

# INTERRELIGIOUS RELATIONS

Introducing Dasök Yu Yöng-Mo's Korean Spiritual Disciplines  
and his Poem "Being a Christian"

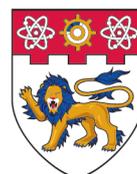
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# **INTERRELIGIOUS RELATIONS**

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Introducing Dasŏk Yu Yŏng-Mo's Korean Spiritual Disciplines and  
his Poem "Being a Christian"

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## **Abstract**

This paper is intended to provide an introduction to, and critical analysis of, the religious thought of Dasök Yu Yöng-mo (1890-1981), one of the most innovative religious thinkers in Korea's modern history. His thought profoundly influenced a generation of thinkers both in Korea's Christian tradition and in Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism. It will argue that Dasök's thought, though currently unstudied and hardly known outside Korea, is an important form of inculturation of Christian thought in the Korean context, and with potential wider learning points for theological construction beyond this context. Dasök integrated indigenous resources from the Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist traditions to contextualise Christianity to a multi-religious Korean context. The paper situates Dasök's spirituality and thought in broader discussions of religious pluralism and will attempt to answer the question of whether Dasök can be considered a pluralist. A further original contribution is the translation and commentary on one of Dasök's most important works, "Being A Christian."

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Dasök Yu Yöng-mo (1890-1981) is one of the most innovative religious thinkers in Korea's modern history.<sup>2</sup> He was the teacher of many significant Korean religious leaders of the twentieth century. His most famous disciple was Ham Sök-hön (1901-1989), who also became a guru of Korean *minjung* (민중) or the people's theology and movement.<sup>3</sup> Dasök's religious thought profoundly influenced significant intellectuals in Christianity and other religious traditions in Korea such as Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism. The primary purpose of this article is to introduce Dasök as an important, though often understudied, religious scholar in Korea, by focusing on his original understanding and interpretation of the Christian faith.<sup>4</sup> Most significantly, Dasök integrated indigenous resources from the Confucian, Daoist and Buddhist traditions to inculturate Christianity to a multi-religious Korean context. This paper will situate Dasök's spirituality and thought in broader discussions of religious pluralism and will attempt to answer the question of whether Dasök can be considered a pluralist. It will also provide an original translation of one of Dasök's most important works, "Being A Christian."

## Opening Up a New Way of Spirituality

Dasök entered into the Christian faith as a Presbyterian at the age of fifteen (in 1905), though he later declared himself to be a Non-Orthodox Christian.<sup>5</sup> Dasök proved to be far ahead of his time amongst Korean Protestants, who were extremely loyal to what they had learnt from exclusivist Western missionaries and could not appreciate his provocative foresights which would, arguably, prepare Christians in the twenty-first century for a multi-religious world. Furthermore, even the so-called theologians of indigenisation in Korea had not recognised his thought as a vein of Korean Christian theology.

For example, in his well-known book, *The Veins of Korean Theology*, Yu Tong-sik summarised the history of Korean Christian theology in three figures: Pak Hyöng-lyong (1897-1978, Evangelical Presbyterian),

<sup>1</sup> A note on romanisation: for Korean Romanisation, this article basically uses the McCune-Reischauer system. Chinese characters are also romanised according to Korean pronunciation, except for *dao* (道).

<sup>2</sup> The pen name of Yu Yöng-mo 柳永模 is Dasök 多夕, which literally means "so many nights." This name symbolically shows his Daoist inclination (namely, night rather than day, emptiness rather than substance, non-being rather than being, etc.). The most important primary source for the study of Dasök's thought is the photocopies of his diaries which he wrote from 1956 to 1975, but they are extremely challenging even for Korean scholars to comprehend due to his recondite writing style and innovative usage of Korean language: Yu Yöng-mo, *Dasök-ilji* 多夕日誌 [The Diaries of Dasök], 4 vols, Seoul: Hongikje, 1990. Fortunately, his faithful student Kim Hüng-ho published their complete commentaries that become a crucial aid for the study of Dasök's thought: Kim Hüng-ho, *Dasök-ilji Gongbu* 다석일지공부 [The Study of Dasök's Diaries], 7 vols, Seoul: Sol, 2001. Another important primary resource is collections of shorthand records of his lectures: Yu Yöng-mo, *Dasök-kangüi* 다석강의 [Lectures of Dasök], ed. Society for Dasök Studies, Seoul: Hyönamsa, 2006.

<sup>3</sup> See Ham Sök Hön, *Queen of Suffering: A Spiritual History of Korea*, trans. E. Sang Yu, London: Friends World Committee for Consultation, 1985. *Minjung* in Korean means the oppressed people. *Minjung* theology argued for the preferential option to the *minjung* and that they are real, authentic subjects of history in the reign of God and so of theology. For an introduction to *minjung* theology, see Kim Yong-Bock ed, *Minjung Theology: People as the Subjects of History*, Singapore: Commission on Theological Concern, Christian Conference of Asia, 1981.

<sup>4</sup> Notably, this article may also be read alongside Heup Young Kim, "Dasök Yu Yöng-Mo's Korean Trans-Cosmic and Trans-Religious Spirituality: A Translation and Commentary on "Spiritual Hiking," *Interreligious Relations* 26 (2021).

