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HAM SÖK-HÖN: A KOREAN PARAGON OF DAOIST AUTHENTICITY

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Abstract: This article explores features of a Daoist perspective in the thought of Ham Sök-hön, who is a religious pluralist and a reformative thinker from Korea. Quite noted for his lectures on and lifelong study of Daoist classics, Ham was drawn to Daoism as a philosophy capable of being harnessed to achieve social change. This article focuses on the spirit of social praxis of Daoism as revealed in Ham's thought. In contrast to what appears to be an obsession with materialism and secular success within contemporary Korean mainstream religions, Ham's thought contains components of social praxis that emphasize understanding the suffering of common people. In his view, Daoism as a way of thinking can be a forceful agent in resistance to authority because Daoism supports the bottom tier of society and the spirit of "wuwei" (letting be), from a Daoist perspective, signifies self-governing in political parlance. In addition, Ham's pluralist perspective argues that there is a common thread cutting across Christianity and Daoism, in that the two disparate religions have a common foundation. Ham appeared to focus on subjectivity and self-realization in people as *ssial* (seed) and on marginalized beings at the bottom of the social strata. Thus, Ham's *ssial* thought is a product that grew out of his lifelong efforts to integrate his own new interpretation of Daoism into the context of contemporary Korea.

Key words: Daoism, *Wuwei* (letting be), Resistance, Ham Sök-hön, Korea, Social Praxis, Political Thought, Authenticity.

1. Introduction

How to make of Daoism as a political thought? Should we look upon Daoism as sort of anarchistic political thought in East Asia? Alternatively, should Daoism be taken as a political thought that gives voice to the authentic demands of the people at the grassroots, especially in the twentieth century of Korea? One of the widely accepted views of the political philosophy of Daoism is that there are unmistakable affinities between Daoism and Western anarchism. Against the long-entrenched consensus that Daoism is anarchistic, those who counter the anarchistic interpretation of Daoism often claim that the arguments for identifying Daoism as an anarchistic strand of political philosophy are predicated on the tenuous assumption that Daoism rejects all forms of coercion and authority (Feldt 2010). With the rise of recent non-anarchistic interpretations of the political philosophy of Daoism, now the conventional consensus that Daoism is anarchistic has given way to a new possibility of interpretation that is bound to enhance our understanding of Daoism by equipping us with more nuanced points of convergence and divergence between two strands of thought: Daoism and Western anarchism. The anarchistic interpretations of Daoism have originated from and widely spread by a group of four authors whose arguments considering the political philosophy of the Laozi *anarchistic* were published in a journal. In the *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* (Vol. 10, No.1), Fredric Bender, Roger Ames, and David Hall, and John P. Clark presented their arguments arguing that political philosophy of Daoism is anarchistic. Since then, the anarchist interpretation of the political philosophy of Daoism had dominated the theoretical discourse until some scholars tried to argue for the possibility of a non-anarchistic interpretation of Daoism (Feldt 2010; Bender 2010; Ames 2010; Hall 2010; Clark 2010; Stamatov 2014). With this broad sketch of the existing discourse in the literature on the connection between Daoist political philosophy and Western anarchism, this article will explore features of a Daoist perspective in the thought of Ham Sök-hön (1901-89), a reformative thinker, in the twentieth century of Korea.

Before discussing features of the Daoist thought of Ham, let me first present my view of Daoism in the context of modern Korea. My view is that Daoism in the twentieth century of Korea as a form of thought needs to be identified as pursuing absolute equality and revolution by virtue of social change. This argument may not appear to dovetail with the prevailing image of the Daoist sage or ruler ruling over the political structure. It is almost commonly believed that a Daoist sage would adopt minimalist interventionist governing principles. However, this non-assertive intervention as a ruler may work during times of peace. When a

