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**Korean Patriot and Tea Master: Hyodang Choi Beom-Sul (1904-1979)**

BROTHER ANTHONY OF TAIZE

**Childhood and Youth**

Choi Beom-Sul was born on the 26th day of the 5th lunar month of 1904 in Yulpo, Sacheon, South Gyeongsang Province. This village stands very near the temple of Dasol-sa, of which he was destined later to become the Juji (head monk); but when he was five, his family moved to So-ri in Seopo-myeon (now part of Sacheon-si) and there he began his studies in a traditional Confucian school. In 1910, after years of gradual encroachment, Japan finally annexed Korea. Although he was still only a child, Choi Beom-Sul rejected the Japanese yoke like so many of his compatriots. When he was only nine years old, he was expelled from Gaejin Primary School with several other pupils after playing a leading role in the boycott of a brutal Japanese teacher there.

That precocious act of autonomous choice was only a start. After completing his primary school studies at another school in 1915,he was so impressed by the Buddhist scriptures he heard being chanted during a visit to Dasol-sa that he received his parents’ permission and became a Buddhist monk at Dasol-sa early in 1916, enrolling in the monastic school at Haein-sa Temple the following year. He was still barely twelve years old when he made that decision! At Haein-sa he received consecration from the Venerable Im Hwan-gyeong. His original monastic name was Geumbong; he later adopted the name Hyodang to indicate his resolve to dedicate his life to making more widely known the teachings of the great Korean Buddhist thinker, the monk Wonhyo (617-686).

The third sign of his early maturity was an act that might have cost him his life. Although he was still only fifteen, when the Independence Movement was launched on March 1, 1919, Hyodang encouraged the student monks in Haein-sa to make thousands of copies of the Declaration of Independence that he had been sent. These they[page 108] distributed throughout the south-eastern regions of Korea. As a result he was arrested and so severely beaten that he could not walk, then transported in fetters to Jinju, So many other had been arrested that there was no room in the yard of the prosecutor’s office and since he was still very young he was set free and carried home. There he stayed for two months, being treated with traditional remedies that included drinking human excrement; the damage to the muscles of his back and shoulders as well as the sinews and bones of his legs meant that for the rest of his life he suffered pain whenever the seasons changed. In early July of 1919 he was able to return to school at Haein-sa, where he and the other student- monks were glad to exchange news on what had happened to them.

**The years in Japan: 1922 – 1933**

In 1922, after studying many of the major Buddhist sutras as well as the Indian logic known as Hetu-vidya, and having completed 100 days of prayer, he set off for Japan for further studies. In this he was following the example of many other young Korean intellectuals of the time, for whom Japan’s schools and universities offered a depth of learning both modern and traditional not to be found anywhere in Korea. In addition, the recent triumph of the Russian revolution meant that Tokyo offered many possibilities of learning more about the new political philosophy known as Socialism. For Hyodang, now eighteen, this departure marked a new beginning, and the years in Japan were to be full of many kinds of experiences, both painful and rewarding. These were the truly formative years that determined the course he followed for the rest of his life.

He and a fellow-monk arrived in Tokyo on the morning of June 6, 1922 and went to live with his nephew Choi Won-Hyeong, who was 3 years older and had already been studying in Tokyo for several years. It was this nephew who had sent a copy of the Independence Declaration to Hyodang at Haein-sa; he had also smuggled Manhae Han Yong-Un’s Letter on Korean Independence (조선동립 서) out of Seodaemun Prison a couple of years later. He continued to be active in the Independence Movement and died a martyr’s death in prison in Daejeon only a few months before Liberation in 1945. He is buried in Daejeon National Cemetery, not far from Hyodang.

In Tokyo, Hyodang began to work delivering newspapers over a[page 109] wide area. Hearing one day of a Korean living on his route, he visited him and so met the noted anarchist Bak Yeol (1902-1974), who was living there with his remarkable, equally celebrated Japanese wife, Kaneko Fumiko. After that, he would often visit and discuss with them. It ought to be noted that the Korean and Japanese “anarchists” of this period often did not adopt the very negative ideas about society and its organization generally associated with the anarchists of the West. In particular, many Korean anarchists were idealists eager to participate in the formation of a government overseas fighting for an independent Korea. Japanese anarchists, too, were often ardent advocates of positive human rights, in particular the rights of women who, in traditional Japanese society, had no identity. Frank Hoffmann writes:

 In the 1920s the anarchists were one of the very important groups. They were mostly people who had been shocked by the brutality with which Lenin had the Kronstadt sailors killed when he brought himself to power, and who were disappointed by the American style of democracy after Wilson’s 14-points at the end of WWI were not applied to Korea. So, during most of the 1920s the anarchists were one of three major parties, with activities going on in Korea (center in Taegu), Japan, China, and even in Paris and Berlin. Later, some of the former anarchists were involved in South Korean politics till the early 60s. Yu Rim (elected Speaker of the Korean National Assembly) and Jeong Hwa-am are good examples. Half of those in Chinese exile went back to North Korea, some long after the Korean War.

