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New Age in South Korea[†]

Hai-Ran Woo

Since the 1980s, the religious landscape of South Korea has been visibly changed by the popularity of ki-training and the introduction of New Age commodities of foreign origins. Since Korean New Age is not well-known in western academic circles, this paper presents an overview, delineating the historical development of Korean New Age from the 1970s to the present, together with analysis of its socio-cultural background. It is suggested that Korean New Age has common denominators with the New Age in the West as well distinguishing characteristics. The example of Korean New Age challenges some common assumptions about New Age, including its classification as a counter-cultural movement, a form of subjective religiosity and as an indicator of advanced secularisation.

1. Introduction

The New Age in South Korea is a terrain barely known to western scholars. Even though it is often said that the New Age is a global phenomenon, only a few western scholars deal with the New Age in non-western societies, let alone undertake in-depth comparative studies on the phenomenon worldwide. In a sense, academic discourse on the New Age is dominated by western scholars, and theorisation on the subject has proceeded primarily from observation of western societies. But lamenting the imbalance of prior research on New Age is of little use as long as non-western scholars themselves do not conduct serious studies of New Age. One reason for disinterest in the subject on the part of non-western scholars lies ironically in the very nature of the western academic tradition of religious studies.

Western intellectuals have tried to confine or define the scope and nature of 'religion' since the Enlightenment, and non-western peoples subject to westernisation or modernisation have come to internalise the resultant narrow conception of 'religion' produced in the West, even after western scholars themselves became sceptical about such a conceptual construction. Korean scholars of religious studies tend to concentrate on institutionalised religions, focusing on written traditions and standardised rituals. Consequently, Korean scholars tend to be reluctant to see amorphous or less-structured phenomena like New Age as genuinely 'religious'. A narrow concept of 'religion' or 'what religion should be' is, in this way, one of the major

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reasons why the New Age is not yet established as an important research-field within religious studies in South Korea.¹

Neither should it be overlooked that the religious landscape has changed considerably over the past two decades in South Korea. People are more and more involved in a variety of meaning-systems and practices from diverse cultural sources, for the sake of enhancing not only their mental and physical condition but also their religious or spiritual life. This process is accelerated by a so-called ‘well-being boom’² and heightened interest in health. A huge market has come into being where a wide spectrum of material and non-material commodities and services are offered, which are designed to promote well-being and to meet the diverse needs of the people in question. This is not yet necessarily a ‘cultural shift’. But it is evident that the process is still ongoing - having far-reaching effects on individual life-styles as well as religious and popular culture in South Korea. Under these circumstances, this paper is intended not only to introduce these developments to western readers but also to induce further theoretical discussion on the subject in local and global context.

2. The term ‘New Age’ and its definition

‘New Age’ is not a very common term in South Korea, and it tends to be associated with music rather than spirituality. From the early 1990s Korean theologians and pastors began to identify as New Age a wide spectrum of cultural trends which they believe to be hostile to Christianity.³ The word ‘movement’ is often added to New Age by such commentators, to suggest that New Age is systematically planned and disseminated (by Satan or evil) to undermine Christian belief and order. While Korean Protestant churches use the term ‘New Age’ consistently, Korean Catholic churches adopted additionally *Sin-yōngsōng-undong* (‘New Spiritual Movement’) as a synonym.⁴ This Catholic term soon modified to *Sinhŭng-yōngsōng-undong* (‘Newly-arisen Spiritual Movement’) and more recently *Yusa-yōngsōng-undong* (‘Pseudo-Spiritual Movement’) because of internal criticism among Catholic authorities that the first designations sound too positive or value-neutral.⁵ Individuals and organisations who introduced western New Age and another non-mainstream worldviews and practices into South Korea generally do not use the word ‘New Age’ explicitly as a label of their activities and products, let alone strive to establish an overall discourse on ‘New Age’.

Some Korean scholars use a more value-neutral term, *‘suryon-munwha’* (修練文化), which means ‘culture of self-cultivation’. This term does not

designate the whole spectrum of New Age but rather the sector where various methods of meditation and *ki*-training⁶ are followed. ‘*Ki*-training’ is treated more often in mass media together with rather positive comments, and has become a favoured motif in South Korean cinema, commercial advertisements and animations. This indicates that at least this sector (*ki*-training) within New Age is relatively well received by Korean society and has become a part of Korean popular culture. Another relevant development in recent years is that the individuals and institutions which represent the ‘culture of self-cultivation’ get together, often at events and symposia to introduce their activities to the public as well as to discuss their common interests openly.⁷ Even though it is too early to talk about an alliance between them, they are getting more conscious of their socio-cultural power in the country.

Independent of popular discourse on New Age in a given society, there remains the question of whether ‘New Age’ should be used in a technical sense. Opponents of such usage point out that the majority of people who practise non-traditional or non-mainstream religion do not identify themselves as ‘New Agers’. Nor do they identify their activities as a new cultural movement called ‘New Age’, partly because of the negative social reception of the term. A similar critique notes there is not a strong enough utopian or millenarian consciousness within the scene, to justify its usage. According to these critiques, the term ‘New Age’ is an etic category which represents the view of the outsider or researcher and therefore distorts the real perception of the participants and actual state of the matter. Furthermore, it is contended that there is no homogeneity or closed system among those mentioned under the label ‘New Age’, which suggests there exists an identifiable entity as such ‘out there’. Following those arguments, ‘New Age’ can be merely an academic construction.

But it must be remembered that all academic terms are more or less ‘constructed’ – the term ‘religion’ being a case in point. This does not mean an academic term is totally estranged from its actual referent. On the other hand, it is not logically required that a technical term should conform to usual societal usage. There is no agreed common term that is shared by participants of non-traditional and non-institutionalised religious phenomena, nor a term which reveals the core characteristic(s) or ‘essence’ of these phenomena – supposing there is such a core. Thus, simply replacing ‘New Age’ with another seemingly more appropriate term will encounter similar criticism as being an artificial construct.

What is at stake is how useful and productive the constructed terms are in dealing with the issues in question. A pragmatic solution in this case could be using 'New Age' with a clear and explicit definition. For the purpose of comparative work, the definition should be broad enough to comprise non-western counterparts of the New Age, but it should also serve to differentiate it from other religious and cultural phenomena. The following definition of New Age is an attempt to satisfy this condition. It is designed in the first place as a guideline for my own research on New Age in South Korea, that is, it is an operational definition subject to ongoing modification based on research results.

New Age is a religious-cultural phenomenon which has been spreading globally since the last part of the 20th century, especially in advanced industrial societies and urban areas, focusing on enhancing individual religious, mental and/or physical capability. It is based on elements selected and combined from non-mainstream religious tradition(s) as well as from (non-)religious meaning-systems and practices of foreign cultural origin. It distinguishes itself from established religions and new religions primarily in its means of dissemination and organisation and by the multiple options regarding its content.

This definition focuses on historical conditions, formation of religious-cultural elements, and organisational characteristics concerning New Age, in contrast to existing institutionalised religions. The concept of 'New Age' is here 'constructed' as a category or a type, to which a wide spectrum of religious-cultural phenomena operating outside of established religions is to be subordinated. It is an ideal type for the reason that it is not always possible clearly to distinguish between institutionalised and non-institutionalised religion. For example, 'in-between' New Age groups are also observed. These are groups which have charismatic founders, specific beliefs, often sacred texts, and elaborate training-systems but without any fixed congregation of adherents. These groups take paying clients instead of lay believers and therefore can be classified as 'client religions' (Stark, Hamberg & Miller 2005:10f). Furthermore, there is a tendency that expanded or successful New Age groups are inclined to become institutionalised (like any new religion), while established religions often integrate certain popular elements from the milieu of New Age into their system or adapt their existing elements accordingly to be competitive in the religious marketplace. In short, 'New Age' as a type can be differentiated into many sub-types according to its diverse structural forms.

This kind of approach, which is less about what New Age ‘is’, but more about ‘how’ New Age is operating, is a pragmatic one. The presence of a diversity of meaning-systems and practices, which are currently available outside traditional religions, makes it nearly impossible to determine New Age on the basis of its contents, let alone those elements New Age inherited from old religious traditions. However, it is exactly this diversity that appeals to potential ‘consumers’ who prefer having a free hand to choose and test methods to maximise their physical and/or spiritual potential. Liselotte Frisk has criticised the concept of New Age as an ‘essential’ category (which is focused on one true essence or a few central characteristics of New Age) and proposed instead to focus on the whole field of non-official or popular religiosity in contrast to institutionalised religions (Frisk 2005). At the same time, an understanding of the historical and ideological background of New Age in a given society is needed, first of all to understand the specific formation and characteristics of the phenomena in question.

