

Han Yongun's Buddhist Socialism in the 1920s-1930s

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The paper deals with Han Yongun's (1879-1944) attitude towards the radical movements of socialist (Communist or anarchist) persuasion in 1920-30s' Korea. Socialism had strong appeal for a large sector of the educated youth at that period: some of the younger monks or lay Buddhists are known to have become radical activists, while larger number had sympathies towards the "new currents of thought", as radical views were euphemistically called. But both dogmatically stiff negative attitudes of the orthodox Communists towards all religions, Buddhism included, and low level of the understanding of Marxists theory among the monks and lay Buddhists hindered deeper contacts between Buddhists and socialism. Han Yongun attempted to overcome these hindrances, putting forward his theory of "Buddhist socialism."

Key Words: Han Yongun, Buddhist Socialism, Communism, Anti-religious movement, Seno'o Girō.

I. The first encounters between Buddhism and socialism

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in colonial Korea - the 1920s.

The heightened popularity of socialism in 1920s' Korea did not fail to influence the Buddhist community as well. Just as the majority of the pioneering Communist activists of the early 1920s were the younger intellectuals in their 20 and 30, often with the experience of studying in Japan, hailing from *petit bourgeois* or middle class families (Chŏn, 2004:80-103), the first Buddhist monks to interest themselves deeply in the Socialist or Communist ideas mostly were idealistic students, often of relatively comfortable backgrounds. In the very beginning of the 1920s, "conversion" to socialism - or anarchism, often viewed at that time as a branch of socialism - among the Buddhist intellectual youth usually was limited to some individual cases, some Buddhist students having been simply superficially affected by the fashionable "new ideas" and some practically quitting the Buddhist community as a result of too deep an involvement with the anti-establishmentarian movements and thus exercising quite little influence upon their co-religionists. For example, one of the first Korean Buddhist monks to be arrested and imprisoned (for 6 months) for the "crime" of "propagating extremist ideas" in August 1921, was a Tōyō University student named Kim Kyŏngju, who then went on to pursue a successful career in various Buddhist organizations to become eventually a superintendent of the Central Buddhist College (*Chungang puljŏn*) in Seoul in the late 1930s, while obviously demonstrating no special continuing commitment to any sort of "subversive" ideas any longer (Kim, 1998). The monk of the early 1920s who made the most distinguished contribution to the incipient Communist and anarchist movements in Korea was arguably Kim Sŏngsuk (1898-1969), a Pongsŏnsa (Kyŏnggi Province, Kwangnŭng) monk from a poor peasant family, who met Kim Saguk (1892-1933), one of Korea's first Communists, in prison, while serving his term for the participation in the nationalist March 1 Movement (1919), and then, deeply impressed by his elder friend, went on to read the *Communist Manifesto* (in Japanese), work in the Communist-influenced Korean Labour Fraternal Association (*Chosŏn Nodong Konjehoe*) and emigrate to

China (1923), where he subsequently became a famed anarchist (Yi and Kim, 1988). There were 3 more Korean monks, who participated in the anarchist movement in China together with him (Kim, 1998), but they hardly were in any position to influence Korea's Buddhist community - with which they maintained only very casual contacts from their exile. Even more typical case of a former Buddhist who lost any connection whatsoever with Buddhism and Buddhist community after "conversion" to the radical ideas is that of Kim Ch'önhae (original name: Kim Hagüi: 1898-?), a 1916 graduate of the Central Buddhist School (*Chungang hangnim*) in Seoul, who went to Japan in 1921 to study, and, eventually, to become one of the "founding fathers" of the Korean communist movement in Japan, responsible secretary of the Japanese Section of the Korean Communist Party (June 24, 1928) and then one of the prominent leaders of the organizational movement of pro-Pyongyang Koreans in Japan after 1945 and a distinguished member of the North Korean establishment (Kim, 1998; Kim, 2004:179-205).