Bak Yeol later introduced Hyodang to a group of nationalistic Koreans who were making and selling taffy in order to support high- school students all over Korea. Hyodang soon joined them as a taffy-seller, but also did many other lowly jobs as he learned more about Japan and the Japanese. Also at this time he happened to visit a small temple, Fusenji (普泉寺), where he met a Japanese monk, Sakato Chikai (坂戶智海), who welcomed him kindly, introduced him to the Tientai teachings, and in later times helped him when he was in difficulty.

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Hyodang was admitted to the 3rd year class of Rissho Middle School, and also became involved in the struggles of the many poor Koreans living and working in the surrounding industrial area. Bak Ryeol had founded the Black Current Society (Kokutokai) in 1920 but in 1922 that had split, giving rise to the Black Fellowship Association (Kokuyukai), while the first anarchist labour union among Koreans in Japan, the Black Labour Association (Kokurokai), was established in August 1923 by the same group.

Soon Hyodang (who was known at this time as Choi Yeong-Hwan) became a member of a group of Koreans established in May 1923 by Bak Ryeol, called the Futeisha (不逞鮮人社 Society of Rebels), who published two numbers of a review and generally encouraged a resistant, disrespectful attitude toward the Japanese authorities. Bak Yeol and his anarchist companions in the Futeisha developed a plan to detonate a bomb during the wedding of the Japanese Crown Prince (later the Emperor Hirohito) planned for September. Hyodang received some money from Bak Ryeol and, although utterly innocent of the ways of the world, went across to Shanghai and with help from a young sailor brought back explosives. Finally, some details about the plot leaked out and most of the conspirators were arrested by the Japanese police on September 3, just after the terrible Kanto earthquake of September 1, 1923. News of the planned assassination, declared an act of nigh treason, made a great impression in Japan and in Korea, the case having been amplified by the Japanese authorities as part of their attempt to justify a violent crackdown against the Korean population in general and especially the anarchists, who had begun to cause trouble in the factories. They were accused of having “caused” the earthquake and thousands of Koreans were massacred by frenzied crowds in the following days.

Bak Yeol and Kaneko Fumiko were sentenced to death for high treason, but after international protests this was commuted to life in prison. Bak Yeol was only set free in 1945, after the Japanese surrender. His companion wrote her memoirs (published in English as The Prison Memoirs of a Japanese Woman) and then died in 1926, hanging herself as a political gesture asserting her right to dispose of her own life (see: Helene Bowen Raddeker). Bak Yeol is reported to have died in North Korea on January 18, 1974, having been taken there during the war after[page 111] returning to South Korea in April 1949. Hyodang’s role in obtaining the explosives remained completely unknown at the time; only Bak Yeol seems to have known of it, and he claimed to have received the explosives from Manchuria, in order to deflect suspicion from Hyodang. The facts of the matter were only revealed much later, after Liberation by Hyodang himself (in a series of articles “Cheongchuneun areumdaweora” in the Gukje Sinbo starting January 26, 1975).

At the time of the great earthquake, on September 1, 1923, Hyodang had been out delivering newspapers, and escaped harm. Teams of Japanese were soon out challenging those they suspected of being Koreans, seeing if they could pronounce correctly “Rarirurero,” which for most Koreans was impossible with its repeated “r” sounds. Those caught were then lynched, in a strange kind of mass hysteria that considered the presence of foreigners to have been the cause of the disaster. Hyodang escaped detection and was able to hide in Fusenji temple until October 5, when the police came and took him to Shibuya Police Station. Legally, a person could not be detained for more than 29 days, but in his case he was regularly re-arrested the moment he was released and he effectively spent the next 3 years in prison without ever being charged.

In March 1927 he was admitted to the preparatory courses in the Buddhist Studies Department of Taisho University; in 1930 he moved to the main course of studies and graduated in March 1933. During his years in Japan, he was not only active in the Korean resistance movement, especially through his involvement with the anarchist groups, he also supported himself by doing a great variety of often very humble, dirty and menial jobs, which brought him in close touch with many different aspects of Japanese society, and in particular gave him a profound insight into the realities of the working classes.

At the same time, he studied intensively, mastering Sanskrit and Pali, learning about Buddhist traditions in different countries, early Buddhism, and the development of the basic Buddhist sects, as well as taking courses in sociology, economics, Buddhist art, etc- He was especially interested in the writings of the Indian founders of Mahayana Buddhism, Nagarjuna, Asanga, Dinnaga and Vasubandhu. His graduation thesis was about “Hinayana and the teachings of Vasubandhu” and it received high praise from the five professors who examined it. All the [page 112] while, he continued to nourish a special interest in Wonhyo, whose teachings he had first read about in Haein-sa when he was only 16.

The years when he was studying in Japan were a time when many world-famous figures came to lecture there; Hyodang was thus able to attend a week-long course of lectures by Albert Einstein on the Theory of Relativity, and listen to Tagore reading his poems in Bengali and English, which impressed him deeply. Another fateful meeting was with Anagarika Dharmapala (1864 - 1933), the Sri Lankan who devoted his life to the restoration of the great Buddhist temple of Bodh Gay a in northern India. He was traveling round the world bringing minute particles of relics (sari) of the Buddha to every country. For Korea, he entrusted three fragments to Hyodang; these were later enshrined in a special pagoda at Beomeo-sa Temple in Busan. But equally significant were lectures about current social issues he heard given by great Japanese scholars who were socialists, anarchists, and activists. Perhaps the most impressive among these were the speeches given by the radical anarchist Osugi Sakae (1885- 1923), which greatly inspired Hyodang in his social vision. Yet he never disregarded the vision comprising his identity as a Buddhist monk, nourished by Zen meditation practice.