3. The historical development of New Age in South Korea from the 1970s

It is not easy to determine at which stage a certain phenomenon is to be designated as New Age. If it is a question of socio-cultural impact that the phenomenon brought about, we can talk about the presence of Korean New Age certainly since the mid 1980s, when interest in *ki* and *ki*-training arose nationwide. But some major characteristics of Korean New Age are to be traced back to the early 1970s, when the forerunner groups appeared, having laid the cornerstone of what Korean New Age nowadays is, even though they didn’t catch wide public attention at that time. The development of New Age in South Korea is outlined chronologically alongside the major events of each period.

3.1 *The 1970s: Kouk Sun Do, a ki-training centre, New Science, yoga, TM and Mind Control*

Kouk Sun Do was the first organisation to open a training centre and introduce *ki-suryōn* (氣修練, cultivation of *ki*) to the general public in South Korea. The organisation was founded by Kyōng-Min Koh (or Master Ch’ōng-San) in 1971, when *ki*-training was not familiar to the public in general. Of course there were always certain persons, who devoted themselves to self-cultivation. But they practised individually at secluded places, mostly in mountains, and the related teachings were handed down in person. The founder Koh went through the same process until he came down from the mountains in 1967. It was told that he had trained himself to the utmost for 20 years from the age of 14 in the mountains under the guidance

of Song-Un Lee (or Master Ch'öng-Un) who initiated him into the mysteries of *Söndo* (仙道), the so-called genuine Korean art of self-cultivation.⁸

At the very beginning, the founder Koh tried to attract public attention by demonstrating his supernatural physical strength in public and accordingly *Kouk Sun Do* stressed building up a healthy body or 'external skill' (外功).⁹ High-ranking military and governmental officials took interest in *Kouk Sun Do*, some later taking leading positions in the organisation. *Kouk Sun Do* has since been assigned to train members of some governmental institutes and military academies. But in the course of time *Kouk Sun Do* came to stress 'internal skill' (內功) which addresses inward life-energy and its activation.¹⁰ According to *Kouk Sun Do*, activation of the primary life-energy or *ki* in the lower abdomen or the hypogastric centre (丹田, Kor *tanjōn*) and letting *ki* flow throughout the whole body with help of proper breathing is the basic part of the training. It is told that continuous *ki*-training brings not only perfect physical condition but also the unity of mind and body, and in the end becoming a whole person being united with all beings and cosmos. Even though this group didn't get a wide response from the public in the 1970s, it represents the proto-type of those groups which have appeared in large numbers since the 1980s. They are those groups which were founded by charismatic individuals who are said to follow the Korean tradition of 'self-cultivation', *Söndo* (仙道), and stress low abdominal breathing specifically and *ki*-training in general.¹¹ *Kouk Sun Do* identifies itself as the 'head house of *ki*-training' in Korea.¹²

Publishing companies also played a decisive role in the development of Korean New Age, especially for the introduction of western New Age into the country. *Bömyang-sa*, the oldest such publishing company, was founded in 1978 and specialises in New Science, publishing 57 books in its 'New Science Series.' These include Fritjof Capra's famous works like *The Tao of Physics* (Capra 1979/1977) which stimulated interest in New Science among Korean intellectuals.¹³ So this company made the subject 'New Science' familiar to the public and above all, paved the way for the New Science movement in South Korea, while the movement began to be organised in the 1990s.¹⁴

In the 1970s, a series of methods of 'self-training' which originated in foreign cultures, were introduced into the country. Yoga was already known in the 1960s, with the Korean Yoga Association being founded in 1970. Transcendental Meditation (TM) became known around 1975 via American soldiers who were stationed in South Korea, and the first Korean TM teachers presented themselves in 1983. Mind Control was taught informally

by an Argentinean Catholic priest in 1976 for the first time and one year later officially by a Korean Catholic priest, who was authorised by the New York headquarters of Mind Control. Jose Silva, the founder of Mind Control, visited South Korea and gave public lectures in 1979. Shortly thereafter, the Korean Branch of Mind Control was founded and attracted many members at the beginning of the 1980s (*Chöngsin Segye* 1999:68ff).

3.2 *The 1980s: Chöngsin Segye-sa, a New Age publishing company and Dahn-hak-Sönwon, a ki-training centre*

From the early 1980s, books on famous Indian gurus (Lamana Maharashi, Maharishi Mehesh Yogi, Jiddu Krishnamurti, Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, Swami Rama, and Baba Hari Dass, for example) were translated into Korean and some of them became bestsellers. Various traditions of non-indigenous meditation were also introduced into South Korea during the 1980s, such as Tibetan Pulsing and Kundalini meditation of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, Krya yoga of Paramahansa Yogananda, tantra and mantra yoga-meditation of Ananda Marga, and Surat Shabd Yoga of Thakar Singh. ‘Meditation’ and ‘yoga’ started to become familiar words to the public. China’s policy of reform and opening-up in the 1980s enabled diverse methods of Chinese ki-training (氣功, *qi-gong*,) to be introduced in South Korea.

Far more crucial to the development of Korean New Age was the establishment in 1984 of the first publishing company to specialise in New Age, *Chöngsin Segye-sa*. The name of the company, *Chöngsin Segye* (精神世界, ‘World of the Spiritual’), is the same as the Japanese term *seisin sekai*. This Japanese term was, according to Shimazono (1999), first used by a Tokyo bookshop around 1978 and became the popular word to designate Japanese New Age, but there seems to be no direct influence from Japanese New Age on the Korean publishing company.¹⁵ *Chöngsin Segye* has stated, “We don’t represent a certain religion, but at the same time we are religious more than any other publishing companies, because we are treating subjects like life and death, former life and transmigration of soul, and salvation and the future, etc.”¹⁶ The publishing company introduced a broad range of western New Age books to Korean readers. But at the same time it showed an affinity for nationalist thought by publishing two bestseller books, *Dahn* (丹)¹⁷ in 1984 and *Handan-Gogi* (檀檀古記) in 1986.

Dahn (1984) is a novel which is based on oral statements from a historical person, [Bong-U]¹⁸ T’ae-Hun Kwon (1900-1994), who led the independence movement during the Japanese occupation of Korea (1910-1945) and is admired as a great master of *Söndo* (the so-called traditional Korean way of

‘self-cultivation’) by his followers.¹⁹ The novel *Dahn* covers subjects like *Sōndo*, supernatural abilities of *Sōndo*-masters (producing the *ki*-blow, contracting space, clairvoyance, etc), a controversial reading of Korean ancient history, and prophecy regarding the future of the Korean people. Regarding the latter [Bong-U] predicted that Korea will recover its old territory which includes Manchuria, Eastern Mongolia and North China, and lead a new civilisation together with China and India entering upon “a great era of the big transition from the white race to the yellow race” (黃白大轉換期). The book also made the term *dahn-hak* (丹學) popular.²⁰ *Dahn-hak* is, in short, about the way to cultivate *dahn* (丹), the pure life-energy, which can be activated by proper breath-control. The goal of *Dahn-hak* is described as attaining perfect body and mind, and eventually being one with the cosmic origin. At the same time, it is emphasised that self-cultivation is not pursued for the sake of personal fulfilment but to be a *hongik-in’gan* (弘益人間), a human-being who contributes to the welfare of mankind. This philanthropic ideal is believed to have been advocated by *Tan-gun* (檀君), the mystical progenitor of the Korean people as well as the founding father of the nation. For the same reason, *Dahn-hak* is believed to have originated from *Tan-gun* and to have been handed down through Korean history, but often suppressed under the strong presence of foreign religions in the country (Kim 1984).