<sup>5</sup> With Christianity, his life and theological thoughts can be divided into four periods. In the first period (1905-1913), receiving new Western-style education, he faithfully studied, taught, and maintained a conventional form of Christianity. In the second period (1914-1939), after the tragic experience of his younger brother's death, he departed from the Protestant faith and explored in depth the East Asian philosophy of life to reach what he called "living day by day" (하루살이 *halu-sali*). In the third period (1939-1943), while focusing on the spirituality of the night and breathing (숨쉴 *sum-swim*), he developed the thought of *kaon-tchikki* (가온찍기 [see note 18]) and the theology of filial piety. In the fourth period (1943-1981), after the spiritual experience in the unity of heaven, earth, and humanity, he developed his mature religious thought, an attempt he summarized as "put the bone marrow of Western civilization into the bones of Eastern civilization (동양문명의 뼈에 서양 문명의 골수를 넣는다)." See Pak Chae-sun, *Dasök Yöng-mo: tongso-sasang-ül aurün ch'angjojök saengmyöng ch'örhakcha* [The Creative Philosopher of Life who integrated the Eastern and the Western Thoughts], Seoul: Hyönamsa, 2008, 40-83.

Kim Chae-jun (1901-1987, Ecumenical Presbyterian), and Chöng Kyöng-ok (1903-1945, Liberal Methodist).<sup>6</sup> Dasök is unfortunately excluded from this history. Pak Hyöng-lyong founded the conservative, dogmatic school (presently, Chongshin University), loyal to Neo-Calvinism; Kim Chae-jun established a progressive theological school with active social participation, which later developed *minjung* theology (Hanshin University); while Chöng Kyöng-ok initiated the liberal theological school which later promoted Korean theologies of indigenisation (Methodist Theological University).<sup>7</sup> However, all of them obtained their theological education from American seminaries.<sup>8</sup> Hence, their primary tasks were to transmit what they had learnt in the United States back to Korea and to translate them to the Korean context. Therefore, the book demonstrated that the veins of Korean Christian theology are in fact merely Western (and particularly North American) theologies. Hence, I argue that genuine native Korean theologians like Dasök must be included when talking about the development of Christianity in Korea as they offer authentic indigenous resources to formulate, what may be termed, *bona fide* Korean theologies.<sup>9</sup>

Indeed, Dasök was a precursor to intertextual interpretation, multifaith hermeneutics, and comparative theology for the global age.<sup>10</sup> Deeply embedded in East Asian scriptures, he developed an intriguing interpretation of Christianity in the light of East Asian thought. Put simply, he read the Christian Bible alongside indigenous resources such as Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist scriptures. He made an interesting suggestion to “regard all the scriptures of East Asian religions as the Old Testament.”<sup>11</sup> However, whether Dasök was a religious pluralist is still debatable. Theologians and scholars interested in Dasök hold three different positions on this subject. The first position regards Dasök as a pioneer of “religious pluralism” in Korea. Most of the members of the Dasök Society (Dasök Hak’ hoe), a leading academic association of research on Dasök’s teachings, support this position.<sup>12</sup> Those associated with the second position are largely Dasök’s followers who are inclined to believe that he founded a new Korean-style religion beyond Christianity in Korea’s pluralistic religious environment. The leader of this group is Park Yöng-ho, who served and followed Dasök as a student

<sup>6</sup> See Yu Tong-sik, *Han’guk Shinhag üi Kwangmaek: Han’guk Shinhak Sasangsa Sösoi*, Seoul: Chönmangsa 1982.

<sup>7</sup> Established in 1901 by North American Presbyterian missionaries, Chongshin University has deep historical ties to conservative, evangelical Presbyterianism and belongs to the Presbyterian Church in Korea (PCK). By the influence of Pak’s fundamentalism, it provoked schisms among Korean Presbyterian Churches, because of the issues of Biblical interpretation and ecumenism (the World Council of Churches). Established in 1939 during the schism, Hanshin University, affiliated with the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PCROK), became one of the most progressive Protestant churches in Korea. Meanwhile, Methodist Theological University is the first and main Methodist Seminary in Korea, first established in 1907 by North American Methodist missionaries.

<sup>8</sup> Pak, Princeton Theological Seminary and The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary; Kim, also Princeton Theological Seminary; Chöng, Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary.

<sup>9</sup> See Heup Young Kim, “Han’guk Chojikshinhak 50nyön: Kanmunhwajök Koch’al” [50 years of Korean Systematic Theology: a Cross-Cultural Approach] in *Sinhak Yön’gu 50 Yön* [50 Years of Theological Studies], ed. Ihwa Yöja Taehakkyo Han’guk Munhwa Yön’guwön, Seoul: Hyeon, 2003, 139-88; also Heup Young Kim, *Doüi Sinhak II* [Theology of Dao II], Seoul: Tongyön, 2013, 93-144.

<sup>10</sup> Dasök said, “After Confucianism, Buddhism, and Christianity illuminate each other, they also know themselves better” (이렇게 유교, 불교, 기독교를 서로 비추어 보아야 서로서로가 뭔가 좀 알 수 있게 된다), in Yu Yöng-mo, *Dasök-örök* 多夕語錄 [the Analects of Dasök]: *Ssial-üi-maeari*, ed. Park Young-ho, Seoul: Hongikje, 1993, 365. Most English translations of Dasök’s original texts in this article are my own. I appreciate the assistance of Rev. David Sang-Jun Kim for translation.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 82. Dasök partially supports the theory of preparation and fulfillment; he regarded Christianity as a New Testament that has completed the truth revealed in Asian religious scriptures, so to speak, East Asian Old Testaments. His cross-cultural Asian hermeneutics would be summarised in the following statement: “Putting the bone marrow of Western civilisation and culture into the backbones of Eastern civilisation and culture” (서양 문명과 문화의 골수를 동쪽의 문명과 문화의 척추에다 집어넣을 수 있다 [可西文髓東文骨]). See Yu, *Dasök-kangüi*, 310-12; Kim Hüng-ho, *Dasök-ilji Gongbu* 2:176). For the fulfillment theory, see Paul Hedges, *Preparation and Fulfillment: A History and Study of Fulfillment Theology in Modern British Thought in the Indian Context*, Bern: Peter Lang, 2001.