political structure has to undergo a transition and consequently demands transformation in the governance structure or philosophy to accommodate external changes, the minimalist non-interventionist type of rule has to shift to one that is more proactive, dynamic, and interventionist. This point is well encapsulated in Joseph Needham's remarks: "it is not in the least surprising that Daoism was associated with all revolts endeavoring to overthrow the established order, for more than a thousand years" (Needham 1989, 98). Taking a step forward from this broad characterization of Daoism as a driver for social change while glancing back at the history of social changes, Needham may want to show that Daoism can be taken to be fully aligned with the idea of primitive democracy as an essential feature of the body politic. Perhaps Needham's vision of Daoist sages further fleshed out the idea of primitive democracy by painting Daoist sages as working in close union with people at the grassroots level, as he notes "the Daoists were against the concepts of noble and mean as applied to Nature, but they were also against them as applied to Man, and thus they affirmed their science and their democracy at the same time. Just as there was no real greatness and smallness in nature, so there should be none in human society" (Needham 1989, 103). Daoist sages as seen through the frame of Needham are thought to act with and for the grassroots people, and for this the rulership of Daoist sages can be awarded sheer authenticity given that Daoist rulership is for the grassroots people and the way such ruling is conducted and manifested is in accordance with the spirit of *wuwei* (letting be), thus helping shape the social *praxis* for social change. Ham Sök-hön, a Korean philosopher, fits the image of such a Daoist sage who commits himself to sympathizing with the people's suffering of the times, and protests against the ruling regimes that coercively intervenes and suppresses the grassroots people.

To better understand such wide and profound engagement of Ham in his quest for social change, it is necessary to provide more details on the historical conditions he faced. The modern history of all three countries, China, Korea, and Japan, from the eighteenth to the early twentieth centuries faced a common dilemma of how to review existing, traditional thought and embrace, adapt, and apply Western thought adequately to their local conditions. Against the backdrop of this complex process, the modern history of Korea has been consumed by conflating Eastern and Western civilizations, resulting in three historical consequences that can be the defining characteristics of modern Korea: the egalitarian orientation of social classes, democratization, and industrialization. With the collapse of the Chosŏn dynasty in the wake of Japanese colonial rule, its ruling class and dominant ideology became fragmented and lost ascendancy. The people thus began to seek a new way of life while suffering from the chaos and disillusionment following the breakdown of their traditional systems and beliefs. With the weakening of the

traditionally dominant ideologies of moribund dynasties, intellectuals and common people were strongly affected when confronted by the challenges and stimulation of Western thought and culture, such as Christianity. In particular, Daoist political inclinations were transformed into a new political ideology that refused to leave the existing order unchanged and instead voraciously gave voice to authentic demands and desires of the grassroots people. Ham's pluralist perspective argues that there is a common thread cutting across Christianity, Buddhism, and Daoism, in the sense that each of these disparate religions has a common foundation. Ham accepts the mysterious principles of the universe that read "all are one"; that is, all beings look distinct from all other beings, but they are essentially one.

In contrast to what appears to be an obsession with materialism and secular success within contemporary Korean mainstream religions, Ham's thought contains components of social *praxis* that emphasize understanding the suffering of common people (CWH 3: 33). While his recognition of egalitarianism was ascribable to Daoism, he unceasingly attempted to explore the confluence and tangency of Asian traditions and Western thought.

Preexisting studies on the Asian roots of Ham's thought have failed to provide a sufficient, and convincing account of how the fusion of Asian traditions such as Daoism with progressive Christianity occurred within Ham's thought. Scholars (Kim 1998; Chey-Baik 2003; Pak 2013) have also failed to account for how, as per Ham, the common threads between Daoism and progressive Christianity formed and evolved. This article attempts to fill the void by offering a detailed analysis of the main features of his thought as well as the Daoist frame of thinking underpinning his life-long social engagement.

2. Ham Sök-Hön's the Spirit of Resistance

When considering Ham's thought, the first question in any analysis would be, "what aspect of his thought has shaped and contributed toward establishing the authenticity of his grassroots social protest?" His distinctive '*ssial* (seed) thought' is the answer. His life was spent establishing, sophisticating and propagating his unique *ssial* thought. Ham promoted non-violence movement while striving for initiating and accomplishing Korean democratization.