The novel *Dahn* created a big sensation and over one million copies were sold in South Korea. The high popularity of the book led numerous books on meditation and New Science to appear in book markets shortly afterwards. Above all, the book aroused public interest in subjects like self-cultivation and the national spirit in the country, and so created fertile ground for the emergence and spread of groups which propagate the Korean art of self-cultivation. Publication of the book may be regarded as a turning point in the history of Korean New Age. The publishing company, encouraged by the success of the novel, published further books on [Bong-U] T’ae-Hun Kwon, the hero of the novel *Dahn* (Kwon 1986, 1989). The central messages in those books are: (a) Korean people or ‘people of *Paektu*-mountain’ (白頭山族)²¹ originated from North Manchuria, where the oldest Eastern civilisation was established, while they contributed to Chinese and Japanese cultures by conveying this civilisation to these countries, (b) Korea will retake its position as the leading Asian civilisation, followed by national reunification and acquisition of its old territory in the near future, (c) Korea will surpass western countries in material wealth as well as in a spiritual way and will take the lead in striving for world peace. Besides this, [Bong-U] established a training centre named *Dahn-hak Yōnjōngwon* soon after the

success of his books, but the centre has not been too popular partly because of its strict rule of training.

Another best-selling book of the publishing company, *Handan-Gogi* (1986) concerns the ancient history of Korea, and comprises four texts controversially claimed to be ancient, but which were possibly penned more recently. According to the book, the Korean people have a 10,000 year-long history (5,000 years longer than usually supposed) and the first Korean kingdom ruled for 3,300 years over a vast territory which stretched beyond Asia and even into Sumer. Furthermore, it is claimed that Korean people were the first to use a written language 4,000 years ago. The impact of this book is far reaching, both in circles which propagate the Korean art of self-training, and also in resurgent South Korean nationalism, which is heightened by growing tension with Japan and China in historical and territorial issues.²² The company *Chǒngsin Segye-sa* has since published further books which glorify ancient Korea.²³

It is worth stressing that such publications should not be dismissed as works of a few eccentrics with vivid imaginations. Rather, they are artefacts of a cluster of ideas and beliefs which have existed as part of a marginal intellectual tradition which dates, at the latest, from the beginning of the twentieth century, when Japanese Imperialism endangered the national identity of the Korean people. During this period, a nationalist movement formed, re-interpreting Korean history and worshipping *Tan-gun* as the progenitor of the Korean people and the builder of the first Korean nation. *Taejongkyo*, founded in 1909, is one of the oldest Korean new religions, with *Tan-gun* as the central figure of worship. *Taejongkyo* promotes an ethnocentric worldview which played an important role in the nationalist movement, with many of its adherents fighting against the Japanese colonial regime, and its religious doctrine attracting Korean intellectuals who aspired to national independence.²⁴

The popularity of publications on subjects like traditional Korean self-cultivation and ancient Korean history in the 1980s owed much to the political situation, at a time when there were mass protests against the dictatorial military regime and the USA, which supported it. A re-evaluation and resuscitation of traditional culture, which had been suppressed under a rigorous policy of 'modernisation', was a form of protest against the ruling powers. In parallel with the nationalist cultural movement, which was initiated by intellectuals and university students, the idea was spreading in certain circles that enhancing physical and spiritual ability in a traditional Korean way would revive the perfect community and individuals of old.

This blend of individual development and nationalist thought, which centres on the glory of the ancient time of Korea, remains a distinguishing mark of the culture of *ki*-training in South Korea. It goes without saying that the publishing company *Chǒngsin Segye-sa* and its best-selling books played an active part in this development.

In 1985, a *ki*-training centre named *Dahn-hak-Sǒnwon* (丹學禪院, *Dahn-hak* Meditation Centre) was opened. The group is of importance in so far as it made *ki*-training popular in the country. Some say that this group later played a leading part in the so-called ‘*ki*-syndrome’ in South Korea (Kim 1999:48). The group has developed into the country’s largest ‘meditation industry’, with many training centres in South Korea and abroad. The charismatic founder of the group, [Il-Chi] Seung-Heun Lee (b 1950), studied martial arts, Mind Control, clinical pathology and sport pedagogy. According to the group, Lee attained enlightenment during his intensive training at *Moak*-mountain²⁵ in 1979 and he realised soon after that what he exercised and experienced was *Sinsǒndo* (神仙道)²⁶ or *Sǒndo* (仙道), the Korean way of self-cultivation. This was said to have been almost lost until he rediscovered it.²⁷ Five years after this enlightenment, Lee discovered a method through which everybody can realise the true-self. Lee used the old term *Dahn-hak* to name this method but claimed to have made modifications to suit modern people. Lee explains that traditional Korean *Dahn-hak* helps people use their own *ki* and eventually to accomplish self-perfection by themselves in the sense that they come to realise the oneness of cosmic and bodily energy. At the same time, the founder emphasises that real self-perfection is only achieved when the person in question becomes involved in the world, ie in establishing a ‘New Human Society’ which is not based on competition but communication and mutual empathy.²⁸

The success of *Dahn-hak-Sǒnwon* may be attributed to a number of factors. Firstly, modern *Dahn-hak* is taught with a rather simple contemporary vocabulary including popular scientific terms and furnished with easily exercisable methods. Secondly, the practical benefits of *ki*-training – namely, healing and enhanced learning ability – have been stressed. Thirdly, a Korean conglomerate, SK group, supported *Dahn-hak-Sǒnwon* through training employees in its methods from 1986 to 1989,²⁹ facilitating *Dahn-hak-Sǒnwon*’s consolidation as an enterprise (Kim 1999:49).

Lee did not just teach physical and mental exercise but attempted from the initial phase of the group from 1987 to mobilise large numbers to worship *Tan-gun* as a great holy man. He claimed the so-called cardinal idea of *Tan-gun*, “Widely benefit humanity, rightfully harmonise the world,” (弘益人間

理化世界) should be the core spirit of the reunification of Korea and this idea would contribute to world peace such that Korea would be a spiritual leader in the world. The first movement Lee initiated is the ‘One Mind Movement’ (*Hanmaŭm Undong*), which aimed to establish peace on the philosophy of “unity of all human beings, and unity of heaven, earth and people.”³⁰ Since then, a number of organisations have been established tasked with developing cultural movements to ‘enlighten’ the population with a sense of national identity and national pride. Some organisations are profit-making teaching enterprises, disseminating the various methods Lee designed for the development of physical and/or mental capabilities. Other non-profit organisations are assigned for either researching Korean cultural tradition, or organising cultural movements which aim to change the value systems of Koreans, to become conscious of their national identity and cultural role in the world. Conveniently, the former support the latter financially and no less with human resources.

In the 1980s, *ki*-training began to be popular, largely through the agency of *Dahnhak-Sŏnwŏn*, which made *ki*-training widely accessible in a modernised and relatively simple form. It is also during this period that the culture of *ki*-training visibly combined with certain nationalist ideas, inspired by popular books published by *Chŏngsin Segye* publishing company.³¹ In particular, *Handan-Gogi*, an apocryphal history book on ancient Korea, has remained a long-running best-seller, providing the recent national movement with reactionary ideology, glorifying the cultural and territorial achievements of ancient Korean kingdoms. So we can say that New Age, ie non-mainstream and un-institutionalised religious culture, entered a phase of “Koreanisation.”

3.3. *The 1990s and 2000s*

Expansion of ki-training and other New Age groups

In the 1990s, the so-called ‘*ki*-syndrome’ spread in South Korea, so that ‘*ki*’ and ‘*ki*-training’ came into the spotlight and diverse *ki*-training methods including Chinese *qi-gong* (氣功), were offered in the market. As a result, the spectrum of *ki*-training widened and diversified, and ‘*ki*-training’ became highly commercialised and developed into a lucrative business sector. Many groups engaged in the business of *ki*-training or New Age, could expand their field. For example, from *Chŏngsin Segye-sa*, initially simply a publishing company specialising in New Age books, the ‘*Chŏngsin Segye* Business Group’ developed, an “all-around New Age cultural enterprise, which induces and leads the spiritual civilisation.”³² The business group consisted of five business lines: the original publishing company *Chŏngsin Segye-sa*;

the bookstore *Ch'aegbang Chōngsin Segye*; *Well-Being*, the journal of *Chōngsin Segye*; the training centres *Chōngsin Segye-won*; and the Internet website *Chōngsin Segye*. The Internet site *Chōngsin Segye* worked as a kind of junction where all the activities of this company met. Visitors to this site could collect information on the books, journals, lectures and workshops that this company provided and could directly purchase the commodities there. However, the company did not conduct lectures and workshops directly, but rather invited external lecturers and workshop leaders. Until it closed in 2005, the group provided an infrastructure, enabling diverse small groups and persons to introduce their alternative worldviews and self-training methods to the public, and as result a loose community of customers came into being. In this context, the company once described itself as “a stronghold of those people, who don’t believe that western scientific rationalism and material civilisation is the hope for humankind.”³³ There are several key reasons why the company eventually folded: management failure of the leader, who is far from the CEO-type; failure to develop new programmes; and a changed market situation. The New Age market since the 1990s has been restructured under the boom of *ki* and meditation. The constant popularity of alternative religious practice since then has enabled many small groups and persons in the milieu of New Age to set up on their own, and the increase in the number of New Age suppliers has resulted in high competition in the market, precluding the ‘monopoly’ previously available to *Chōngsin Segye*.