In the meanwhile, he had been appointed head monk of Dasol-sa in July 1928, despite his youth, so was obliged to spend his summer and winter vacations in Korea; at the same time he was active in the ongoing Independence Movement among Buddhists. In 1932 he joined the Mandang Squad (卍當결사) that had been founded in 1930 under the inspiration of Manhae by noted Buddhist Korean independence fighters. He also published a review with other Buddhists studying in Japan, Genmgangjeo (金剛杵), which was destined to help rekindle the vitality of the Buddhist community in Korea.

**Service in Korean Buddhism under Japanese rule**

Hyodang had barely graduated in 1933 when he received news that he had been chosen as chairman of the central executive committee of the Buddhist Youth League so he was obliged to travel quickly to Seoul and that marked the end of his years in Japan. Henceforth, Korea was to be the scene for his activities. The main inspiration for the Buddhist Youth League, as for so much of what happened in the anti-Japanese Buddhist[page 113] circles around Hyodang, was provided by Manhae Han Yong-Un (1879 - 1944), the great Buddhist monk, leader of the Independence Movement and poet. It is a pity that no record seems to indicate just when Manhae and Hyodang met for the first time.

Manhae is above all famed as the leader of the 33 signatories of the March 1 1919 Independence Declaration. For that he was imprisoned, of course. In October 1925, he finished his one collection of poems, titled Nimui-chimmak (Lover’s silence). In 1933, he married Yu Suk-won, and from then on mainly lived in a house known as Simujang in Seongbuk-dong, Seoul, where he composed a series of long novels that were serialized in the *Chosun Ilbo*.

**Hyodang’s activities in the 1930s**

This was a difficult time for Korean Buddhism, with conflicts arising among the monks who were teaching at the new Buddhist School, and tensions about the financial support to be provided by temples for a centralized administration. At the same time, Japanese supervision and control was growing increasingly strong and restrictive. Manhae seems to have hoped that Hyodang might be able to find solutions to these problems and that seems to be part of the reason why he was selected. Since some of Hyodang’s most trusted mends and colleagues had recently been forced out of the central Buddhist administration, he invited them to move, together with their families, down to Dasol-sa, where he would provide housing and food, although it was hardly a large or wealthy temple. Among them was the very talented scholar Gim Beom-bu and his brother, the future novelist Gim Dong-ri. Already it was Dasol-sa that was covering the living expenses of Manhae. In addition, they were in constant confrontation with monks who actively supported the Japanese.

Meanwhile, members of the Seoul Young Women’s League had been demanding the establishment of an educational facility for Buddhist girls. In June 1933, Hyodang established Myeongseong School for Girls in Seoul and he was installed as its first principal for 2 years. The school grew rapidly, counting 300 students by the start or its third year. This school still exists, the only middle and high school for girls directly run by the main Buddhist organization.

The arrival of a whole series of known opponents of Japanese [page 114] rule at Dasol-sa meant that the temple was under constant police supervision. In April 1933, Hyodang proposed that the Mandang Squad should be dissolved, since it had been infiltrated by pro-Japanese elements. Some members dissented, but finally it was dissolved while its former members remained active in the Buddhist Youth League. The large number of intellectuals gathered at Dasol-sa needed to be justified, and the suspicions of the authorities set to rest, so in 1936 Hyodang set up a Buddhist Academy there, with Gim Beom-bu, Gim Beop-rin and Gang Go-Bong as lecturers.

In March 1934 he had already established Gwangmyeong Institute at Wonjeon, a few miles from Dasol-sa, to provide primary education for the children of the local farmers. Gim Dong-ri, the younger brother of Gim Beom-bu worked as a teacher there for a time, and his experiences provided the material for some of his most famous novels, written in later years. Soon after this, Hyodang was arrested and remained in custody for some 8 months.

Among those frequenting Dasol-sa in those years were some of Korea’s first Communists, Bak Rak-Jong, Jeong Hui-Yeong, Ha Pil-won; in fact the “Goryeo Communist Party Manifesto” was composed there. Later, in 1935, when those founding Communists were involved in incidents at Daejeon and Imsil, Hyodang was detained for 3 months at Imsil Police Station. Ha Pil-Won in particular lived for a number of years at Dasol-sa with his Russian mistress Agnya. With many other significant figures in the Independence Movement coining and going, the temple played a major role in the anti-Japanese movements of those years, especially in the south-eastern regions.

Meanwhile, in addition to his role at Dasol-sa, Hyodang had become administrative head (법무) of Haein-sa at the start of 1934, at the request of the head monk. There, Hyodang supervised the tenth complete printing of the Tripitaka Koreana from the temple’s 80,000 printing- blocks. In addition, for the first time he examined and printed out the texts contained on the blocks preserved in the smaller western and eastern chambers of the Haeinsa library, that no one had ever bothered with, and this led to the discovery of hitherto unknown works by Wonhyo, among other treasures, with some of the blocks being of great antiquity.