An important stumbling block for any deeper contacts between the institutional Buddhism and the new-born radical groups was the emphasis the latter, especially the Communists, placed upon the "anti-religious propaganda." Anti-religious campaign in the 1920s' Korea was basically an attempt by the radical, predominantly Communist-influenced circles, to establish their own paradigm of modernity, which would be distinctively different from that of 1890-1910s nationalist movement, strongly tinged by its association with either Protestant Christianity or new nationalist religions. The campaign coincided with the deepening of the critical mood towards foreign missionary leadership of Korea's Christian denominations among Korea's non-leftist nationalists as well, heralded, for example, by young novelist Yi Kwangsu's (1892-1950) seminal 1917 article "Faults of Today's Korean Christianity", where he challenged Christians' perceived indifference towards non-religious "civilizational improvements", "superstitious" character of their faith, "hierarchical nature" of their churches, and, on more general level, their "failure to become sufficiently Koreanized" (Yi,

1917:81-84). That Yi Kwangsu, a profoundly religious person, who at that point was deeply influenced by Leo Tolstoy's (1828-1910) interpretation of Christianity and considered a Christian nationalist leader, An Ch'angho (1878-1938), his mentor (Sin, 2002:91-109), came out with the criticisms towards Korean Christian churches, shows that the unquestioning acceptance of the religion, especially the "religion of the civilization" - that is, Christianity, - as the key element of "national strength", typical for the previous period, was passing into the past. While the main inspiration for the leftist attacks upon religion was undoubtedly Russian Bolsheviks' unmitigated hostility towards the institutional Orthodox Christianity in the wake of October 1917's revolution (Dickinson, 2000:327-335), another reference point, closer both geographically and culturally, was China. There, the New Culture Movement's emphasis upon anti-imperialism and science laid the foundations for the anti-religious campaign of the early 1920s, its flames being further fanned by what was perceived as World's Student Christian Federation's (WSCF) "provocative decision" to hold its 1922 meeting in Beijing. This movement, actively promoted by nationalists, anarchists and nascent Communist milieu alike (Lutz, 1976:395-416), was given sympathetic coverage in such "progressive" nationalist and leftist journals of Korea as *Kaebŏk* and *Sinsaenghwal*, which often described it as "pan-national, scientific assault upon reactionary religious ideas born by the primitive humanity's fear of nature and bankrupt today" (for example, Im, 1922:50-53). Just like in contemporaneous China, the main target of this attack upon religion in Korea of the 1920s was Christianity, "tarnished" by the missionary predominance, perceived "superstitious" nature of the doctrine and faith, and association with Bolshevik's Russian Orthodox adversaries; but Buddhism, as another major religion, was in no way spared.

These attacks presented grave problems for these Buddhist organizations, first and foremost that of Buddhist youth, which thought active participation in the burgeoning socio-political life of the period, dominated by either nationalist or radical left flows. Korean Buddhist Youth League (*Pulgyo ch'ŏngnyŏnhoe*), led by Okch'ŏnsa monk Yi

Chongch'ön (?-1928), and Korean Female Buddhist Youth League (*Chosŏn pulgyo yŏja ch'ŏngnyŏnhoe*), led by U Bongun, actively participated, for example, in the organization of the initiatory meeting of the All-Korean Youth Party Congress (*Chŏnchosŏn ch'ŏngnyŏn tang taehoe*) in March 1923, and had some of their concerns duly addressed there - the 1st section of the Congress (women, education, religion-related problems) adopted the resolution urging the abolishment of the 1911 “Temple Law”, which the Japanese colonial authorities used for administering Korea's institutional Buddhism in a rigidly centralized, authoritarian way. But at the same time, the same section - following Moscow's line, as the Congress was in reality initiated by the Comintern-appointed Central Bureau of Korean Communist Youth League (*Koryŏ kongsan ch'ŏngnyŏnhoe chungang ch'ongguk*) and Kim Saguk-led local Communist fraction known as “Seoul group” - proclaimed religion as such “a prejudice, which harms the development and expression of individuality, contradicts the truth of science, and (…) serving as an opiate for the conquered”, thus making the continuous presence of the religious youth groups, Buddhist included, inside the Communist-led leftist youth movement extremely difficult (Yi, 2003:186-264). “Anti-religious struggle” was highly prominent on the agenda of the first ever Korean Communist Party, formed under the leadership of the so-called “Tuesday fraction” (*hwayop'a* - the fraction trusted best by Comintern's Korburo, charged with the task of organizing a unified Communist party in Korea) in April, 1925, although, happily for the Buddhists, the focus was on the struggle against the main “imperialist agents”, that is, Christians (Cho, 1925). However, the militant anti-religious views of the “Tuesday fraction” were not shared in full by Kim Saguk-led “Seoul group”, concerned with the danger of alienating “the revolutionary nationalists, disguising themselves under the mask of religion” (Chŏn, 2001:93-94); neither could they satisfy Comintern, as it was until the very end of the 1920s urging the tactics of the “united front with the radical bourgeois nationalists” upon its branches in the colonial and semi-colonial countries, and the “radical national bourgeoisie” was represented in many cases exactly by some “religionists” (radical “old fraction” inside