Although consolidation as a business group was not ultimately successful for *Chōngsin Segye*, many New Age companies and *ki*-training groups are following the conglomerate format. For example, *Dohwajae*, a *ki*-training group established in 1991, owns an Oriental (or Chinese) medicine clinic, a publishing company and a university. Another big *ki*-training group *Suseonjae*, established in 1998 by followers of the female master Hwa-Young Moon, is managing its own publishing company, research institute (Institute of Seon Culture), ‘meditation convenience stores’, ‘meditation lounges’, and Internet shopping mall.³⁴ But the most extensive consolidation has been attempted by *Dahn-hak-Sōnwon*, later known as *Dahn World* to signify that the group has become an ‘international meditation educational institution.’ The ‘world mission’ of this group began in earnest in the mid-1990s. The heart of the ‘world mission’ or ‘global management’, is the Sedona Ilchi Meditation Centre, in Arizona, USA, where the exercises are presented under the name of ‘Dahn Yoga.’³⁵ *Dahn World* has numerous affiliated groups and enterprises. On one side, there are profit-making enterprises which offer diverse services, and on the other, non-profit groups assigned for research and campaigning. To the former belong: training centres, a publishing company, consulting and educational companies, a

hospital, an Oriental medicine clinic, distribution companies, factories, agricultural co-operatives, travel agencies, and so on. To the latter belong the University of Brain Education, research institutes including the Institute for Traditional Korean Culture Studies, Kuk-Hak Institute and the Korean Institute of Brain Science, and affiliated non-governmental organisations (NGOs), mainly engaged in the promotion of Korean national consciousness through campaigns such as “Erecting 369 *Tan-gun* Statues in Schoolyards”, “Rectifying Korean History”, and “Collecting 10 million signatures against China’s North-East Asia Project.” There are also international non-profit NGOs and foundations which were initiated by Seung-Heun Lee, the founder: World Earth-Human Alliance (WEHA), World Earth-Human Alliance for Peace (WEHAP), Kuk-Hak Peace Corps, Mago 2000, New Millennium Peace Foundation and the International Foundation for the Gifted. The group is quite exceptional in the wide scope of its activity, and especially in the promotion of the Korean national spirit. In this way, *Dahn World* has developed into a group with socio-cultural power in South Korea.

New Science movement

Along with the heightened public interest in *ki*, the New Science movement came into sight in the mid-1990s, aiming to establish ‘*ki*’ as an object of scientific research. A working group (新科學研究會: *Shin Gwahak Yŏn’guhwoe*) had, since the mid-1980s, opened the debate on New Science and published research results, and many intellectuals came into touch with New Science in the late 1980s. But the movement was not as widely popular as, for example, *Han’guk Chŏngsin Gwahak Hakhwoe* (‘The Korean Society of Jongshin Science’)³⁶ and the *Minaisa Club*.

Han’guk Chŏngsin Gwahak Hakhwoe was founded by natural scientists in 1994 as a learned society for the systematic research of New Science, and now has 1,500 members from a variety of professions and fields of specialisation. The Society has as its goals: (a) the re-evaluation and systematisation of an Asian holistic view of science to replace the western mechanistic view; (b) inquiry into mental and natural phenomena inexplicable by classical science; (c) the development of technologies to protect nature; and (d) the attainment of human potential.³⁷ The Society has recently sought to become more accessible to the public and for that propose runs *Qi Culture Centre*, where workshops on traditional art self-trainings have been held since 2004.³⁸ This society shows that the New Science movement in South Korea is not simply a reproduction of its western counterpart. A major component of the South Korean New Science movement is the scientific explanation and legitimation of traditional Asian

or Korean knowledge, ie a reappraisal of Asian cultural tradition as an alternative to western civilisation.

Minaisa Club came into being in 1997, the name an abbreviation of “Club for Mirae-rül Naeda-bonŭn Saramdŭl (people who foresee the future).” According to the group, a “new humanity is evolving based on new consciousness and new science which integrate matter with spirit.”³⁹ The Club has organised an International New Science Symposium annually since 1997. *Minaisa Club* has a rather flexible structure, which does not require firm membership and is also open to laypeople, while it offers to the general public lectures on subjects such as the New Science, alternative medicine, consciousness development, new economic system etc. This group especially uses the Internet very effectively. It is a place where communication takes place between members and information on the latest developments in New Science is collected and diverse New Age commodities are sold through its website. Without a doubt, this increased scientific interest in *ki* and supernatural phenomenon can be related to the popularity of *ki* and *qi-gong* since the 1990s in South Korea.

The IMF crisis and turning to the self

The so-called ‘International Monetary Fund (IMF) crisis,’ attributed to the policies of the IMF, broke out in 1997 (Hayafuji et al 2003). The IMF crisis brought not only the collapse of the economic system, massive short-term unemployment and the bankruptcy of many small and medium enterprises, but also left long-lasting social and psychological damage in South Korea. Many family units were disrupted by a high divorce rate and the abandonment of children for financial reasons. Many people settled in rural areas, where land and houses had been abandoned in previous periods of urbanisation. The IMF crisis triggered off re-settlement of urbanites in rural areas and as a result activated a ‘community movement’ that seeks an alternative lifestyle in collectivity. The IMF crisis has changed the thought-pattern of many Koreans – people trust themselves or their families more than the ‘system’ or ‘institutions’ of society, to which they had attributed the economic success of South Korea since the 1980s. Korean newspapers at the time of the IMF crisis reflected this change, advising readers to strengthen body and mind. To quote some headlines from newspapers in 1998: “You can only trust your body in the times of IMF”, “Salaried men can only hold out as long as they are healthy”, “Fearing job cuts, you can only trust your body”, “Relieve your IMF frustration through *ki*-exercise”, etc.⁴⁰

Many social scientists agree⁴¹ that the IMF crisis in South Korea did not simply mean an economic crisis but a crisis of world view, value system and social relationship. The rapid economic growth of South Korea preceding the IMF crisis relied on a mass production system and this system required a unified nation, which could easily be mobilised on a large scale in a short time. The 'myth of growth', fostered by the rapid economic development of South Korea from the 1980s, was internalised and strengthened by the identification by individuals with the success of their employers and the nation as a whole. The destruction of the myth of growth after the IMF crisis inevitably led people to the notion that the nation or the company have less to do with individual security and self-realisation. Individuals became anxious about survival but also experienced an identity crisis. Increased labour intensity and prolonged working hours in an insecure working place, consequences of the adoption of neo-liberal employment principles after the IMF crisis, made many people seek an alternative lifestyle outside the tightly structured economy. Many highly-educated office workers with rich socio-cultural experiences dream of 'escaping' from their work places to focus on their own life-project (Cho & Um 1999). The 'reformed' economic system of South Korea after the end of the 1990s concentrates on small-scale production of diverse commodities and higher value-added business. This neo-liberal economic system requires individuals to be equipped with a rather creative and flexible identity, but without granting individual security in return (Cho & Um 1999:120). Economic change in South Korea since the late 1990s has thus amplified the turn to the self and an alternative lifestyle, providing fertile ground for South Korean New Age.

Transpersonal psychology

The *Minaisa Club* and *Chöngsin Segye-sa* played an important role in introducing to South Korea the latest trends in western psychology like transpersonal psychology/psychotherapy and Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP). In 2000, the Korea Transpersonal Association was founded, and the Korean Transcendental Spirituality Counselling Association and the Korean NLP Association were integrated into the Korea Counselling Association. It is controversial as to whether transpersonal psychology is to be considered New Age, primarily for the reason that transpersonal psychology has become established as an academic discipline and regarded as the 'fourth force' in the field of psychology. Nevertheless, transpersonal psychology and NLP grew out of the human potential movement in the West, and their current popularity in South Korea can be attributed to New Age and especially to the New Science movement. Given their mutual influence and impact, their shared holistic worldview and common concern with spiritual growth, it does

not seem productive to consider transpersonal psychology and New Age as two separate phenomena. At least in South Korea, transpersonal psychology and NLP attract not only academics and professionals working in medical, therapeutic and counselling fields but also specialists from established religions and persons active in the scene of *ki*-training and meditation.