Ham played many different roles ranging from social activist to publisher to thinker, expanding on his unique interpretation of Daoism. This article focuses on the main features of his *ssial* thought. Before going into the specifics of his thought, the following biographical facts and Ham's accomplishments are mentioned to provide a more factually enriching picture of Ham as a person. Ham was born in north Korea in

1901. He participated in the March First Independence Movement in which the Declaration of National Independence from Japanese colonial rule was announced. He founded *Malssum* (Words) magazine in 1955. He founded the *Ssial* Farm in Ch'onan from 1957. As a publisher and principal editor of the journal, *Voice of ssial*, he enlisted the then famous dissenters and columnists such as Chang Chun-ha and introduced new talented novelists and poets to the masses until the publication was forcibly closed in 1980. He engaged in various social enlightenment campaigns through books, articles, and lectures throughout his life from 1961 until he passed away in 1989. Ham had been suppressed until 1987 by Park Chung-hee's authoritarian regime, and imprisoned several times. Ham received the Order of Merit for National Foundation in 2002. As his nickname called "Gandhi of Korea" tells much of his commitment to peace, he was twice nominated for Nobel Peace Prize by American Friends Service Committee in 1979 and 1985. Ex-presidents of Korea such as Kim Tae-Chung (1923-2009) and Kim Yöng-sam (1928-2015), famed persons such as historian Kim Tong-gil (1928-present), and theologians such as An Pyöng-mu (1922-96) said that they had been profoundly influenced by Ham (An 2001, 383-411). All these prominent figures persevered in unflinchingly, actively engaging themselves in anti-dictatorship and democratization movements during the pivotal years from 1961 through 1987. For several decades, some mass-based popular groups existed in society, whose primary goal was to do research on and give praise to what Ham represented and accomplished as a thinker and his sacrifice for the cause of democratization.

In Ham's various social activities, one big, common factor influencing his thought and the way he socially engaged in myriad forums is in fact Daoism. For example, he started to hold study meetings for *Laozi* from 1971 onward. Not only as a founder and observer for these series of study meetings, he himself taught the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi* in public from July 1971 until May 1988. Moreover, he also wrote many books that include his personal interpretations and commentaries on many chapters of the *Daodejing* and *Zhuangzi*. These interpretations lent more historical and philosophical depth and significance to Ham's spirit of resistance. Among the many features of Daoism, Ham was especially attracted to the idea that Daoism does not reflect the thought of the rulers but is a powerful countervailing thought of the ruled. This new realization redirected Ham's full attention to developing a compelling, new interpretative break from the traditional framework of Daoism that "Daoism is not for the intellectuals only, but rather it is a dynamic thought for the peasants and the ordinary people" (Lee 2005, 233).

Having outlined Ham's social activities and roles in Korea's modern history, now let's discuss his thought in detail. His essential thought is known as *ssial* thought. His unique *ssial* thought combined spiritual self-discipline with social practice and reform in modern society as a way of

resolving the various issues posed by modern social situation. When people are named as *ssial*, then these *ssial* are the very subjects who have awakened themselves to be entitled to claim political sovereignty and at the same time to embrace a cosmological, organic outlook so that their burgeoning sense of being part of cosmological humanity will keep growing (Lee 2012, 572-573). For a better understanding of the essential meaning of *ssial*, one should bear in mind that *ssial* refers to the abiding, perdurable, and imperishable vivacity or life residing in all beings. Broadly categorized, the term *ssial* can be collapsed into two definitions. In one, *ssial* signifies the animating, vital omnipresent principle or the seed of God because “al” stands for the spirit or the energy of life, regarded as the origin of all human beings and all other living organisms; humans are concurrently designated as “seeds” in the literal sense because God implants life within humanity that gives physical form and energy to animate beings. In the other definition, “*ssial*” refers to people who have attained self-knowledge and self-awakening about their embodying political sovereignty and cosmological humanity (Chey-Baik 2003, 197-198). Integrating these two disparate definitions, the resulting overarching outlook of *ssial* entails embracing democracy and elevating the ‘*minjung*(people)’ as the newfound drivers of national liberation grounded in a cosmology (Kim 2015, 190-193).