<sup>12</sup> The representative figures and their significant works for the first position are: Chöng-yang-mo, *Nanün Dasök-ül Ilöhke Bonta* [I see Dasök in This Way], Seoul: Ture, 2009; Shim Il-söp, *Han’guk T’och’ak’wa Shinhak Hyöngsöngsa Non’gu* [A Study on the Formation History of Korean Theology of Indigenisation], Seoul: Kuk’akcharyowön, 1995; Yi Chöng-pae, *Yu Yöngmo-üi Kwil-shinhak* [Yu Yöng-mo’s Theology of Returning to the Oneness], Seoul: Miralbuksü, 2020. In English: Youn Jeong-Hyun, “The Existent Existing God: An East Asian Perspective with Specific Reference to the thought of Ryu Young-mo,” Th.D. dissertation, University of Birmingham, Birmingham, United Kingdom, 2002; Yi Ki-sang, “Holiness and Spirituality: How to Communicate with God in the Age of Globalisation” in *Word and Spirit: Renewing Christology and Pneumatology*, eds. Anselm K. Min and Christoph Schwöbel, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2014, 85-112.

since his youth and became his only surviving disciple.<sup>13</sup> Meanwhile, the third position views Dasök as a religious and theological thinker who attempted to articulate and contextualise Jesus' teachings to the Korean context. Kim Hüng-ho (1919-2012), a favorite disciple of Dasök during his lifetime, represents this third group.<sup>14</sup>

However, the first position, viewing him as a religious pluralist arguably construes him out of his own context by operating under the Western Christian missionary theological framework. It commits a fallacy of categorical imposition. Before the arrival of Christianity in Korea, the country had a long history of many different religions coexisting, including Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism, and Shamanism. Religious pluralism is an alternative position that Western missionaries, theologians, and scholars, who previously had little or no encounter with other religious traditions other than Christianity, adopted when they discovered Asian religions and were shocked by their depth.<sup>15</sup> For Dasök, however, East Asian religions are not a matter of choice, but a historical and existential background already given to him. Secondly, although Park Yöng-ho is knowledgeable and has produced many books about Dasök, his essay-style writings make it hard to do proper academic research. In many parts of his prolific writings, it is hard to distinguish the real author: whether it was Park or his teacher, Dasök. Moreover, Park suggests that the core of Dasök's spirituality is to liberate the spirit from the bondage of body, dividing the spirit-self (얼나 *öl-na*) from the body-self (몸나 *mom-na*). Although most scholars who regard Dasök as a pluralist subscribe to this view, this is an unfortunate misunderstanding of Dasök; instead, Dasök strongly advocated for "the spirituality of body and breath", a theme which we will discuss in this paper.<sup>16</sup> Thirdly, Kim Hüng-ho also produced many works on Dasök, including a complete series of commentaries on the *Dasok-ilji* (*Dasok-ilji Gongbu*) which became a valuable resource for studying Dasök. However, his expositions seemingly overstress the Christian elements in Dasök's work.

So far, research on Dasök has usually addressed partial subjects,<sup>17</sup> and few researchers have systematically dealt with his religious thought as a whole. My volume *Kaon-tchikki: Dasök Yu Yöngmo-üi Global Han'guk Shinhak Sösöl* (*Introduction to The Global Korean Theology of Dasök Yu Yöngmo-üi*) is the only work which analyses his thought and theology systematically.<sup>18</sup> Meanwhile, recent works on Dasök, particularly those from outside Korea, are largely based on secondary materials rather than recondite primary sources. However, for a holistic comprehension of Dasök's spirituality and thought, it is essential to decipher *Dasök-ilji*, which consists of his imaginative poems in classical Chinese and Korean, with complex East Asian religious concepts. This task requires advanced knowledge of the Bible, Christian theology, and the scriptures and teachings of various East Asian religions including Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism, in addition to proficiencies in

<sup>13</sup> Some significant books (commentaries) of Park Yöng-ho are: *Ssial: Dasök Yu Yöng-mo-üi Saengae-wa Sasang* [Seeds: Life and Work of Dasök Yu Yöng-mo], Seoul: Hongikje, 1985; *Dasök-örok*, 1993; *Dasök Yu Yöng-mo-üi Myöngsanglok* [Meditations of Dasök Yu Yöng-mo], Seoul: Ture, 2000; *Dasök Yu Yöng-mo Ölok* [Analects of Dasök Yu Yöng-mo], Seoul: Ture, 2002; *Dasök Machimak Kangüi* [Last Lectures of Dasök], Seoul: Gyoyangin, 2010.

<sup>14</sup> For Kim Hüng-ho, see note 2. Also, O Chöng-suk, *Dasök Yu Yöng-mo-üi Hankukchöck Kitokkyo* [Korean Christianity according to Dasök Yu Yöng-mo], Seoul: Misüba, 2005.

<sup>15</sup> See Heup Young Kim, *A Theology of Dao*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2017, 10-11.

<sup>16</sup> See Heup Young Kim, *Kaon-tchikki: Dasök Yu Yöngmo-üi Global Han'guk Shinhak Sösöl* [Introduction to The Global Korean Theology of Dasök Yu Yöngmo], Seoul: Tongyön, 2013, 27, 42, 106-9, 216-19, 243-46, 397-400.

<sup>17</sup> For example, see Kim Hüng-ho and Yi Chöng-pae eds., *Tongyang Sasang-kwa Sinhak: Tongyang-chöck Kitokkyo I-hae* [East Asian Thoughts and Theology: East Asian Understanding of Christianity], Seoul: Sol, 2002.