It is noticeable that some Korean Buddhists take an active interest in these new therapeutic methods and attempt to apply the techniques to their 'care of soul.' For example, the Seoul Graduate School of Buddhism was established in 2002, focusing on Buddhist studies, counselling psychology and mind-body healing. Its Department of Counselling Psychology has three majors: counselling psychology, transpersonal psychology and art therapy, while the Department of Mind-Body Healing has two majors: yoga therapeutics and mind-body-healing education. The graduate school is soon to be restyled a graduate school of 'well-being culture', also integrating alternative medicine.⁴²

Some Buddhist circles use the Enneagram⁴³ as a tool of counselling and a spiritual guide, and many Buddhist monks and nuns have completed the Masters course of Avatar.⁴⁴ This development suggests that Korean Buddhism is taking advantage of New Age or the popularity of 'self-cultivation' and meditation. As a result Korean Buddhists have increased in number after a long interval.⁴⁵ Established religions are adapting themselves to this new religious market, where holistic care of the 'self' and 'well-being' are coming to the fore. Although Korean Christians have reacted rather hesitantly and slowly to these trends, they have also begun to attempt to integrate transpersonal psychology into Christian counselling, for example with the founding in 2006 of the Association of Meditation and Spirituality Psychotherapy.⁴⁶

Alternative healthcare and the well-being boom

Much 'alternative medicine', already popular in the West, is now available in the South Korean market. But the expression 'alternative' may not be appropriate in South Korea, because of the long tradition of Oriental (or Chinese) medicine. Under the heading of 'alternative medicine', the following are offered: Ayurveda; Reiki; reflexology; aromatherapy; herbal therapy; aura-soma therapy; art therapy; bodywork therapy, including massage and chiropractic; hypnotherapy, including past-life hypnosis and metaphysical hypnosis; homeopathy; wilderness therapy; Gestalt therapy; Thought Field Therapy (TFT); holotropic therapy; kinergetic therapy; laughter therapy; pyramid therapy; electro-magnetic therapy; cranio-sacral

therapy; yoga; *ki-* or *qi-gong*-therapy; and so forth.⁴⁷ Increasing public interest in spiritual and mental growth as well as in alternative and holistic healthcare has also had an effect on the academic curriculum. Most universities now offer courses on meditation and yoga. Many colleges have opened well-being related departments, such as a department of ‘well-being therapy’, ‘well-being health management’, ‘well-being architecture’, and so on. These are quite popular with students because of a high employment rate after graduation. There are also numerous private institutes or academies, which are entitled to educate specialists in the field of alternative medicine or therapy.⁴⁸ And it goes without saying that most *ki*-training groups have elaborate training programmes for their future elites or trainers, while a few of them have even established their own universities or colleges for the purpose, as in the case of *Kouk Sun Do* and *Dohwhajae*. As for yoga, there are plenty of yoga associations and centres which train future yoga teachers, along with some private graduate schools which are established specifically for the purpose of advanced studies on the subject.⁴⁹ It is no exaggeration to say that an extensive expert system is ready for the demand of an alternative lifestyle, and by the same token promotes such a lifestyle.

It is not so clear how far Korean New Age relates to the current well-being boom. On the one hand, New Age is typically thought to represent alternative worldviews to western rationalism and materialism, while the Korean well-being boom is driven largely by consumer culture. On the other hand, New Age is also highly commercialised. Both New Age and the well-being boom are diffused within each other and also integrated into popular culture. It is debatable whether the well-being trend has an underlying structure, or instead exists just in fragments or elements within popular or consumer culture. It is often observed that the well-being boom owes much to the consumer and service industry, which wraps up goods in ‘well-being’ packaging in order to grant consumers the feeling of being ‘special’ or ‘unique’. But because being in fashion entails the loss of uniqueness and individuality, new well-being commodities are incessantly coming to the market. Therefore, ‘well-being’ can be conceived as a mode of consumption. Well-being works as a symbol associated with certain goods and is utilised to stress differences in lifestyle (see also Featherstone 2004:16f). In these ways, New Age and the well-being boom strengthen each other, each leading its customers to the other.

The community movement

The Korean ‘community movement’, comprised mainly of eco-communities where members share ecological values and strive collectively to realise those values, may be thought to stand in opposition to the consumption-oriented well-being boom. The eco-community movement began in the mid-1980s and has become more popular since the 1990s,⁵⁰ although its socio-cultural impact remains to date rather moderate. Eco-communities are often defined as ecological, cultural, and spiritual, but in reality it is hard to find communities that fit all those descriptions.⁵¹ Korean eco-communities typically focus on the cultivation for sale of environmentally-friendly agricultural products, and ‘well-being’ products. So the circle is closed up, with a supposedly oppositional community movement servicing the individualistic well-being boom.

Also present in South Korea are communities modelled on European alternative schools like the German *Waldorfschule* and Summerhill school in England (*Minaisa Club* 2005). Fully-functional eco-communities based explicitly on the spirit of New Age, comparable to Findhorn for example, are at present rare in South Korea. But several such projects are underway, aiming to establish communities based on very specific worldviews, which could be designated as New Age. One of them is the Holos Project of the *Minaisa Club*, which plans a community with a research institute and education centre, modelled after the Institute of Noetic Science and the Esalen Institute in the USA.⁵² There are also a number of countryside retreats, where urbanites can recover physically or mentally with programmes like *ki*-training and yoga. Many such retreatists then aspire to build ecological and spiritual communities of their own.

New Age as value-added business

The Avatar course was introduced to South Korea in 1993, the first country in Asia to host the US franchise, and has brought about a visible change in the local meditation market. The Avatar course is promoted as a self-development programme to enable the participants to attain ‘enlightenment’. The standard three-stage course takes seven to nine days, and the Master and Wizard advanced courses take nine and thirteen days respectively. Participants pay a high price for such a ‘speedily effective’⁵³ course. The Avatar programme is a product of Star’s Edge International, USA, which franchises the brand worldwide, supervising courses, fixing prices and licensing Avatar-teachers. This type of global enterprise specialising in ‘self-development’ was unfamiliar to Koreans at the beginning of the 1990s. The

fast-track ‘enlightenment’ offered by the Avatar course is exceptional in Asian religious tradition, where ‘enlightenment’ or ‘awakening’ usually requires a long process of individual effort if the ultimate stage is ever to be reached. Prior to the advent of the Avatar programme, most Korean *ki*-training or meditation groups provided their trainees step-by-step courses over a relatively long period, not to mention being hesitant about promising ultimate ‘enlightenment’.

The Avatar course seems to have met the need of ‘modern’ people who prefer a faster and easier way of meeting their goal, and are willing to pay a higher cost for a more efficient method. The popularity of Avatar in South Korea gave impetus to the appearance of similar local groups which focus on fast and simple ways to attain enlightenment, combining traditional meditation with psychotherapy. Well-known Korean groups of this sort are *Maum Meditation* (f 1996), *Dongsasup* (f 2003) and *Meditation World* (f 2004).⁵⁴ *Maum Meditation* is the fastest-growing such group, managing 93 meditation centres worldwide. The group claims that every trainee can be a divine being him/herself through the eight-level programme, with the trainee’s consciousness dissolving into the consciousness of God.⁵⁵ *Dongsasup*, evolved from an ‘encounter group’ or ‘T (training) group’, based on the work of Carl Rogers (1902-1987), through the work of some Korean Buddhist monks. *Dongsasup* offers a three-stage course which takes 14 days to complete, with the final objective of attaining “the status of feeling ultimate freedom with no-bound and no-attachment”, in another words “pure feeling of good”.⁵⁶ *Meditation World* introduces itself as an organisation specialising in the development and supply of modern, practical and systematic meditation programmes. The main programme of the group is the ‘Z-course’ which is designed for accomplishing absolute freedom through rapid expansion of consciousness, taking just two days over a weekend, and is relatively highly priced.⁵⁷