Further, Ham’s worldview shows traces of both Christianity and Daoism. Many scholars on Ham, including Pak Chae-sun, Kim Söng-su, and Kim Myöng-su, focused unduly on the Christian roots of Ham’s thought (Pak 2013; Kim 1998; Kim 2010). However, his philosophy can be considered a critical continuance of Asian traditions such as Daoism, which he interpreted differently from the way earlier historical figures did. In fact, the Daoist perspective shaping Ham’s *ssial* thought can be seen from his remarks made in the reinterpretation of the *zaiyou* chapter of *Zhuangzi*. The following demonstrates this new aspect of Ham’s *ssial* thought. Regarding the significance and status of *ssial*, he remarked in his reinterpretation of the *zaiyou* chapter, “*ssial* may be lowly in status, but it surely has to be followed” (CWH 20: 182). “One should trust *ssial* and not treat it lightly. Follow the thing; do not discard it” (CWH 20: 183).

Ham’s Daoist world was also the reason for his political suppression during the regimes of Rhee Syng-man and Park Chung-hee. The Park administration adhered to the ideology of Confucianist allegiance to nation and filial piety. This ideology was an extension of the Confucian maxim that one should love one’s parents and should remain loyal to one’s nation in all conditions, favorable or otherwise. Against this oppressive political landscape, Ham argued for what appears to be the Daoist spirit of freedom, and the ultimate orientation of his position was to set free all the *ssial*. “Despite the contaminated politics of the last several decades, I could draw breath through my daily conversation with *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi*” (CWH 20: 26; Kim 1998, 338). Ham taught his own version of the philosophy of

Laozi and Zhuangzi and other East Asian classics to the Korean public, and published it in his magazine, *Voice of Ssial*. In this way Ham attempted to find a middle ground between the philosophy of the Asia and the West, from the perspective of an East Asian Christian thinker.

Even a cursory glance at the main features of Ham's thought would lead us to realize that his thought was not that of a Daoist recluse or a hermit who chose a life of seclusion away from society in quest of his own spiritual life. Ham's unwavering adherence to the Daoist spirit is well summed up by Kim in his bifurcated view of the goals every practitioner of Confucianism and Daoism should strive after and achieve (Kim 1998, 319). The pursuit considered the most highly respected, most virtuous, and laudable for a Confucian gentleman, is studying and holding of governmental office, not taken as separate quests but as integrated and inseparable lifetime activities. However, a Daoist practitioner should have high respect for individual freedom independent of governmental control and embrace a frame of mind inseparably wired into transcendentalism. In view of these starkly contrasting approaches to what each practitioner should seek to achieve as his lifetime goal, Ham seems to favour transcendentalist Daoism almost as if it were second nature to him (CWH 20: 34). This is the reason why Ham was attracted to the pacifism of Laozi, and why he saw Laozi as the first pacifist, claiming that: "Laozi stressed the futility of war and violence as instruments of national policy, recommending that peaceful solutions be found" (CWH 14: 29).

Ham also adopted Christianity as his religion because of its reformist characteristics, and he attempted to apply this aspect of reform-orientedness as a religion to Korean society throughout his life. It is significant that Ham (CWH 4: 66) called those who are oppressed and excluded from mainstream society and those who carried heavy historical burdens at the bottom levels of society as 'seeds' and not as 'the people' or 'the grassroots' (Lee 2012, 572). In accordance with this concept of seeds, he tried to initiate a new era that would materialize when the marginalized stepped up to the forefront of history. The reformative feature expressed in this liberation theology above can be found in Daoism as well, and Ham seems to have noted this reformist tendency of Daoism as a thought (CWH 8: 467). As a thought that resists authority, Daoism supports the bottom tier of society (Kang 2008, 40). This characteristic is described in Laozi's work as follows: "The highest excellence is like that of water. The excellence of water appears in its benefiting all things, and in its occupying, without striving to the contrary, the low place which all men dislike. And when one with the highest excellence does not wrangle about his low position, no one finds fault with him" (Legge 1962, 3; CWH 20: 26).