<sup>18</sup> Heup Young Kim, *Kaon-tchikki*. *Kaon-tchikki* 가온찍기 is a core concept of Dasök's thought. *Kaon* 가온 is composed of three old Korean characters, "亓" (*kiök*), "·" (*arae a*) and "ㄴ" (*niün*). *Area a* ("·") in old Korean can be both a (亓) and o (ㄴ). (亓 + · = 가 *ka*; · + ㄴ = 온 *on*; therefore, 가온 *ka-on*). According to him, "亓" signifies the heaven, "ㄴ" the earth, and "·" selfhood (humanity). Also, *ka-on* refers to center (가운데 *kaunde*), which, he said, is equivalent to the Chinese character *chung* (中). Hence, *kaon* means the center in the unity between the cosmos and selfhood (my anthropo-cosmic center), my real and true place (both existential and ontological). *Tchikki* literally means "to put a dot (myself)." Thus, *kaon-tchikki* connotes locating selfhood in its real anthropo-cosmic center (ontological and existential), which is the goal of and the true starting point for religion and spirituality.

This book also elaborates twelve central themes of Dasök's theological thoughts; (1) human self as the subjectivity (제소리 *Che-so-li*), (2) God as the One (하나 *Hana*), (3) Christ as the The anthropocosmic Center (가온 *Ka-on*), (4) philosophy of "living day by day" (하루살이 *halu-sali*), (5) transcendental method of correlation (무름-부름-푸름 *murüm-purüm-p'urüm*), (6) theology of the body (몸 *mom*), (7) theology of the breath (숨 *sum*), (8) theology of the dao (theo-dao, 道), (9) paradoxical theology of being in non-being (없이 계심 *öpshi kyeshim*), (10) well-dying rather than well-being, (11) theology of Korean language (한글 *hangül*), and (12) "Our Nation as the Kingdom of God" (우리나라-하늘나라 *uli-nala hanül-nala*). See *ibid.*, 31-50.

Korean (*hangul*) and traditional Chinese, interspersed in his writings. Hence, it is incredibly challenging to translate his religious thought into English or into other foreign languages.

Dasök's primary interest did not lie in religious epistemology, such as elucidating a theology of religious pluralism, but the constructive hermeneutics of his faith in and through the plurality of Korean traditional and indigenous religions. Kim Hŭng-ho argued that Dasök was first and foremost a Christian, a serious follower of Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, Dasök differed from other Korean Christians subjected to Western-style Christianity because he freely employed indigenous scriptures to understand the Christian Bible better and more appropriately in his multi-religious context. For longer than a millennium, East Asian religious scriptures and teachings have profoundly influenced and shaped and are deeply embedded in Korean (and East Asian) modes of life and thinking, much as the Bible is embedded in a Western context. By reading the Bible in and through interreligious dialogue with these indigenous scriptures, Dasök could conceive his new faith in Jesus Christ more clearly, intelligibly, and practically.<sup>19</sup>

## Life and Spirituality in “Being a Christian”

In this section, I will examine Dasök's unique view of the Christian faith as a Korean who is heavily influenced by Confucianism. Dasök sees no separation between spirituality and ordinary daily life, namely, between the sacred and the secular, much like how Herbert Fingarette famously summarised that the Confucian life is doing the “secular as sacred.”<sup>20</sup> Simultaneously, as a Christian, Dasök regards spirituality as deeply embodied with prayer, which he does not distinguish from the totality of everyday life. He summarised his view of leading a Christian life and practicing Christian spirituality in a short Classical Chinese poem (漢詩 *hansi*) titled ‘Being a Christian’ (基督者 *kitokcha*). Dasök's pre-dawn prayer was proceeded by the recitation of verses from multiple scriptures of different religious traditions, and contemplation: a process he calls *naal* (나-알; knowing me). The prayer then concludes with him writing summary poems, a process he describes as *alla* (알-나; producing an egg).<sup>21</sup> It was through this process of *naal-alla* (나알-알나, self-awakening and egg-producing) that his literary gems of classical Chinese and Korean poems were born. I will proceed to unpack the meaning of each line of his poem, “Being A Christian,” below.

Prayer is graciously and deeply breathing the original vital force.  
The healthy beating of a pulse is the music of praise by the body [to God].  
Every meal is the summit of a virtuous rite.  
Wholehearted devotion with sincerity is the way to enter into the oracle.<sup>22</sup>

*Prayer is graciously and deeply breathing the original vital force*  
(祈禱陪敦元氣息 *kito paeton wŏn kisik*)

Aligned with the teachings of the Korean church, Dasök identified Christians as “the people who pray,” and prayer as the *breathing* of faith. For him, however, the reference to “taking a breath (숨 *sum*)” (氣息 *kisik*)

<sup>19</sup> For Dasök's Christology, see Heup Young Kim, “The Word made Flesh: A Korean Perspective on Ryu Young-mo's Christotao” in *One Gospel and Many Cultures: Case Studies and Reflections on Cross-Cultural Theology*, eds. Mercy Amba Oduyoye and Handrik M. Vroom, Amsterdam-New York, NY: Rodopi, 2003, 129-48. This paper pointed out seven characteristics of his Christological thought: Jesus as the Filial Son (효자 *hyoja*; Confucian), the Rice (밥 *bab*; sacramental), the Flower (aesthetic), the Seed (씨알 *ssial*; anthropological), the Spirit (pneumatological), the Dao (cosmic life; theodaian), and the Being in Non-Being (apophatic). For a systematic theological review of Dasök's religious thought, see Kim, *Kaon-tchikki*.

<sup>20</sup> Herbert Fingarette, *Confucius: The Secular as Sacred*, New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1972.

<sup>21</sup> In this insight, Dasök played with the Korean word “*a*” whose pronunciation denotes a double meaning, both “knowing” and “egg.”