Although groups which propagate ‘instant’ enlightenment are sometimes criticised as reducing traditional Asian meditation to therapeutic techniques or as merchandising enlightenment, *ki*-training or meditation has become a common South Korean business plan for public authorities. *Kyongsang-buk-do* province plans a large-scale “meditation well-being town”, expected to be finished in 2008, fostered as the “Mecca of meditation culture”. The town will consist of a “centre for experiencing meditative culture”, a “centre for meditation- and nature-healing”, a “meditation hot spring” and an “institute for the development of cultural contents”.⁵⁸ *Kyongju* city also plans to establish an “industrial complex for meditative culture”, including a meditation centre for Zen (Kor *Sŏn*) and yoga, a hot spring and “forest

bathing”⁵⁹ area. *Yeongam* county, in *Jeolla-nam-do* province, focuses on ‘*ki*-business’ and plans a complex called ‘*ki* cultural contents centre’ at the foot of *Wöl’chul* mountain, which is regarded as sacred and favoured by ‘seekers’ or *dosas*.⁶⁰ The centre will include a ‘*ki*-science research institute’, a ‘house of *ki*-experience’, a training centre, an exhibition hall, an education centre and a shopping centre. The trademark, ‘氣@Yeong-am’ has already been registered, and visitors have been projected at two million per year.⁶¹ The provincial government of *Jeju*-Island has also worked on establishing an international meditation centre on the island with the help of *Dahn World*, which has already held the ‘International Peace Meditation Camp’ there three times.⁶² It is evident that these projects aim to take maximum advantage of contemporary New Age culture, providing for visitors an optimal consumer environment in which to test New Age commodities in a single place doubling as a ‘spiritual entertainment resort’ and a ‘spiritual shopping mall’.

Although it is too early to ascertain that all these projects will be realised and profitable, they are an indication that New Age is now thought worthy of huge investment at local government level. This does not necessarily mean that all organisations propagating *ki*-training or meditation pursue profit-making. Nevertheless, the fact that the majority of these groups show a tendency to expand, which again requires capital investment, indicates that the groups cannot be totally free from profit-making. *Ki*- and meditation related groups show a stronger tendency to become an enterprise in South Korea, in contrast to yoga and *qi-gong* related groups. *Dahn World* is the best example as it registered as a profit-making company limited by shares (or stock company) in 1993. *Dahn World* was soon thereafter granted by the Bank of Korea the right to invest in foreign countries, and has expanded abroad. The group stresses their spiritual products make a much higher profit than any other Korean export articles abroad.⁶³ *Dahn World* manages 500 training centres worldwide, 200 abroad and 170 in the USA alone. Total sales of *Dahn World* amounted to 250 billion won (280 million US dollars) in 2005 – and in 2004 ca. 40% of sales were made abroad.⁶⁴ The emphasis of the group on low abdominal breathing has shifted to ‘brain breathing’ or ‘brain respiration’, which is thought to be more scientific and thus more suitable to a global market. The Korean Institute of Brain Science, established by the founder, Seung-Heun Lee and affiliated with the Korean Ministry of Science and Technology, researches the development and ‘enlightenment’ of the brain. The institute has developed ‘human technology’ programmes, to maximise and optimise brain function so as to improve the quality of life and establish a better world.⁶⁵ The institute recently presented the ‘brain operating system’ or ‘Brain Window’, comparable with the ‘Windows’ operating system of computers. It is

claimed that everyone is able to operate their brain for a healthy, happy and peaceful life with the help of the system.⁶⁶ These all sound as if the main key to happiness lies in neuroscience, not to mention scientific positivism. But at the same time this development within *Dahn World* parallels intensifying scientific research on the relationship between the brain and religiosity or spiritual development in general.

4. Conclusion

The history of Korean New Age shows distinctly how far the phenomenon has expanded its sphere of socio-cultural influence. With accelerating globalisation, the landscape of Korean New Age will become more complex. The sheer diversity of meaning systems and practice that South Korean New Age contains simply does not allow it to be summarised by a few common characteristics. In the same context, determining New Age based on its contents doesn't make much sense. Thus, this paper first proposed rather to pay attention to how New Age, ie un-institutionalised religious-cultural phenomena outside traditional religions, is operating locally as well as globally. At the same, it was necessary to describe the local (Korean) situation, because of the absence of western literature concerning Korean New Age.

To summarise, Korean New Age may roughly be divided into four sectors according to the degree of organisation and affinity to Korean religious tradition:

- (a) traditional *ki*-training;
- (b) yoga and *qi-gong*;
- (c) New Science, alternative or holistic health care, and self-development programmes; and
- (d) well-being culture.

The first sector, *ki*-training forms the core of Korean New Age with high popularity and socio-cultural impact on society. Nearly all groups which propagate *ki*-training or traditional 'self-cultivation' promote Korean national consciousness. The biggest such group, *Dahn World*, makes an explicit commitment to foster the national spirit. The group has invested huge financial and personal resources to this end, recently targeting China's policy of interpreting Korean ancient history as part of its own. Another characteristic of *ki*-training groups is that most are well-organised and tend to be hierarchical.⁶⁷ Groups structured in this way bear some similarities to new

religions, except that membership is based on payment without absolute commitment.

The second sector, to which yoga and *qi-gong* belong, may be characterised as consumption primarily for the sake of physical well-being, without religious or ideological implications. Yoga is quite standardised in South Korea as a set of physical exercises being favoured by a large population, while Chinese *qi-gong* of various schools focuses mainly on healing or staying healthy.⁶⁸ Yoga groups exist mainly in the form of associations, while *qi-gong* groups centre on a number of masters and are relatively small in size.

The third sector, into which the New Science movement, holistic or alternative health care and diverse self-development programmes are to be subsumed, does not yet appeal to the general public, although public interest is constantly increasing. New Science remains only an intellectual movement in South Korea. In a similar way, alternative psychotherapy (transpersonal, NLP, etc.) and self-development programmes (Avatar) which are imported from the West, are favoured by intellectuals and/or financially privileged groups due partly to the complexity of their theories and partly to the higher cost. Some Korean meditation groups combine the latest trends in western psychotherapy with Buddhism but demand only a moderate price, and thus appeal to a wider section of the public. The structural form of groups in this sector is rather simple, because the main activity of the groups is offering courses which are held periodically - sometimes at different places - without having any tie to their clients except during the courses. In the case of the Avatar courses, their local organisation is also kept minimal, because the courses are directed and supervised by their American headquarters.

Finally, the well-being culture of the fourth sector must be mentioned, not because this might be a stable component of Korean New Age, but because it is a substratum of the New Age related to consumer culture and consequently accelerates the commercialisation of Korean New Age. This does not mean that the well-being boom is only related to consumer habit, but reflects a changing view of the self and the environment, that is, viewing body, mind and spirit, human beings and the environment in harmony. In this sense it is no exaggeration to say that the present well-being boom is both a product and promoter of New Age at the same time.

Some accepted theories on New Age must be re-examined in light of this presentation of New Age in South Korea. New Age is generally considered as an indication or a symptom of advanced secularisation, with the decline of

established religions and increasing numbers involved in alternative religious or spiritual practices. There is unfortunately no statistical survey on the 'religious' population outside of the established religions in South Korea. But enough indicators are present which strongly suggest that much of the population is involved in New Age: a plethora of training centres and courses for *ki*, yoga, *qi-gong* and self-development, large projects at local government level to establish well-being or *ki*-training towns and centres, and so forth.

However, there is no sign of a decline of established religions in South Korea. On the contrary, according to the census of the National Statistical Office, the number of people who are affiliated with a certain confession increased from 46.2% of the general population in 1985 to 53.1% in 2005, with Buddhists representing 22.8%, Protestants 18.3% and Catholics 10.9%. Korean Catholics and Buddhists have increased in number since 1985, although the number of Korean Protestants has slightly decreased since 1995.⁶⁹ Many of these people affiliated to an established religion are also involved in New Age and do not necessarily feel conflict between their religious confession and the New Age they consume. One reason can be found in the long history of religious pluralism in Korea where one single religion never had as dominant a position as Christianity did in Europe, another reason the claim of New Age groups that they are not 'religions'. Even though Korean Catholic and Protestant churches are officially against New Age, they cannot really prevent their believers from taking part in such alternative 'self-training'.

Thus the secularisation thesis does not fit the religious situation of South Korea. Nevertheless, this does not necessarily mean that Korean society is 'sacralised', for Korean religious culture is not exempt from the late capitalist economic system, as the commercialisation or commodification of Korean New Age indicates. The secularisation theory of New Age misses the complexity of 'modernity'.