Although water flows everywhere, it pools or collects, especially at the lowest levels. To stay where others do not want to is Ham's point of emphasis. In fact, Daoism often appeared in Asian history as a re-

volutionary spirituality. In Northeast Asian history it represented hope for freedom and transcendence and as a discourse of liberation and resistance. Its people-oriented direction inspired Ham to uniquely interpret the word *sang* in Laozi's classics: "Laozi had high regard for the word *sang* although it was used in the negative sense in Korean as exemplified by *sangnom* (bastard) and *sangsröpta* (vulgar). Laozi, however, was one who really understood human society. While I emphasize people, namely seeds, Laozi called them *sangmin* (common subjects) or *sang'in* (common people) in the same context. The word 'subjects' that I sometimes use when I explain about seeds can be interchangeably used to refer to the word *sang'in*" (CWH 8: 467).

As explained above, Ham's unique interpretation renders the term *sang* to mean the ordinary people. Traditionally, many Laozi scholars have interpreted *sang* as representing 'immutability' or 'eternity' (Chen 1983, 369). However, if *sang* is a reference to the people at the bottom level of society, it can be argued that a person who can embrace everyone without making any distinctions is a true person of the masses and deserves to be known as the true one of the Dao and eternal truth; and the Dao so attained is immortal and everlasting (CWH 8: 468-9; Cho 2001, 244).

However, Laozi is not the only person in the history of Asian thought to posit that the will of the people is the will of heaven. This people-based thesis has also been advocated among Confucianists such as Mencius. So why did Ham frequently refer to the Daoist rather than the Confucian way of thinking? During Ham's lifetime, Confucianism was an ideology that endorsed and reflected the Confucian cardinal principles, such as loyalty to one's nation, filial piety toward one's parents, and so on, as emphasized by the ruling Park Chung-hee regime (1963-79). Confucianism regarded filial duty to parents as integral to human nature. It also emphasized loyalty to one's country as an extended virtue of filial duty. However, this became problematic, in that loyalty to one's country became unconditional obedience to the regime, which enforced obedience. As was typical of Northeast Asian countries that advocated Confucianism as their ruling ideology, President Park Chung-hee's regime used Confucianism to its political advantage. Therefore, by maintaining a stance against the regime and advocating Daoism, Ham promoted Daoism as a countervailing force against Confucian ideology.

Ham referred to those oppressed by the ruling regime as *ssial*, defining them as "the people on the ground without any position or authority who serve the whole even with no recognition of what the whole is" (CWH 12: 124, 281). Furthermore, he said, "God and the people, they are the same" (CWH 3: 147). These statements enable us to conclude that the people are God. Ham frequently voiced what a God-inspired prophet spoke forth, that is, the burning spirit of resistance as the foundation of his thinking while using the word *min* (the people) in the 1960s and *ssial* in his later work.

Ham opposed the rule of the majority, because the minority, those in the lower levels of society, could be sacrificed for the majority as Daoists had been sacrificed under a Confucian ruling class. He expressed respect for individual freedom under governmental rule, which is the essence of Daoism. Ham thought that, just as Jesus recognized the impossibility of salvation by following the doctrine of the Pharisees, Laozi and Zhuangzi recognized the impossibility of salvation by following the Confucian doctrine (Kim 1998, 149-150, 220-221). Ham sought not only the “greatest happiness for the greatest number,” but also the protection of the dignity of the minority from abuse by the majority (Kim 1998, 149-50, 220-221).

3. Inheritance of the Daoist Tradition

The history of Korea, indeed, did not cease even when the country experienced oppressive annexation and pillaging by the Japanese militaristic imperialism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Japan’s imperialistic invasion and annexation of Korea resulted in unbearable suffering for people at the grassroots level in Korea at the time. Freedom of the grassroots was inextricably bound to incessant refutation of and formidable resistance to any imperialistic domination. Resistance against Japanese imperialism was also inseparably interlocked with a nationalistic orientation in Korea.