<sup>22</sup> “基督者. 祈禱陪敦元氣息. 讚美伴奏健脈搏. 嘗義極致日正食. 禱誠克明夜歸託.” (Yu, *Dasök-ilji*, 1956.12.8).

does not merely end in symbolic and spiritual gesture but also includes the physical act of breathing. In the first line, he states that prayer is originally the act of breathing (元氣息 *wŏn kisik*). Besides, the Chinese characters in this phrase “*paeton*” (陪敦) denote to do so deeply, graciously, and respectfully. He explains:

As we are praying, we are taking a breath. When we do so, we breathe deeply, generously, and respectfully; the origin (元 *wŏn*) is breathing. Consequently, we should not say, ‘we offer our prayer.’ Instead, it is right to say, ‘we offer our breath.’... The act of prayer is the act of offering the very thing we breathe, which we originally have received from God.<sup>23</sup>

This line also lends itself to another stimulating interpretation: prayer is to breathe the original vital force (元氣 *wŏnki*) deeply, generously, and respectfully. In other words, prayer is to breathe the root force of the Universe (the cosmic breathing) or the living natural force (浩然之氣 *hoynchiki*) in communion with the Holy Spirit. This first line suggests the possible connection between Dasök and the breathing method of Korean Söndo (仙道), an inherited tradition of ascetic training in the mountains to become immortal (神仙 *sinsŏn*) through enhanced hypogastric breathing techniques (丹田呼吸 *tanchŏn hohŭp*), partially related to Korean Daoism.<sup>24</sup> Dasök’s discipline clearly resembles Söndo, Dasök wasted no single act of breathing. In every moment of breathing, Dasök immersed himself deeply in meditation, contemplating God and reflecting on the meaning of being a Christian. Similar to the Jesus Prayer in Eastern Orthodox Christianity, Dasök received God (하나님 *Hananim*) as he breathes in, and offers his faith and reverence as he breathes out.<sup>25</sup>

*The healthy beating of the pulse is the music of praise by the body*  
(讚美伴奏健脈搏 *ch’anmi panchu kŏn maekpak*)

For Dasök, hence, spirituality is not only psychological but also should be experienced in the most basic levels of human existence, biological and physical. Being alive means that one is breathing and that one’s heart is beating. As in the previous line where he likens breathing as a prayer to God, he writes, in the next line, that the healthy beating of the heart is an inner musical accompaniment of doxological praise (讚美伴奏 *ch’anmi panchu*) to God:

The pulse ought to be healthy. The healthy beating of the pulse (健脈搏 *kŏn maekpak*) is genuine praise. I am envious of no other things. For ‘keeping the body healthy’ (몸성히 *mom-sŏngŭhi*), ‘relieving the mind-heart’ (맘놓이 *mam-nohi*), and ‘cultivating the selfhood’ (바달퇴히 *pat’al-t’oehi*) are to keep ‘the healthy pulse-beating.’ What else would it be if this is not genuine praise [to God]?<sup>26</sup>

Dasök explained his thinking about a Christian who lives an authentic life in this way: “The pulse leaps with vigour accompanying the orchestra of praise. Such pulsation is the blood of Christians. Is this not the image of a Christian, praying deeply, graciously, and respectably by offering the original breath and praising with the accompaniment of our healthy pulse.”<sup>27</sup> The way of achieving a healthy pulse is none other than “keeping the body healthy” (*mom-sŏngŭhi*), “relieving the mind-heart” (*mam-nohi*), and “cultivating the selfhood” (*pat’al-t’oehi*).

<sup>23</sup> “우리가 기도를 하는데 숨을 쉬면 두텁게 후하게 그리고 정중하게 하는데 그 '원(元)'은 숨입니다. 그래서 기도드린다는 말은 안 됩니다. 호흡을 드린다는 말이 옳습니다... 우리가 숨쉬는 것, 곧 호흡하는 것을 바로 하느님에게서 받아서 하는 것이 기도입니다. 즉, 기도는 우리의 '원기식'을 두텁게 해서 말하는 것입니다.” (Yu, *Dasök-kangŭi*, 365-66).

<sup>24</sup> For example, see Ko Kyŏngmin, *Yŏngsaeng-hanŭn Kil* [The Way for Immortality], Seoul: Chongno Ch’ulp’ansa, 1974. Ko Kyŏngmin (b. 1936, pen name: Ch’ŏngsan 靑山) was the founder of Kuksöndo (國仙道), literally the National Söndo, which contributed to a revival of the Korean Söndo (especially, *tanchŏn hohŭp*) tradition. For Ko and Kuksöndo, see *ibid.*; also, Ko Kyŏngmin, *Kuksöndo*, 3 vols, Seoul: Kuksöndo Publications, 1993.

<sup>25</sup> See Kim, *Kaon-tchikki*, 43-44, 239-56.

<sup>26</sup> “맥박은 건강해야 합니다. 맥박이 건강하게 뛰는 똑똑똑 하는 소리는 참찬미입니다. 다른 것을 부러워하지 않습니다. '몸성히 맘놓이 바달퇴히'로 나가는 것이 '건맥박'으로 나가는 것입니다. 이것이 찬미가 아니고 무엇이겠습니까?” (Yu, *Dasök-kangŭi*, 366).

<sup>27</sup> “맥박이 팔딱팔딱 찬미하며 반주합니다. 이렇게 뛰는 것이 그리스도인의 피입니다. 기도는 배돈하고 '원기식'을 드리며,

This thought is not far away from traditional Christian spirituality. St. Paul in *Romans* had encouraged us to present our bodies “as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God” and defined it as “spiritual worship” (Rom 12:1 NRSV). However, from the influence of Hellenistic dualism, many Christian spiritual traditions tend to idolise spiritual and cerebral aspects while neglecting the physical body (몸 *mom*) and the material. The rise of “theologies of the body” and “spiritualities of the body” is a legitimate attempt to supplement this shortcoming. Thus, Dasök’s insight of “the healthy beating of the pulse as the music of praise by the body” along with “keeping the body healthy” is an in-depth resource for retrieving and developing a spiritual theology of the body that resonates with the current theological landscape.