[page 115] **Hyodang’s relations with Japanese Buddhism**

1938 saw many young Koreans being drafted to fight for Japan in the Japano-Chinese war, and an increased crackdown on every kind of dissent. Dasol-sa, with its group of known dissidents, was particularly scrutinized. In August, several members of the group residing there were incarcerated at Jinju Police Station and in October, Hyodang and other leading monks were incarcerated at the Gyeongi Province Police Station, having been arrested in Seoul.

One incident that has sometimes been misrepresented as a sign of Hyodang’s alleged pro-Japanese activities happened soon after that. Perhaps because he felt a need to establish his credentials as a devout Buddhist in the eyes of an increasingly suspicious civil administration, in September 1939 he invited 48 scholar-monks of the Japanese Tientai sect for ceremonies in the Ha-an-geo at Dasol-sa, where Master Gim Beom-bu lectured for 7 days on esoteric thought (현리사상). Outwardly, it seemed to be a time of religious retreat and sharing but we may think that inwardly Hyodang saw this as a chance to affirm the superiority of the Korean Buddhist tradition over the Japanese by direct confrontation. That is surely a far more probable interpretation than any claim that Hyodang had suddenly become a turncoat siding with the Japanese attempts to corrupt Korean Buddhism by introducing Japanese influences. During the ceremonies, some of the greatest singers of Korean traditional Buddhist chant, “Beompae,” were present.

The long-lasting, close relationship of Hyodang with Manhae Han Yong-Un was marked by a visit the latter made to him and the other former Mandang members living at Dasol-sa in 1939,to celebrate his 61st birthday (a major celebration in Korean tradition), that fell on the 12th day of the 7th lunar month that year; this visit was made just a few days after the main celebration organized in Seoul.

There is a fascinating vignette in a memory of his visit that Hyodang transmitted: in the evening, after the celebrations were over, the two men sat together in Hyodang’s room, and composed poems in Chinese characters until late at night, as Korean scholars and monks had always done. A page of their compositions written that night has survived. This visit gives us a very clear indication that, so far as Manhae was concerned, Hyodang was as strongly involved in the independence [page 116] struggle as ever, and was in no sense compromised with the Japanese.

The following year, in April 1940, Hyodang returned the visit of the Japanese monks, and was invited to give a special lecture at the conference hall of Kanon Temple in Asakusa, Tokyo. Some 5,000 people attended and heard Hyodang explain how the temple enshrined a statue originally made by Korean craftsmen; he then went on to remind them that throughout history, many kingdoms, particularly Chinese, had attempted to crush Korea, and all had failed and been crushed in turn while Korean culture and language had survived. He compared that to Israel’s providential survival in Old Testament times. Now Japan might, he feared, be making the same mistake as the enemies of ancient Israel and Korea. This lecture, too, serves as a manifest sign that Hyodang was in no way prepared to acknowledge Japanese claims of superiority, and rather saw his visit as part of an effort on behalf of Korean Buddhism and Korean national culture, stressing its importance for Japanese Buddhism.

After this, Hyodang visited a number of major Japanese temples before making the classic, immensely grueling 3-week pilgrimage of Hiezan (Mount Hiei) outside Kyoto, that all great monks are supposed to complete (if they cannot make the full 1000-day pilgrimage, which usually takes about 7 years). The courageous way in which Hyodang completed the pilgrimage despite the physical difficulties he encountered impressed the Japanese monks. The first Buddhist temple on Hiezan was built by the founder of the Tientai (Tendai) Buddhist school in Japan, Saicho, who is also sometimes credited with introducing tea to Japan, when he returned from a visit to China in 805. After the rigors of the mountain, Hyodang visited some of the main temples in Kyoto, and also some of the famous tea-plantations there.

There is no sign in all this that his fierce opposition to Japan in its attempt to deprive Korea of its national, cultural identity had in any way weakened. One of the most important keys to any defensive strategy is often formulated as the simple command, “Know your enemy.” Hyodang knew Japan, his nation’s enemy, intimately; that does not mean that he has surrendered to it in any way, on the contrary. In 1941 Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7 marked the beginning of the Pacific Wan Hyodang’s numerous spells under arrest in the wartime years also testify to the negative view of him held by the Japanese authorities.

[page 117] **Hyodang and Shin Chae-Ho**

On March 1, 1942,Hyodang with other scholars launched a plan to prepare an edition of the complete works of Danjae Sin Chae-Ho (1880 - 1936). It might be helpful to evoke very briefly the quite extraordinary story of this very important Korean nationalist, intellectual and historian, if only to show the Kind of person for whom Hyodang felt such deep respect.

