious view for the 21st century. Because of their distinctive organismic perspective on the relationships among all living things, both Donghak and Won Buddhism collectively can serve as a valuable paradigm for a new global value system for ecological sustainability in the 21st century, as they point to a paradigm shift, i.e., a shift in perception and values as well as in lifestyles, in redirecting the ecologically destructive path of humanity to environmentalism and in stirring a move from anthropocentrism to ecocentrism. In this way, both religions can serve as practicable alternative philosophies for the sustainable environment in the 21st century.

In particular, the potential applicability of Donghak’s philosophy in the context of ecology is immense, as the former suggests the important role human intervention, i.e., the role of human beings as an agent of environmental sustainability (Y. Hong 2015, p. 124). Donghak has the potential to become the source of inspiration for humanity in that it offers a fresh perspective on ecology: that all beings in the universe, animate and inanimate, are interconnected; that all the existences depend on one another for their wellbeing; and that human beings bear the burden of changing their consciousness and action to bring about environmental sustainability. Indeed, Donghak can be used to promote neo-humanistic values in order to rebuild the earth ravaged by the anthropocentric modernization process. Donghak also offers a fresh perspective on life, whereby human beings can cultivate their minds to feel the pains of nature as it were their own body and to feel in their body that “all things are a manifestation of God” (C. S. Kim 2002, p. 183). Donghak not only promotes ecological consciousness but also illustrates the fundamentals of ecological living. Instead of searching for a transcendental being as the source of life’s ultimate foundation, Donghak is focused on interconnectedness among all living things and on the spirituality that underlies humankind which gives human beings the ability to engage in life (C. S. Kim 2002, p. 184). The ecological crisis facing humanity today cannot be stopped without a radical change in the mindset of humanity. Donghak serves as a model for a way of life that calls for a drastic transformation of human consciousness and lifestyle based on an ideal of respecting and treating nature as if treating their own body. In particular, the doctrine of *sicheonju* in Donghak places a strong emphasis on the public responsibility and accountability of humans in the universe.

Moreover, Donghak challenges the anthropocentric paradigm as the new religion reevaluates the idea of nature to highlight the risks of viewing it as only an object to be conquered and controlled:

The ontology of human being is related with cosmology in Donghak. The relations among God–human–nature–cosmos are conceived of as relationships of equals without hierarchal strata. Conceiving of a cosmological community means considering the cosmic energy as one (混元一氣); humans should expend their efforts to restore this unified cosmic spirit. . . . Thus, the interconnection and equal relations among God–human–nature–cosmos in Donghak go beyond the anthropocentric understanding of human–nature relation. (Moon 2017, p. 1157)

Such ecology-centered view of Donghak maintains that, as suggested by the doctrine of *sicheonju*, human beings should regard every living thing as “divine,” treat nature with the same respect they do their own bodies, and uphold the goal of peaceful coexistence amongst all living and non-living things (Moon 2017, p. 1157). The focus on coexistence

in Donghak, together with the ontological examination of the link between God, humanity, environment, and the universe, marks an important addition to the ongoing scholarly exploration on the role of religion in environmentalism (Moon 2017, p. 1158).

### 3. Conclusions

With the ecological crisis threatening the environmental sustainability of the earth, humankind has finally begun to respond to environmental problems through carbon neutrality policy and the like. However, the survival crisis that will determine the fate of humankind cannot depend solely on government or market mechanisms. Therefore, since the late 1970s, environmental governance related to solving environmental problems has been continuously raised and discussed. Religious organizations too are engaging in ecological discourse and practice at both the level of each religion and interfaith movement. Now is thus the time to deal with ecological issues as a dimension of religious governance, complete with a set of ethics and mechanisms that are utilized in pursuit of environmentalism.

With this in mind, this paper started from a critical reflection that in solving the “wicked problems,” such as the environmental disasters, the state or market-led method faces limitations and that a new approach to “governance,” i.e., the sharing of roles and cooperation among the various actors in society, is necessary (Bae et al. 2016, p. 272; see Rhodes 1997). That is because the effectiveness of the state-led approach to governance, centered on monitoring, punishment, and regulation, is being increasingly questioned, and the market-driven approach centered on the establishment of market mechanisms is also being disputed. Instead, a governance method centered on all stakeholders, including the government and market as well as citizens and civil society, is being preferred (Bae et al. 2016, p. 290). This is related to the “new governance” approach, a society-centered governance that believes in the spontaneity and autonomy of society, rather than the “old governance” approach, which is government-centered governance that values effective government (Pierre and Peters 2000, pp. 39–46).