*Every meal is the summit of a virtuous rite*  
(嘗義極致日正食 *sangüi kükch’i il chöngsik*)

In the third line, Dasök asserts that the attitude of reverence should also be applied when we gather around the table for a meal to sustain our health. Every meal should be regarded as the Christian Eucharist and the Confucian memorial rite (祭祀 *chesa*), essential for propriety (禮 *ye*) of filial piety. Dasök argues that worship does not occur only in the Church but also for every gathering to eat. He says:

There is one phrase I ask [you] to remember. That “every meal as the summit of a virtuous rite” is the memorial rite and Eucharist. “The summit of a virtuous rite” (嘗義極致 *sangüi kükch’i*) is to eat the meal with the spirit of love (愛食 *aesik*) and community (會食 *hoesik*). The Eucharist constitutes the origin of the memorial rite. However, there may yet lurk hypocrisy. We give thanks to God for what we are about to eat and drink; this ought not to be done only in the sanctuary. According to this very spirit, to live everyday life is “the summit of a virtuous rite”. We could reach this summit only when we give an earnest expression to the spirit of “commemorating the memory of origins and ancestors” (報本追遠 *popon ch’uwöñ*) at every gathering for a meal.<sup>28</sup>

*Wholehearted devotion with sincerity is the way to enter into the oracle*  
(禱誠克明夜歸託 *ch’esöng kükmyöng ya kwit ’ak*)

In the last line of this poem, Dasök argues that wholehearted devotion with sincerity (禱誠克明 *ch’esöng kükmyöng*) is the prerequisite to know and to be in communion with God. Wholehearted devotion (禱 *ch’e*) refers to praying to God in such a manner as one faithfully fulfils filial care (孝 *hyo*) towards the ancestors with sincerity and humility.<sup>29</sup> Sincerity (誠 *söng*) here means an ontological fulfilment of the truth (참 *cham*). He says:

Wholehearted devotion is the right way of prayer to approach God; evidently, it is substantiated by sincerity... The only way of fulfilling sincerity is to practise devotion. It should be done consistently and thoroughly (克 *kük*). To pray in this way is how we can know God. As we always practise sincere devotion, we can enter the divine oracle, which is the night (夜 *ya*).<sup>30</sup> [In this way], the Word can enter

찬미에는 '건뭍박'으로 반주하는 것이 그리스도인의 모습이 아닌가 합니다.” (Ibid.).

<sup>28</sup> “이 한마디만큼은 기억해주시요. '상의극치일정식'은 제사이고 성찬입니다. 애식과 회식의 정신으로 먹는 것이 상의극치인데, 성찬은 제사의 근본입니다. 그러나 여기에는 아직 가짜가 들어 있습니다. 먹고 마시는 것을 허락하여 주신 하느님께 감사를 드리는데, 예배당에서만 해서는 안 됩니다. 그 정신을 가지고 일상을 사는 것이 '상의극치'가 됩니다. 보본추원(報本追遠)의 정신을 매끼 식사 때마다 표시하여야 극치를 이룰 것입니다.” (Ibid., 329).

<sup>29</sup> Dasök continues to compare Christian spirituality to *chesa* (the memorial rite), which is the core ritual of Korean family tradition. In traditional Korean families, *chesa* refers to practising the propriety of filial piety for ancestors, a prime virtue of Confucianism. Dasök therefore argues that Jesus is the filial son who completed the Word of God (see Kim, “The Word made Flesh,” 132-34). For the extended family/ancestors as the core of Chinese and East Asian culture, society, and government, see Jordan Paper, *Chinese Religion and Familialism: The Basis of Chinese Culture, Society, and Government*, New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2019.

<sup>30</sup> Dasök views sunlight as a false light that hides far bigger cosmic realities in the darkness. Thus, he believes that truth exists rather in the night, which is the reason why he used the pen name which literally means “many nights” (多夕).

the “truth” always. In this way, when we leave this world, we can enter with dignity. We enter the eternal “Night.”<sup>31</sup>

Therefore, with this one line, Dasök suggests a perceptive East Asian definition of a theology of prayer. For prayer is an effort to enter into divine oracle (神託 *sint' ak*), to communicate with God, through sincere and thorough devotion (禱誠克明, *ch'esöng kükmyöng*).

### Three Basics for Spirituality

From the above poem, and in considering other works by Dasök, we can identify a central core of three key aspects within his spirituality. These come from, or are framed within, his Christian base, but are always infused within a Korean religious and contextual framework, which can also be seen as a grounding for them. They are: “keeping the body healthy” (몸성히 *mom-sönghi*); “relieving the mind-heart” (맘놓이 *mam-nohi*); and “cultivating the selfhood” (바달퇴히 *pat'al-t'oehi*).