It is quite common in New Age literature that New Age is related to the counter-cultural movement, at least in its initial phase. Of course, New Age contains some cultural-critical ideas, in which contemporary culture is considered as a stage to be overcome, in order to evolve into the next level. Nevertheless, this presentation of New Age in Korea shows that New Age does not necessarily clash with established culture. On the contrary, in the case of *ki*-training groups and the New Science movement, criticism is mainly directed at 'others', ie western civilisation or other negative foreign

cultural influences and this leads to (re-)evaluation and affirmation of Korean cultural tradition.

The strong national consciousness of most *ki*-training groups does not fit into the subjectivity thesis of New Age either. Although *ki*-training focuses on individual subjective experience, most trainees take an ethno-centric world view for granted at the same time, partly owing to the teaching of these groups. Even though turning to the self and nationalist aspiration seem to be contradictory trends, both tendencies are present within Korean New Age and are not necessarily in tension with each other. To understand New Age as a global and at the same time as a very local phenomenon, studies on New Age need to be carried out more in a global context (including consideration of global power relations between western and non-western countries) and from a cross-cultural perspective, instead of being concentrated on western societies and considering the latter as the sole observational field of New Age.

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Notes

¹ Japanese scholars are an exception to this general observation. Research on the New Age has intensified since the 1990s in Japan, especially in the context of Japan's 'New New Religions' (*shin shin shukyo*), although publications are primarily in Japanese. A leading researcher of Japanese New Age is Susumu Shimazono, whose work (1999, 2004) played an important role in introducing Japanese New Age to western academics.

² South Koreans just adopted the English term, spoken *welbing bum*. In this article Korean words have been transcribed according to the McCune-Reischauer system (*in italics*), except where an accepted English transcription already exists.

³ Most publications on the subject of 'New Age' in South Korea are of a theological nature, with an apologetic standpoint and negative judgment.

⁴ The term *Sin-yŏngsŏng-undong* ('New Spiritual Movement') was introduced by Kil-Myong Noh, a Korean sociologist of religion and a Catholic, into the Korean Catholic church. Noh adopted the term from Shimazono.

⁵ It is interesting to observe that the Korean Catholic church, which was rather tolerant to New Age in comparison with the Korean Protestant church, is more recently intensifying an anti-New Age campaign, distributing a series of pamphlets and booklets which warn their believers against New Age. See eg Chukyo-hwŏi Kyori-gyoyuk Uiwonhwŏ (2005), Chukyo-hwŏi Samok-yon'guso (2005) and Chukyo-hwŏi Sinang-gyori Uiwonhwŏ (2005). This changed attitude to New Age on the part of the Korean Catholic church can be interpreted as defensive in that many professing Catholics are also involved in alternative methods of 'self-training'.

⁶ *Ki* (氣, Chin *chi* or *qi*) means the life-force, life-energy, or cosmic energy, operating in every being and activity.

⁷ For instance, large events were held in Seoul under the slogans of “Culture of Self-cultivation which Opens the New Millennium” on 5 September 1999 and “International Ki Cultural Festival” on 4-8 May 2000. See *Chōngsin Segyesa* (1999:20-49); *Internet Hankyoreh*, 28 April 2000 <http://www.hani.co.kr/section-009000000/2000/009000000200004282334006.html>

⁸ http://www.ksd21.com/newko/sub/top01_chung02.php

⁹ Koh explained this step by the Buddhist notion of ‘skillful means’ to demonstrate the effect of *ki*-training which was not familiar to the general public at that time

http://www.ksd21.com/newko/sub/top01_chung01.php

¹⁰ http://www.ksd21.com/newko/sub/top01_chung01.php

¹¹ *Kouk Sun Do* is often regarded (especially in the West) as a martial art, because of its extended physical exercise which is said to help to extract *ki* and to activate its flow. The group has 120 training centres in South Korea and 20 abroad.

¹² <http://www.ksd21.com/newko/sub/main.php>

¹³ <http://www.pumyangbook.co.kr/english/english.html>

¹⁴ <http://ksjs.or.kr/seollip.htm>; <http://www.herenow.co.kr>

¹⁵ *Seisin sekai* is translated usually as ‘Spiritual World’ or ‘World of the Spiritual’, although the word *chōngsin* (Kor) or *seisin* (Jap.) has a broader meaning than ‘spirituality’, closer to the German word ‘der Geist’. In an interview (25 July 2005) with Sun-Hyon Song, founder of *Chōngsin Segye* publishing company, he stressed that he was not aware of Japanese New Age when he established the company. Song had previously trained in Mind Control and received a certificate for its teaching during his stay in the USA in 1992.

¹⁶ http://www.mindvision.org/publisher/main_new.html, translated by the author.

¹⁷ *Dahn* (丹, Chin *tan*) is a central concept in Taoism. *Dahn* means literally ‘red’ or ‘hot’ and symbolises ‘energy’ or *ki* (see footnote 6, above).

¹⁸ A pen-name (號, Kor *ho*) is traditionally inserted before a respected person’s name in a number of Asian cultures, and the custom survives in South Korean intellectual circles. In this paper, pen-names appear in parentheses.

¹⁹ <http://www.bongwoo.org>

²⁰ Even though *Dahn-hak* is often regarded as the genuine Korean art of self-cultivation, it is actually one of many Taoist developments. In Taoism perennial youth and longevity or becoming *sinsōn* (神山 Taoist hermit with supernatural abilities) have been pursued as the ultimate goal, but attainment of this goal has two paths, namely *oe-dahn-hak* (外丹學, the outward *dahn-hak*) and *nae-dahn-hak* (內丹學, the inward *dahn-hak*). The former path seeks to produce a substance called the ‘elixir of life’, while the latter path focuses on self-training, including diet, breath and meditation, in order to be in tune with cosmic energy. The term *dahn-hak* as used in contemporary Korean *ki*-training falls under the latter category.

²¹ *Paektu* mountain, at the of North Korean/Chinese border, is regarded by Koreans as the most sacred mountain, being the mountain from which *Hwanung*, a son of the heavenly king, came down to earth. According to Korean mythology, *Hwanung* married a female bear and their son, *Tan-gun*, became the forefather of Koreans and founder of the first Korean nation.

²² Recently the Chinese government has under its ‘North-East Asian Project’ interpreted Korean ancient history as a part of Chinese history. See Ahn (2006) and Byington (2004).

²³ See Chōng (1992), Bong-U Sasang Yon’guso (2001) and Chōng, ed (2003).

²⁴ [Bong-U] Tae-Hun Kwon on whom the novel *Dahn* is based, was in charge of the highest office of *Taejonggyo* for years. See <http://www.bongwoo.org>

²⁵ *Moak-san* is another sacred mountain in Korea, and the region is also well-known for its new religious groups. *Moak-san* mountain is regarded as being full of energy and is visited by those, including shamans, seeking enlightenment or contact with spirits.

²⁶ *Sinsōndo* and *Sōndo* are often used as synonyms. *Sinsōndo* means the Way (*do*) of *sinsōn* (神山), who is believed in Taoism to have overcome the death and have been dwelling in eternal peace. See also footnote 20, above.

²⁷ See Mu-Kyong Kim (2002:23).

²⁸ See Lee (2002:18f) and <http://www.dahnyogaonline.com/beginners/dahnhakandbr.asp?check=1>

²⁹ <http://www.sk.com/introduce/overview/overview.asp>. Thanks to SK Group training employees at its centres, *Dahn-hak-Sōnwon* could open 12 training centres nationwide one year after its foundation in 1986. SK Group distanced itself from *Dahn-hak-Sōnwon* from the late 1980s and developed their own training programmes based on the practice of *Dahn-hak-Sōnwon*, aiming for health of mind, body and *ki* through meditation, physical exercise and hypogastric breathing respectively. See http://www.skms.or.kr/sim/sim_5.html. SK Group may have broken with *Dahn-hak-Sōnwon* because of its ethnocentric standpoint centred on the worship of *Tan-gun*. The main concern of the SK Group was the physical and mental improvement of their employees, not ideological or religious. Although other Korean enterprises put certain New Age groups in charge of training or motivating their employees, the SK Group was exceptional in the sense that they not only invested large sums in *ki*-training all employees and their families, but also subsequently developed their own programmes based on the technique. Much is owed to the late president of the group, Chong-Hyon Choi, who was deeply engaged in *ki*-philosophy and convinced of the positive effects of *ki*-training. See (Kim 1999:51) and *Chōngsin Segye-sa* (1999: 98f).