In response to this necessity, the paper has examined the doctrines of Donghak and Won Buddhism, particularly focusing on the possibility of religious governance based on the ecological view implied in the philosophies of *samgyeong* and *saeun*. Departing from anthropocentrism, which comprises the core of Western thinking that objectifies matters and sees the latter as objects of exploitation and conquest, the two thoughts hold deeply ecological position which implies that all living things, including humans, animals and plants, and the natural environment are organisms that need to coexist. Inherent in these doctrines is the idea of respect for all things and the idea of cosmic life that does not hold a dualistic view on human life and cosmic life. Such organic view of ecology implied in *samgyeong* and *saeun* is not simply internalized as a religious doctrine, speculation or idea but is externalized as a set of practice to follow, as in *sipmucheon* in Donghak and “therapy for daily practice” in Won Buddhism. The practical driving force loaded with such ecological perspective maintains the purpose of coexistence without insisting on the identity and boundary of one particular religion. The ecological views contained in these two religions can be said to also provide room for building the possibility of religious governance through their system of ethics, rules and practices by which their organizations are controlled and operated, complete with mutual respect and mutual trust, and mutual communication and reflective cooperation among its followers.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> As a principal teaching of Buddhism, the Noble Eightfold Path is a set of practices which can lead to liberation from samsara, the agonizing cycle of birth and rebirth, in the form of nirvana. The Noble Eightfold Path comprises the following eight practices: right understanding (view), right intent (resolve), right speech, right conduct, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration.
- <sup>2</sup> For prominent figures in Korean history and politics, the paper uses the Eastern name order in which the family name precedes the given name.
- <sup>3</sup> Hanulnim is also spelled, or pronounced, as Hanullim, Haneulnim, Haneunim or Hananim (“One Lord”). Although Hanulnim is the most frequently used term to designate God in Donghak (Cheondogyo), there are also other terms that are used, namely Cheonju and Sangje. Both are Korean pronunciations of the Chinese terms, with the former meaning “Heavenly Lord” and the latter deriving from the Chinese word *Shangti*, meaning “the Supreme Ruler.”
- <sup>4</sup> Suun “experienced” Hanulnim after travelling around the country in search for a new Way and truth for about two decades. He meditated in the mountains and riverbanks during this period. After Hanulnim’s divine message was revealed to him, Suun experienced the trembling of his body and an aura of contact with a spirit. Suun recounted that he tried to see, but could not and tried to hear, but could not. He asked the spirit, “Why are you doing this?” and the latter said, “My heart is your heart” (see Y. C. Kim 2007).
- <sup>5</sup> Donghak emerged when the sense of crisis against the rising Western influence, especially that of Catholicism, was heightening. As a reform movement, Donghak incorporated the teachings of Confucianism and other traditional religions and advocated self-cultivation, human rights and equality.
- <sup>6</sup> What is noteworthy is that although the ideas of respect for heaven and respect for fellow human beings in *samgyeong* are identical to Confucianism, there is one major difference: while the latter’s focus is only on humans and their relationships, the former sees each and every object as having a divine quality. Another notable difference between the two traditions is that while Confucianism prescribes and proscribes social norms based on hierarchy among human beings, including that between men and women, *samgyeong* insists that all human beings should be recognized as essentially equal, abolishing all artificially discriminatory hierarchies that exist among human beings.
- <sup>7</sup> It is not argued here that Won Buddhism is exclusively concerned with worldly concerns or that “traditional” Buddhism, particularly Mahāyāna Buddhism, is not concerned with worldly matters. What must be pointed out, however, is that the latter does tend to lean relatively more deeply toward personal religiosity centered on individual awakening or nirvana, an experience which can be said to be wholly detached from society.
- <sup>8</sup> Won Buddhists also gather for religious services every Sunday and sing hymns during the service, both of which can be said to have been influenced by Christianity.

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