#### i) Keeping the Body Healthy (몸성히 *mom-sönghi*)

To enter into the true life and spirituality of a Christian, first of all, Dasök emphasises that we need the body to keep “the healthy pulse” (建脈搏, *jianpaibo*). He expresses it in Korean as “*mom-sönghi*”. However, it does not imply an advocacy of self-centered eugenics; on the contrary, for him as a Confucian and a Christian who pursues the *dao* of benevolence (仁 *in*) and love (*agape*), its aim is altruistic.<sup>32</sup> He says: “If your body is healthy, you need to help those whose body is unhealthy.”<sup>33</sup>

#### ii) Relieving the Mind-Heart (맘놓이 *mam-nohi*)

Secondly, one ought to put down and relieve the mind-heart (맘 *mam*); that is to say, empty it.<sup>34</sup> Dasök refers to the putting-down of the mind-heart as *mam-nohi* (맘놓이) and the relieving of the mind-heart as *mam-bihi* (맘비히). *Mam-bihi* could be his East Asian way of expressing a Christian spirituality of self-emptying (*kenosis*; Phil 2:7). One ought to empty the mind-heart to be clean like a vacuum (眞空 *chin-kong*). He says: “We ought to empty our mind-heart. Once there is a vacuum, then everything surges to rush in.” We should fill the vacuum by rolling the elements of truth, such as purity, straightforwardness, and fidelity, that rush in

<sup>31</sup> “하느님에 대한 추원(追遠)을 옹계 하는 것이 체(禱)요, 이에 바로 들어가면 성(誠)입니다. 체성(禱誠)은 치성(致誠)입니다. 이 ‘체’를 밝혀야 ‘성’을 이룰 수 있습니다. 극은 늘 하자는 것입니다. 철저하게 ‘체성’을 하자는 것입니다. 이렇게 하여야 하느님을 알게 됩니다. 늘 ‘체성’을 밝히면 밤, 곧 신탁(神託)에 들어갑니다. 말씀이 늘 참에 들어갈 수 있습니다. 이래야 우리가 세상을 떠날 때 떳떳하게 들어 갈 수 있습니다. 영원한 밤에 들어갑니다.” (Yu, *Dasök-kangüi*, 367).

<sup>32</sup> The Chinese character of *in* 仁 (benevolence or co-humanity), the cardinal virtue of Confucianism, consists of two parts, meaning two (二 *i*) and human being (人 *in*), which entails the Confucian definition of ontological (original) humanity. Hence, the goal of self-cultivation, the primary project of Neo-Confucianism, is to achieve this original co-humanity or being-in-togetherness beginning from the concrete context to the universal extension, from self via family and society to the world (修身齊家治國平天下 *susin-cheka-ch'ikuk-p'yöngch'önha*). For benevolence and *agape*, see Heup Young Kim, “*Jen [Ren, In] and Agape: Toward a Confucian Christology*,” *Asia Journal of Theology* 8:2 (1994), 335-64.

<sup>33</sup> Yu, *Dasök-kangüi*, 56.

<sup>34</sup> In Korean, mind (*mam* 맘) and body (*mom* 몸) are not mutually exclusive; rather, they are inclusive as their characters are from the same origin (口+口+“.”). Since *mam* (*maüm* 마음 or 心 *sim*) connotes a psycho-somatic unity between the mind and the body, it is translated as the mind-heart in this article. The “putting-down” of the mind-heart refers to the process of freeing the mind-heart from the excessive occupation of the brain by moving concentration down from the top (brain) to the bottom of the body. It is regarded as a preparatory process of East Asian mind-heart cultivation.

(참말기 *ch'aem-mal-ki*). This process of rolling (말기 *mal-ki*)<sup>35</sup> eventually leads to the body achieving a state of cleanliness (맑기 *malk-ki*).<sup>36</sup> He explains: “Do not merely fill up with the rolling. When the body is empty in the state of wholeness (*mom-söng*hi), it will become clean and eternally ever cleaner. I do not mean in this life, but in the afterlife, beyond death.”<sup>37</sup>

iii) *Cultivating the Selfhood* (바탈퇴히 *pat'al-t'oehi*)

Finally, the two stages of keeping and harmonising the healthy body (*mom-söng*hi) and relieving and emptying the mind-heart (*mam-nohi*) have the trajectory towards the process of cultivating and sanctifying the selfhood (*pat'al-t'oehi*). *Pat'al* (바탈) means the foundation of a person and one's individuality; that is, the selfhood. *T'oehi* (퇴히) is originally written with the consonant 't' *iüt'* (“ㅌ”) and the vowel “*arae a*” (“ㅏ”). This Korean character simultaneously takes on the double meaning of “consuming by fire” (燃 *yön*) and “boarding to ride” (乘 *süng*).<sup>38</sup> As such, this refers to the perpetual process of consuming one's bad habits and renewing selfhood; in terms of Confucianism and Christian theology, the process of self-cultivation and sanctification, respectively. As he said: “There is only 'I.' There is no other way but to consume selfhood with fire so that I am born again and again with new selfhood and ultimately take it off entirely. Our life is to exert ourselves in bringing this new 'I' to be born again by the will of God persistently.”<sup>39</sup>

“Cultivating the selfhood” (*pat'al-t'oehi*) means to consume (然 *yön*) the selfhood by itself (自 *cha*). If the two Chinese characters are combined, it becomes “*cha-yön*” (自然, nature).<sup>40</sup> Moreover, Dasök interpreted that its first character (自) in Classical Chinese is a hieroglyphic representation of “the inside of a nose.”<sup>41</sup> Therefore, it means that “the nose is on fire;” that is to say, to breathe through the nose: “In our East Asian word, “*cha-yön*” means to consume with fire... Breathing means that the fire is entering [our noses]. Thus, it refers to the inside of the nose that is consumed by fire.”<sup>42</sup> This passage illustrates a clear correlation between Dasök and Korean Söndo (仙道) again.

There is a similarity between Dasök and Ko Kyöngmin in method and theory that regards emptiness as the way to reach the truth (空眞 *kong-chin*).<sup>43</sup> First of all, the process of *mom-söng*hi that aims at reaching the “true body” (참몸 *ch'am-mom*) corresponds to “adjusting the body” (調身 *cho-sin*) in Kuksöndo, which is a process of harmonising the healthy body in order to embody the right body (正體 *chöng-ch'e*) or the true body (眞體 *chin-ch'e*). Secondly, *mam-nohi*, which aims at the true mind-heart (참맘 *ch'am-mam*), is similar to “adjusting the mind-heart” (調心 *cho-sim*) in Kuksöndo, which makes the mind-heart peaceful in order to realise the right mind-heart (正心 *chöng-sim*) and the true mind-heart (眞心 *chin-sim*), the properly rectified mind-heart.