Danjae Chae-Ho was born in Daejeon into an impoverished branch of an illustrious family. Despite their poverty, he was admitted to study in the local Confucian school, then completed studies at the Confucian Academy in Seoul, Seonggyun-gwan. But after the declaration in 1905 of the Japanese protectorate over Korea, he began to work as a member of the editorial boards of two major nationalistic newspapers, the Hwangseong sinmun and the Daehan Maeil Sinbo. He can be seen at this time as part of what has been called the Patriotic Enlightenment Movement. His greatest contribution, perhaps, lies in the ideas first formulated in a series of articles he published in the Daehan Maeil Sinbo in August - September 1908, entitled Toksa sillon (A new reading of history). For him, the Korean people, the minjok, are descended from their divine progenitor Dangun and it is they, not the ruling dynasty or the geographical space of the Korean peninsula, that should be the central focus of Korean history. That history, he believed, began in Manchuria and one of his major concerns was that Korea should expand to reoccupy that original space. The notion of the minjok, the ordinary Korean people as a whole, was to play a vital role in later rewritings of Korean history and identity. Toward the end of his active lite, Danjae was tending to use the even more radical term minjung, in place of the earlier minjok.

Just as Korea was losing its last vestiges of independence, early in 1910, he left the country for ever, resolved to seek for strategies by which the nation might regain its freedom. He studied international relations and world history in Beijing, taught patriotic young Koreans, and also lived and worked for a time in the Russian Far East (in Vladivostok). Early in 1919, the Korean Independence and Justice Corps (Daehan Dongnip Uigunbu), formed in Jilin City, published a “Declaration of Daehan (Korean) Independence,” also known as the “Mu-o Declaration of Independence.” The declaration includes the claim that the use of armed [page 118] force would be the only way for the independence movement to succeed. Danjae’s name is included among the declaration’s signatories, but they are numerous and include many others who, like him, probably had nothing to do with its formulation.

In April 1919, Korean exiles decided to establish a unified provisional government in Shanghai and Syngman Rhee was chosen to head it, but only arrived there from the United States at the end of 1920. Danjae, after a time of being associated with it, quit to be active in a variety of militarized groups of Korean exiles elsewhere in China. It is sometimes claimed, almost certainly wrongly, that he was close to the Daejong-gyo religion, a nationalistic new religion whose first leader, Hongam Na Cheol, committed suicide in an ultimate form of anti- Japanese protest in 1916. Although he shared with the cult a particular veneration for Tangun, whom he saw as the originator of the Korean minjok, there is no reason to suppose that he felt any sympathy for their religious aims. He was in fact systematically hostile to all forms of religion, and expressed as much in his writings.

In 1923, he composed The declaration of the Korean revolution (朝鮮革命宣言) which advocated a violent revolution and by 1928 he was clearly an anarchist, convinced of the need to use violent means himself. In order to obtain funds needed to set up a bomb-making factory, he forged a high-value bank-note which he intended to take to Japan to cash but he was caught and identified as a leader of the Korean independence movement. He was incarcerated in a Japanese prison in Lushun (also known as Port Arthur, in Manchuria). His health, already weak, worsened during the years of prison until he died there in 1936. During his life, he expressed himself in many ways; he wrote fiction, poetry, and above all a series of major books about Korean history and culture, all intended to inspire a spirit of nationalistic pride and resistance to Japanese domination; above all, he contributed articles to many journals and newspapers.

Returning now to Hyodang, with the beginning of the Pacific War, the Japanese authorities launched a fierce crackdown on all aspects of Korean culture; people were obliged to take Japanese names, publications in Korean language were banned, and all books recording independent Korean history were confiscated. Hyodang had in his [page 119] possession manuscript copies of Danjae Sin Chae-Ho’s Ancient History of Korea (Joseon Sangyeoksa) and History of Ancient Culture (Godaeimmhwasa) when Japanese police suddenly raided Dasol-sa in September 1942. Fortunately, a Japanese woman living at the temple who had just given birth was able to hide the books under her baby’s bedding and they were saved. But Hyodang’s project of publishing Danjae’s works never came to fruition and a 4-volume edition of his “complete works” only appeared in South Korea in 1972. Hyodang’s interest in his work is symptomatic of his own strong nationalistic views and reminds us of his anarchist links during the early years of his life in Japan; it is also in a sense prophetic of the difficulties he experienced under Syngman Rhee’s rule. For the ideas expressed by Danjae were also anathema to Rhee and much praised in North Korea. For many years, his work was virtually banned in South Korea. It was only later, among the resistance to Park Jung-Hee’s rule, that historians in South Korea rediscovered his work and raised him to his present level of fame.

**Hyodang’s activities: 1940 -1945**

In July 1942, a notorious case had involved the arrest and imprisonment of many members of the Korean Language Society (Hangeulhakhoi). The ultimate sign that Hyodang was in no sense a pro-Japanese collaborator is the fact that he and his companions at Dasol-sa, as well as many other leading monks, spent much of the war under arrest in atrocious conditions at the South Gyeongsang Province Police Headquarters; others confined there included a number of Protestant pastors and lay-people who had refused to perform the obligatory Shinto rituals in honor of the Japanese Emperor. The buildings were overcrowded, prisoners were mistreated and tortured. Many died.

It should be obvious from all this that by the end of the Japanese period, Hyodang had come to occupy an outstanding position among the ranks of those who resisted the Japanese attempts to bring Korea to its knees and rob its people of their values, culture, and language. He had been closely connected with Manhae, who died on June 29, 1944, and with the leading Buddhists associated with him, as well as with many other intellectuals, and he had already shown his interest in improving the educational facilities available in Korea. At the same time he was known[page 120] nation-wide as an outstanding scholar and social thinker, as a devout Buddhist in his practice, as well as an unconditional defender of Korean identity and of its independence from Japan.