In this world, everything should be done “in its own right,” by not relying on others. Ham observed that “the fundamental principle of life is the state of being entirely natural and spontaneous. God is the spirit of doing on its own and the world should grow to reach the state of life where it can do its self-doing” (CWH 1: 48). Along the same line, he also cautiously expounded that this does not mean that everything should be left alone, but instead it means that everything does its own share of doing in the most natural way and on its own with none nudging or helping it on the way. This is clearly manifestation of the Daoist spirit of “*ziran wuwei*.”

In connection with this, Cho claims that Ham argued that the most virtuous and exemplary politics of all comes into being when the government intervenes the least and all governing should be left to what *ssial* aspires to do following one’s nature and this type of politics is called “politics of *zaiyou* (Setting one’s mind at ease and following one’s nature)”. Viewed this way, what Ham envisions as an ideal politics is that if we cannot reverse the destiny of being governed, the most ideal governing should be conducted in the spirit and heart of *ssial* (CWH 12: 320; Cho 2001, 250-252). The politics of *zaiyou* where the *ssial* is entrusted with governing and is allowed to run the government by following one’s own nature while exercising forbearance is in fact in keeping with the spirit of Laozi called “governing a nation is like cooking a little fish” (CWH 20: 166; Cho 2001,

252). Ham offered his own interpretation on this as follows. “Governing a nation is like cooking a little fish. A politician should not rely unduly on his political skills but should uphold his principle. The people of any nation also should come to know of this bedrock principle and accordingly cultivate independent spirit not subject to political manipulations or political artifices of any politician. The people should know themselves to be little fish and stick to this”(CWH 20: 71). “Hearts of people should be left alone. People’s hearts cannot be controlled by human-crafted institutions and rules. Only when people are allowed to live according to their own true nature, there will be true social peace” (CWH 20: 153). In regard to *zaiyou*, he remarked that “it is said that *zaiyou* means leaving world be and exercising forbearance. This *wuwei* politics is true politics and what follows is Ham’s explanations to clarify the connotative meaning of *zaiyoui*” (CWH 20: 152): “The politics of *wuwei* is a form of self-governing where *ssial* are allowed to sustain and cultivate their lives. The significance of *zaiyou* is just that it means leaving *ssial* alone, and then they will stand on their own because humans sustain themselves in their own right. The *wuwei* statecraft is self-governing in modern political jargon” (CWH 20: 184).

In his political vision of *ssial*, *ssial* are not merely limited to passive subjects who are prone to be manipulated by those in power. Instead, Ham attempted to award more political significance to the idea of suffering of *ssial* by rendering the *minjung* (people) the awakened *ssial*, with hope that they would stand up to the preexisting political conditions as political sovereigns. The aforementioned form of self-governing is closely bound up with the ‘suffering’ of the *minjung* (people). In Ham’s view, ‘suffering’ of the people (*minjung*) is related to self-sacrifice. Furthermore as an individual, *ssial*’s life should presuppose a view of life based on self-sacrifice. When *ssial* dies, it is only at that time that the deceased *ssial* can germinate. “Death is a part of life”(CWH 1: 315). “What death means is not a physiological phenomenon but a psychological one. What longevity signifies is that it is freed from the psychological constraints, leaping beyond the dimension of life and death to enter the realm of higher purpose in life” (CWH 20:163).

Construed this way, ironically, life can be sustained through death. “Adversities are not the mischievous flirtations of harsh and grim fate, but rather is Providence of God” (Kim 2003: 144). “Real and meaningful freedom comes only when one is liberated from death. When such freedom is attainable, all forms of liberation are possible.--- From dust come all things, and to dust they all go.--- However, those who awaken themselves are liberated from the cycle of death and birth and do not perish even when they die. This is what Laozi called ‘the one who dies and yet does not perish’” (CWH 20: 164-5). Ham further remarked that “true freedom is attained when one is freed from a straitjacket that limits one’s true nature and is ushered into the gate of the unlimited, playing in the

field of the boundless, free of constraints. Forsaking the smallness of his life, he has now arrived at a place where he can make friends with the sun and the moon and enter the realm of everlasting life with the heaven and the earth” (CWH 20: 165).