<sup>35</sup> The expression of “rolling” here indicates that his method resonates with that of hypogastric breathing (丹田呼吸 *tanchön-hohüp*) which emphasises the rolling of the vital forces (*ki* 氣) in the process of breathing. One can build up the true *ki* (眞氣 *chin-ki*) after fully emptying the mind-heart (空眞 *kongchin*).

<sup>36</sup> Here, Dasök shows an example of his unique play on Korean words (*hangül-ori* 한글놀이), based on the phonic and scriptural relatedness between *mal-ki* 말기 and *malk-ki* 맑기 (ㄹ+ㅏ becomes ㄹㅏ).

<sup>37</sup> “말기'만 채우지 말고 몸성히 비어 있으면 영원히 맑고 맑아집니다. 이승에서가 아니라 죽음을 넘어 저승에서 그러하다는 말입니다.” (Yu, *Dasök-kangüi*, 55).

<sup>38</sup> See Yu, *Dasök-kangüi*, 174-76.

<sup>39</sup> “나'밖에 없습니다. 단지 내 바탈을 태워서 자꾸 새 바탈의 나를 낳는것 밖에 없습니다. 종단에는 아주 벗어버리는 것입니다. 새로운 '나'를 하느님 뜻대로 자꾸 낳아가도록 노력하는 것이 우리 인생입니다.” (Ibid., 206). This part shows that he is synthesising Confucian self-cultivation with Christian sanctification. The subject of Confucian cultivation is my selfhood, the body and the mind-heart (*süng*), and it also connotes the Christian process of regeneration by the burning fire of the Holy Spirit (*yön*).

<sup>40</sup> Although *cha-yön* also means “self-doing” in English, here, he interprets that its hieroglyphics have the following connotations.

<sup>41</sup> Dasök was an excellent scholar in Korean (*Hangül*) and well-versed in classical Chinese writings. While dealing with Confucian classics and Buddhist scriptures, he used Chinese characters freely and expressed his thoughts in Chinese poems (as seen before). Particularly, his interest devoted much effort to developing *Hangül* into a polysemous language like Chinese.

<sup>42</sup> “우리 동양 말로 ‘자연’은 불탄다는 말입니다... 우리가 숨 쉬는 것은 불 타 들어가는 것입니다. 그래서 코 속이 불탄다는 말입니다.” (Yu, *Dasök-kangüi*, 377).

<sup>43</sup> Ko Kyöngmin, *Kuksöndo I*, Seoul: Kuksöndo Publications. 1993, iv.

Finally, *pat'al-t'oehi* that seeks to be sanctified into the true selfhood correlates to “adjusting the breath” (調息 *cho-sik*) in Kuksöndo, which regulates the breathing evenly so that the right or the true breath (참숨 *ch'am-sum*; 正息 *chöng-sik*, 眞息 *chin-sik*) is fulfilled. Thus, Dasök's three basics of spirituality, *mom-sönghi*, *mam-nohi*, and *pat'al-t'oehi*, are comparable to the three fundamentals of Kuksöndo training: “adjusting the body” (調身 *cho-sin*), “adjusting the mind-heart” (調心 *cho-sim*), and “adjusting the breath” (調息 *cho-sik*), respectively.<sup>44</sup>

## Conclusion

Herein, I have not attempted to give a full account of Dasök's life, thinking, or spirituality, which would be the work of perhaps several monographs with considerable translation of originals needed. Rather, I have offered a contribution towards introducing Dasök to the English-speaking academic world, with a particular focus on how he relates to and contributes to thinking around questions of interreligious relations, dialogue, theology, and spirituality. These elements, while often considered distinct within the literature, are integral to the way that Dasök, in a Korean context, makes sense of his religious identity within a worldview where religious borders are envisaged differently. As such, it makes a contribution beyond that which already exists about how both religion, religious identity, and religious plurality are considered within an East Asian, or more specifically Korean context.<sup>45</sup> In particular, it also introduces an immensely creative and original thinker who has not only been neglected within the Korean literature, for reasons noted, but remains unknown beyond that context too. This paper opens up the possibility, by exploring both an original translation of his work and noting the distinctive Korean context, for an indigenous Korean voice to contribute to wider theorising of issues around religious pluralism, intercultural theology, constructive theology, comparative theology, and religious diversity more broadly.

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<sup>44</sup> Park Yöng-ho and other scholars tended to ignore that *Dasök-ilji*, essential resources, is primarily a meditation diary in which Dasök recorded the enlightenment he acquired from the rigorous practice of psycho-somatic, apophatic contemplation with these methods, not to mention Söndo asceticism. See note 13; also, Kim, *Kaon-tchikki*, 251-56. The principle and prayer in Kim, “Dasök Yu Yöng-Mo's Korean” will make this point more evident.

<sup>45</sup> See, for example, on rethinking religious borders in East Asia from a theoretical perspective, Paul Hedges, “Multiple Religious Belonging after Religion: Theorising Strategic Religious Participation in a Shared Religious Landscape as a Chinese Model,” *Open Theology* 3 (2017): 48-72, and for another Korean theologian's, Hyun Kyung Chung, “Seeking the Religious Roots of Pluralism,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 34.3 (1997): 399-401. See also, Heup Young Kim, “Multiple Religious Belonging as Hospitality: A Christian-Confucian Perspective,” in *Many Yet One? Multiple Religious Belonging*, eds. Peniel J. R, Rajkumar and Josepy P. Dayam, Geneva: World Council of Churches Publication, 2016, 75-88.

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