In the end, the strongest, most compelling reason for rejecting any suggestion that Hyodang ever did anything that could be considered “pro-Japanese” is a very simple one. Hyodang, more than any other figure involved in the independence struggle, perhaps, never lived alone and never acted alone. The Dasol-sa community, by its very nature, is the strongest guarantee of Hyodang’s integrity. The people who gathered there, as we have seen, lived close together for sometimes years on end. They were in some cases more radical in political thought and action than Hyodang himself; we must recall them, sometimes over a hundred at a time, sprawled on the temple’s grassy lawn, seemingly relaxing and sun¬bathing in positions designed to mislead the Japanese observing them through binoculars from far off, while they debated the ways and means of their ongoing anti-Japanese struggle. It is perfectly obvious that none of them would have remained there if there had been even the slightest suspicion concerning Hyodang’s attitude.

**Hyodang’s activities after 1945**

On August 15, 1945, Japan surrendered and the Japanese soon began to leave Korea, as demanded in the surrender document. At once, in another indication of his anti-Japanese credentials, Hyodang was appointed the General Secretary of the Sacheon National Foundation Association, for the region around Dasol-sa; in 1946 he was selected to be a member of an Emergency National Assembly. On February 2 1947 he was nominated to represent Korean Buddhist groups on the U.S. - Soviet Joint Commission and on February 15 1947 he was selected to be head monk of Haein-sa.

The interest he had manifested in earlier times in promoting education continued. In July 1947, he and Haegong Shin Ik-Hui took the first steps toward founding Gukmin College (that was later to become Gukmin University) in Seoul. Hyodang became the first chairman of the college’s board of governors. It was to be an entirely Buddhist establishment, with funding coming from a variety of Buddhist foundations including Haein-sa. In April 1950, Hyodang even found himself appointed the president of the college as well, for a brief time[page 121] before the outbreak of the war. On May 10, 1948, Hyodang had also been elected a member of the Constituent Assembly that inaugurated the Republic of Korea. At a period when many people were establishing political parties, he remained firmly independent and was elected as such.

We have seen the close links that united Hyodang with some of the most significant anarchists, idealists, and communists of his age; he was obviously a revolutionary by temperament, or at least a radical, if by that we mean a person who dreams of establishing a society far different from that in which he finds himself; Hyodang nourished a strong hope of helping to found a single Korea, independent, socialist and democratic, where all would share freely in the construction of a new national identity, a land where a privileged few would not be allowed to dominate and oppress the masses who made up the general population. This dream, common to many Korean idealists, was anathema to Syngman Rhee and the corrupt politicians around him. Hyodang was certainly seen by them, not as a heroic independence fighter, but as a dangerous extremist.

The North Korean army attacked South Korea on June 25, 1950, and on June 28, as the invading forces entered Seoul, Hyodang was captured by them, transported around Seoul in a cabinet, and finally he found himself installed with fifty other National Assembly members in the Seongnam Hotel. On September 15, the allied forces landed at Incheon, in a dramatic, unexpected move that threatened to cut the North Korean lines of communication with their army, that had moved very rapidly further south. Control over the territory in and around Seoul shifted in a flash, and, in a dramatic change of situation, on September 19 a liberated Hyodang went north with the American fleet. There he was put in charge of the Hamheung Ilbo newspaper for 3 months before being evacuated southward on December 12. He moved to Haein-sa, of which he had been made head monk, and on July 25, 1951, as the war came close, his well- known nationalistic credentials were such that he was able to convince the leaders of the Communist militia who had captured Baekryeon-am hermitage Just above Haeinsa, not to bombard the main temple, so saving the temple and the wood blocks of the Tripitaka Koreana.

His interest in education had not abated, and that same year, in the midst of wartime turmoil, he established Haein Middle / High School; then early in 1952 he obtained permission from the then minister of[page 122] education, Baek Nak-Jun, to re-establish Gukmin College at Haein-sa under the name of Haein College, for which he was appointed college head. Soon the incursions of partisans from Jiri Mountain made life there too dangerous and Hyodang moved the little college to Jinju. Deeply painful episodes in the following years probably have their explanation at least partly in the political differences that existed between Hyodang, who to some degree at least supported the opposition Democratic Party, and those connected to Syngman Rhee’s oiling Freedom Party. Hyodang went so far as to advocate the need for revolution in his opposition to Syngman Rhee’s dictatorial regime. Rhee personally disliked Hyodang and all that he stood for; thanks to the enmity of the notorious Gim Chang-Ryong, head of Syngman Rhee’s intelligence services, that earned him 6 months’ imprisonment in Seoul’s Seodaemun Prison, until early in 1953.

Hyodang had long dreamed of establishing a new, Wonhyo- inspired Buddhist order, Wonhyo-jong, that would be centered on Dasol- sa. It was to be a kind of Utopia, open to people irrespective of their social, political orientation, or class. For this, a source of funding was essential and Dasol-sa had little beyond that one property, that had been the site of a Japanese temple. Intent on wresting this wealth from his control, his adversaries set out to blacken Hyodang’s reputation by spreading reports that made him appear as the unreasonable party, guilty of greed if not of dishonesty, while newspapers published lurid reports distorting his true intentions. The planned Wonhyo-jong never saw see the light of day.