Although Henri Maspero explained that those who followed and practiced Daoism ended up driving away credentialed Daoists by their single-minded obsession over physical fitness and wellbeing and seeking the esoteric path to immortality, those who were more practically oriented left Daoism and accepted Confucian practices while those more religious found Buddhism as their alternative life-long pursuit of religious zeal. However, such generalized historical interpretation tends to speak only the partial truth. Simply put, not all those driven away from Daoism decided to leave Daoism. These practitioners of Daoism did not make a distinction between life and death and accepted that one is not essentially different from the other but rather identical to the other, embracing a new world and a new way of life, which can be attained only through suffering and not through the path to immortality (Maspero 1981,298). Among this untainted coterie of pursuers and practitioners of Daoism is Ham, who lived through the twentieth-century Korea.

The “Letting be (*Wuwei*)” spirit of Daoism signifies self-governing in political parlance. When the minds and hearts of *ssial* are not restrained or are somehow left untainted or intact, namely, when the nature of *ssial* is left alone and allowed to run its own course in the most natural way, social peace will be achieved. “Real Sages will have their subjects in their vicinity and live together harmoniously by acting together” (CWH 12: 320). This way of self-governing is the most open-minded way toward democracy, and it is bound to protest dictatorship. Based on this thought, Ham set out to initiate and further develop social protest movements. Hence, Ham was politically suppressed by Park Chung-hee’s regime, but at the same time he was criticized by the conservative Christian community too for such social conflict-prone movements.

4. Conclusion

Ham's thought is markedly distinguishable from Korean mainstream religious community because of his emphasis on the spirit of resistance. This spirit of resistance comes from Daoism. Ham ably connects internal cultivation, a practice traceable to Daoism, to political autonomy, thus establishing and further developing his own *ssial* thought. Ham’s thought is oriented toward the grassroots and so was rejected as an unorthodox, unfounded one, while it was politically suppressed by the ruling authorities.

Korea, China, and Japan underwent dynamic internal transformations from the eighteenth to the early twentieth centuries. The

traditional order collapsed and with Western imperialistic domination, Asian countries were colonized or weakened; the traditional civilization of Asia was on the threshold of a head-on confrontation with Western civilization. The intellectuals in Korea encouraged proactive interaction and fusion of other cultures with Korean culture such as Daoism. Ham argued that the spirit of resistance of Christianity naturally dovetailed with the spirit of Daoism, especially Daoism's tendency to focus on the base of any social hierarchy. Also Ham demonstrated that *Wuwei* (letting be) of Daoism can be tapped into becoming a fitting conduit for self-governing of the *minjung* (people) in modern political jargon.

That said, Ham is a Korean paragon of Daoist authenticity. Ham appeared to focus on subjectivity and self-realization in *ssial* and on marginalized beings at the bottom of the social strata. He overlooked a rigorous analysis of the economic conditions and capitalist mechanisms that enabled the continuation of manipulative practices exploiting the suffering, marginalized, socially disadvantaged people. However, in Korea, until the 1990s, the prevailing criticism against capitalism failed to crystallize into a serious discourse. Ham's *ssial* thought appears to be endowed with something of an existentially meaningful discourse when considered against the background of a proposal being presented as an alternative to the putative socialist system, particularly in terms of a resistance movement operating from the base of the social hierarchy against cut-throat capitalism.

Ham succeeded in establishing his own holistic understanding and knowledge that went beyond his own areas of specialization, traversing, and at times transcending, Western Christian-inspired thought and traditional Daoism, in Korea. He was in fact a unique reformist thinker, who embodied new ways of thought and created diverse novel approaches. He attempted to transcend the traditional framework of Daoism and did not accept Christianity at face value. In a way, he recast and reinterpreted Daoism, one of the prevalent philosophical and religious traditions of Asia, in more positive review and re-evaluating. Conversely, not from the vantage point of Asian thought such as Daoism, but from the perspective of Christianity as a Western religion, his works offer ample scope in searching for the meaning and significance of Asian thought. Thus, Ham's theoretical efforts that put particular stress on social praxis reveal a singular and unique feature in the twentieth-century history of East Asian civilization that was distinguishable from that of the West.

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