³⁰ The goal of the movement was summarized under the slogan, “Making mind and body healthy”, “Rectifying Korean history and re-evaluating *Tan-gun*”, and “Removing pollution.” See Woo (2006).

³¹ The tradition of *ki*-training as a non-mainstream and marginal religious tradition in Korea has been ethnocentric for a long time. For instance, during the Yi-dynasty (1392-1910), many intellectuals who were engaged in *Dahn-hak* regarded *Tan-gun* (the mythological forefather of Koreans) as the founder of *Dahn-hak* and claimed the authenticity of Korean culture against China, whose culture had been highly respected as the model to follow at that time.

³² From the former Internet site of the company. Translated by the author.

³³ Op cit.

³⁴ <http://suseonjae.org/org2005/en/index.php>

³⁵ <http://www.dahnyoga.com/>, <http://www.dahnyogaonline.com/beginners/founder.asp?check=1>, http://www.taofellowship.org/tao_mago.html

³⁶ Here *jongshin* or *chōngsin* (Jap. *seisin*) means the spiritual or spirituality.

³⁷ The four main research areas of the society are ‘traditional thoughts’, ‘science of bodily *ki*’, ‘science of spatial *ki*’ and ‘human potentiality’.
<http://www.kjss.org/insa.htm>.

³⁸ <http://www.kjss.org/lecture01.htm>.

³⁹ <http://www.herenow.co.kr/>

⁴⁰ *Newspaper Hangyoreh*, 21 January 1998; *Joongang-Daily*, 13 February 1998, *Sport Chosun*, 15 February 1998.

⁴¹ See eg Cho & Um (1999); Kim & Finch (2002), Shin (2005) and Kim (2005).

⁴² http://www.sgsb.ac.kr/eng/M1/M1_s1.asp?m=1&s=1, http://www.sgsb.ac.kr/eng/M3/M3_s2.asp?m=3&s=1&y=2, <http://kr.news.yahoo.com/service/news/shellview.htm?linkid=13&articleid=2006022409260053462&newssetid=85>

⁴³ The Enneagram is a nine-pointed figure which is believed of ancient origin. In more recent years the figure has been combined with personality analysis.

⁴⁴ *Bōpbo Sinmun*, 2 July 1998 and 10 August 2004. The Avatar-courses have been regarded by many Korean Buddhists as programmes which could assist Buddhist practices, but have also had Buddhist critics. These critics claim Buddhism does not need ‘alternative’ practices like Avatar, that Avatar is not compatible with Buddhist teaching, and weakens the Buddhist faith and the duty of altruistic activities. *Hyondae Bulkyo*, 11 July 2001, <http://www.buddhapia.co.kr/mem/hyondae/auto/newspaper/326/d-1.htm>; *Weekly Dong-A*, 18 April 2002.

⁴⁵ According to the census of the National Statistical Office, the number of Korean Buddhists has increased again since 1985: 8,059,000 (1985), 10,321,000 (1995), 10,726,000 (20005). *Sisa Journal*, 19 December 2006.

⁴⁶ <http://www.medigatenews.com/Users/News/copNewsView.html?Section=2&ID=32536>

⁴⁷ http://www.naturomedica.co.kr/hmt_intro.html

⁴⁸ <http://www.naturomedica.co.kr/>, <http://nh114.co.kr/>,

<http://www.aura-soma.co.kr/english/main/index.htm>, <http://www.kenneagram.com>

⁴⁹ The University of Natural Medicine offers ‘yoga’ and ‘Ayurveda’ as a major for master and doctorate courses, and Shanti Gurukul offers ‘yoga’, ‘Ayurveda’ and ‘Vedanta’ for master and doctorate courses. <http://www.shanti.re.kr/body/sub1/sub2.htm>, <http://www.shanti.re.kr/index.htm>

⁵⁰ The oldest eco-community is *Shinan*-village (f 1984), aims to realise ‘Yamagishism’, which sometimes regarded as a Japanese new religion. The village maintains principles such as ‘No property’, ‘No use of money within the village’, and ‘No distribution’. <http://www.yamagishism.co.kr/index.htm>

⁵¹ This definition of ‘eco-community’ rests mainly on that of ‘eurotopia’ (Eurotopia-Redaktion 2004). The definition is often mentioned as the ultimate goal of eco-community.

⁵² <http://www.herenow.co.kr/>

⁵³ The expression is cited from the Internet homepage of the company. <http://www.avatarepc.com/html/avatarcourse.html>

⁵⁴ <http://eng.maum.org/>, <http://www.dongsasub.org/>, <http://www.senworld.co.kr/noticespecial.asp>

⁵⁵ The group has meditation centres in 17 American cities. The founder, Myung Woo is said to have attained enlightenment during meditation in *Gaya* mountain in 1993, and in the same year to have established the *Maum Meditation*. Until a few years ago the group offered a 5-stage residential programme taking ca. 10 weeks. The current 8-level programme and requires at least 10 weeks for the first 4 levels (residential), with the time for the remaining 4 levels being left open. <http://eng.maum.org>.

⁵⁶ <http://www.dongsasub.org>. The name of the group, *Dongsasup* (同事攝) derives from of the four methods which bodhisattvas employ to approach and save people, called ‘四攝去 (*catuh-samgraha-vastu*), namely “physically working together with them” (同事, Kor *Dongsa*). The group is also working on a community, named ‘Happy Village’ where a famous Korean monk, Yong-Ta is the leading figure. Because of the close relationship of *Dongsasup* with a certain group of Korean Buddhist monks who had hosted sessions in their temples and made theoretical contributions to *Dongsasup*, many regard the group as Buddhist one, even though the group is not officially affiliated with any Korean Buddhist school.

⁵⁷ The ‘Z-course’ has been developed since 1998. According to the group, the ‘Z-course’ is the last or the ultimate method of ‘self-training’. The course bears some likeness to the Avatar course in that it stresses finding out and rearranging past thought-patterns so as to create a new pattern for living. The two-day course costs 500,000 Won (ca. \$520). http://www.senworld.co.kr/guestroom1_1.asp

⁵⁸ *Hangyoreh* weekly magazine 21, 4 May 2004, <http://h21.hani.co.kr/section-021003000/2004/05/021003000200405040508021.html>

⁵⁹ So-called “forest bathing” (*sanlim-yok*, 山林浴) is considered in Japan, Korea and Taiwan as a natural therapy to breath in phytoncides emitted by trees, in order to improve physical as well as mental health.

⁶⁰ *Dosa* (道士) originally means Taoist hermits or ascetics, and broadly those with supernatural powers acquired through self-training in seclusion in the mountains.

⁶¹ *Hangyoreh* 21, op cit.

⁶² <http://www.jejuori.net/news/articleView.html?idxno=19244>,

Money Today, 9 April 2006.

⁶³ *Dahn World* gives the example of Korean cars exported to the USA which, according to the group, make only \$100 profit per car for the Korean manufacturer, while membership of the American *Dahn* training centre alone costs \$120 (in 2004). *Hangyoreh* 21, op cit.

⁶⁴ <http://kr.blog.yahoo.com/goryo2005/2508>. The founder, [Il-Chi] Seung-Heun Lee, said in an interview that *Dahn World* aims to open 36,000 training centres worldwide by 2010, 10,000 more than the 26,000 hamburger outlets McDonalds managed worldwide in 1997. He added “as long as a bread could make it, why we can’t make it with spiritual product.” *Money Today*, op cit.

⁶⁵ <http://eng.kibs.re.kr/About/Foundation.asp>

⁶⁶ <http://eng.kibs.re.kr/HSP/HSPWindow.asp>

⁶⁷ The high degree of organisation of *ki*-training groups may be due primarily to the relatively large attendance at such groups, which have been inspired in Korea by the 'ki-syndrome' since the 90s.

⁶⁸ The emphasis on physical health on the part of *qi-gong* corresponds to Chinese governmental policy, which divides *qi-gong* into two categories: 'sport *qi-gong*' or 'health *qi-gong*' for disease prevention, and 'medical *qi-gong*' as an active cure, avoiding any religious and ideological implications.

⁶⁹ *Sisa Journal*, 19 October 2006.