**The later years: 1957 – 1979**

From 1957, Hyodang often lectured at Dasol-sa to large groups of monks and students on Manhae, then later on the thought of Wonhyo. That was the prelude to the project to collect and publish the complete writings of Manhae, a task that took him and a team of scholars many years and that was only finally completed with the publication of seven volumes in July 1973. All through these years, from the later 1950s, Hyodang resided mainly at Dasol-sa, and his practice of tea, which he had long been developing, became a familiar part of life there. In particular, he planted very many new tea bushes on the slopes above the temple.

In November 1966, a Korean residing in Japan, Gim Jeong-Ju, came to visit him and asked him to write about the Korean practice of tea. [page 123] The result was a small booklet that Hyodang had duplicated, and later printed Hangukui Chasaenghwalsa (History of Korea’s Tea-life); in the course of the following years, he developed that into his major work on tea, Hangukui Chado (The Korean Way of Tea) that was published in its final form in 1973. This book was destined to serve as the foundation text of the great revival of interest in Korean tea he had initiated. Some 300 pages in length, it covers every aspect of its subject in detail. The second half of the book is composed of a series of classical texts about tea, in Classical Chinese, with translations and commentaries, including the Classic of Tea and the major texts by Cho Ui. In addition, beginning in early May 1974, he started to publish a series of sixteen articles about tea in the Dokseomin Shinmun. In August the same year, he published a more general book about his vision of life: Sarameun eottoke saraya hana (How should people live?). But it was above all through a constant series of lectures, presentations, and personal conversations that he stimulated a widespread tea revival that bore its main fruits in the years after his death, with the multiplication of tea-rooms, tea study associations, tea makers and tea-lovers. He could hardly have imagined that tea would soon be taught as an integral part of Korea’s traditional culture in at least a large number of Korean high schools.

During the 1970s, the rule of Park Jung-Hee grew increasingly harsh, with the promulgation of the “Yushin” (Revitalizing) Constitution at the end of 1972 provoking widespread opposition to which the regime responded with arrests, torture, prison and even death on trumped-up charges. At the heart of the struggle were students and figures from all sections of society, writers, artists, churchmen, monks, workers. Many of these found their way to Dasol-sa and to Hyodang, some looking for support, some for help, and for shelter. A number spent months there in hiding and Hyodang’s reputation as an independence fighter and a member of the Constituent Assembly surely helped to keep the police at bay.

Following the philosophy of Wonhyo, Hyodang believed that the Buddha requires that compassion should be shown especially to those in trouble; he therefore gave monastic ordination to quite a number of people who were in deep disfavor with the ruling powers, and to the children of people who had been condemned as communists. Another specific[page 124] characteristic of Wonhyo’s vision of Buddhism is its stress on practical realities. For Hyodang, being a monk did not mean chanting sutras while pious rich women looked after his every need; he demanded that everyone residing at Dasol-sa do a full day’s manual labor out in the fields and around the temple, so constituting a truly communitarian Utopia, during the years of anti-Japanese struggle as during the decades of military dictatorship.

Other visitors to Dasol-sa simply came looking for instruction in Buddhism and whenever Hyodang lectured to groups of students, he would always include the Way of Tea among his topics. In 1969, Chae Jeong-bok, a student from the history department of Yonsei University in Seoul, came to ask for Hyodang’s help in writing her graduation thesis and she finally remained with him for the next ten years, until his death, as his wife and mother of his children. To her, as to no-one else, he transmitted his experience and vision of tea in all its aspects and she continued to teach and promote Hyodang’s Panyaro tea tradition after his death. In the early 1970s, people close to him began to suggest that he should launch an association devoted entirely to tea, in order to support the growing public interest in the topic, but it was only in 1976 that he finally agreed and preparations for the first meeting of the Hanguk Chadohoi (Korean Association for the Way of Tea) began to take shape. In those days, very few Koreans had ever drunk tea, and it was agreed that only people who had at least once drunk tea with Hyodang should participate. That still meant about 100 people, and the resources of the temple were insufficient for such numbers; food would be already a problem, and there was very little room for them to sleep. The meeting was therefore limited to the space of a single day, January 15, 1977.

Hyodang’s troubles were still not over, however. After Liberation in 1945 the order of unmarried monks (soon to be known as Jogye-Jong) received government support in its often violent attempts to gain control of the temples that were, almost entirely, being controlled by the married monks (today known as Taego-Jong). It is a familiar, scandalous story that after the Korean War the Jogye order recruited considerable numbers of young, unemployed thugs as monks; these formed gangs who expelled the married monks from temples with ruthless brutality before going on to take control of the major sources of income belonging to their own order. [page 125] It should be admitted that the married monks at major temples also sometimes had their protective gangs.

For many years, physical violence that at times led to death or permanent disability continued as Jogye-Jong monks slowly won control of most of the Korean temples. This battle was frequently justified to popular opinion by simply terming the married monks “Japanese-style” while the unmarried monks claimed to represent the authentic Korean tradition. But even these apparently nationalistic credentials could not prevent the growth of a widespread feeling that almost all Buddhist monks were mainly interested in worldly wealth. This had probably been part of Syngman Rhee’s intention. Already by 1970 the Taego order controlled only 50 major monasteries, while the Jogye order controlled 950 temples. In the late autumn of 1977, this ugly reality at last reached Dasol-sa. With the temple blockaded by Jogye warriors, and the local police refusing to intervene, Hyodang found himself obliged to leave. He went up to Seoul, where he had many friends. Using his home there as his own school, he continued to teach, and drink tea. Many old colleagues and friends were now university professors, artists, writers and professionals of various kinds in the new urban society. Many came to share tea with him and deepen their understanding of Buddhism, especially of the thought of Wonhyo.

After a series of weekly lectures, in May 1978, a group gathered around Hyodang in Seoul decided to establish the Cha-Seon-Hoi (Tea-Zen Association). Not long after that, in June 1978,he fell sick and underwent major surgery but his days were numbered and his life came to an end one year later, just after midday on July 10, 1979. He was cremated and his remains were at first placed in a stone urn near the entrance to Dasol-sa but with the passage of years his family and friends came to feel that, given the violent way he had been expelled, this was not the right place. Finally, in 1996,his remains were transferred to a grave in the National Cemetery at Daejeon where he rests alongside many others whose lives were dedicated to the Independence Movement and who, often, had to suffer like him in the years after 1945.

**In conclusion**

What, we might ask, forms a unifying bond between Hyodang’s [page 126] various activities, beyond the pain they brought him? The Buddhist monk, the advocate of an independent Korean cultural, national identity, the founder of schools, the quiet opponent of dictators, the friend of dissidents, the communitarian visionary, the tea master ... From time to time we have noted his attachment to the teachings of Wonhyo (617 - 686). Wonhyo is, I believe, the key to Hyodang’s entire life. This immensely popular Buddhist figure from ancient Silla is hardly known in the West, for obvious reasons. Even in Korea, the difficulty of his many writings makes his teaching hard to grasp. His life-story is more accessible, but the deeper vision underlying the tales of his various strange and eccentric acts is not always well understood. One of the most characteristic features of Hyodang’s life is his openness to everyone, but especially to those who are suffering. We may cite his welcome at Dasol-sa of so many different kinds of marginalized people, his readiness to accept as monks people who did not conform to standard models, his ready mingling of monks and ordinary people in the community there, his conviction that monks too should work with their hands and perform menial tasks. Even his readiness to reach out in positive ways to Japanese monks, although clearly part of his conviction that Korean Buddhism had as much to offer as any Japanese tradition, can also be seen as showing his universal compassion.

Wonhyo was convinced that all human beings were utterly equal since each and everyone had an inalienable, fundamental Buddhist nature, the potential of attaining buddhahood (il-sim). In his own life, Wonhyo stressed that freedom (mu-ae) and compassion were the two essential qualities of a Buddhist (or human) life. He stressed the need to struggle to overcome false distinctions (hwa-jaeng), rejecting all the we would term “clericalism” and even reckoned total enlightenment was a potential snare, if it were seen as dispensing those monks who had attained it from practicing compassion toward suffering humanity. The socialist or anarchist radicalism observed by Hyodang in his youth must surely have appealed to him above all by its rejection of divisive, elitist attitudes. Like Wonhyo, Hyodang refused to practice a distinction between the monastic life and ordinary life. Unlike him, he was not inclined to sing and dance in the streets, banging on a gourd in an eccentric lifestyle; but like Wonhyo, he placed his monastic vocation firmly on the side of those poor and[page 127] suffering under the demands of current social and political realities, as a challenge to the powerful and privileged. Hyodang’s sympathies clearly lay, from his earliest days in Japan, with the exploited victims of society.

When we see how often he wrote the four characters 茶道無門, “the Way of Tea has no doors,” we are reminded of that same deep, universal, all-embracing vision. His assertion that to prepare and drink a cup of tea is in itself a practice of Zen, a search for enlightenment, challenges the need for years of practice in monastic seclusion. Like Wonhyo, he is affirming that anyone, monk or lay, here and now, in this present life, no matter what their education or status or morality even, can fulfill their essential Buddha nature in the simplest possible ways. Tea drinking becomes a school of compassion, so of enlightenment, and therefore the tea is named Panya-ro, the dew of enlightening wisdom (Prajna). For Hyodang, as for Wonhyo, no pretension or ambition to special privileges had any place in Buddhism or in human society, and for Hyodang that was expressed in the openness of his tea practice. Not for him, the claims of this or that “tea expert” to special veneration or superior authority in the world of tea. Perhaps that helps explain why, although in his later years he had certain very close tea-friends, he left no one who could claim to be his “jeja” (disciple) in the common Korean manner. For it he had, then he himself would have been claiming the role of “master” and the total equality of each and all in tea would have been undermined.

In conclusion, rather than try to evaluate separately Hyodang’s achievements in the many very different areas in which he was active, we would do well to stress their common quality as manifestations of the Wonhyo thought to which he had dedicated his whole life: the inner oneness of all beings, their essential interconnectedness, the compassion of Buddha by which we are rendered free of all determining bonds. And we can be grateful, if that already sounds complex, for his realization that everything that matters can be experienced by means of a very simple cup of tea, the sign that indeed we all are one.

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