Ch'öndogyo, for example) in Korea (Scalapino, Robert & Lee, Chong-Sik, 1972:93-110). Therefore, the anti-religious assault was softened, to a certain degree, especially at the time between 1927 and 1931, when Communists cooperated with the sections of moderate and radical nationalist movement - often represented by the personalities with religious affiliations and connections - inside the framework of *Sin'ganhoe* (New Korea Society), which was designed to become the “unified national party”, ultimately the vehicle for progress towards independence and “democratic reforms” (Yi, 1993). But after Profintern's September 18, 1930 resolution attacked *Sin'ganhoe* - soon to be dissolved - as a “national reformist organization” and urged more radical and uncompromising line towards all the “*petit-bourgeois* elements” (Scalapino and Lee, 1972:111), the anti-religious propaganda by the Communist or Communist-inspired leftist authors regained its heat (Kim, 2000:45-46).

One of the typical salvos was delivered by certain Chin Yöngch'öl, a Communist, who could be considered a moderate, as he was arguing in favour of a limited alliance with the small bourgeoisie (“under the hegemony of the proletariat”, of course: Kwön, 1996). Chin drew extensively upon the famous thesis of Marx's 1844 *Introduction to a Contribution to a Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* - understood by him in a literal, extremely dogmatic way - that “Religion is, indeed, the self-consciousness and self-esteem of man who has either not yet won through to himself, or has already lost himself again. ... State and ... society produce religion, which is an *inverted consciousness of the world*, because they are an *inverted world*. Religion is ... the *fantastic realization of the human essence* since the *human essence* has not acquired any true reality. The struggle against religion is, therefore, indirectly the *struggle against that world whose spiritual aroma is religion*” (O'Malley, 1970). According to him, religion, which succeeded, due to Korea's “backwardness”, in “absorbing” large numbers of Korea's “proletarians and peasants”, posed the gravest threat to the class movement as it was not only “paralyzing” and manipulating the consciousness of the oppressed with its “inverted”, “fantastic” worldview, but also actively joining politics as the main organized force in the camp of “national

reformism” and thus subverting the basis for both anti-colonial liberation movement and struggle for socialism. Concrete “anti-religious struggle”, for Chin, had to proceed as an organic part of the general “class struggle”, and be centered upon both “theoretical propaganda of the scientific atheism” and practical movements for, for example, “separation between religion and education” - that is, against the idea of the religious education for the general masses of school pupils and students. “Marxists”, concluded Chin in a categorical tone, “are necessarily to be atheists” (Chin, 1931:10-16). Even for a relative Communist moderate, the struggle against religions - and institutional Buddhism was mentioned specifically, with its slogan “From the mountains to the society!” and its “threatening” to more active proselytizing among and organizing of the youth, - was an epitome of the struggle against the world of “class domination”, religious consciousness being a synonym for the “oppressors' ideological opiate.” No distinctions between, for example, the original equalitarian spirit of Buddhism and Christianity and their later, institutionalized forms in the class societies, were made; no interest towards the fine points of the various religious doctrine (for example, Buddhism's rather rational theory of causation) shown. Korea's religions encountered thus an uncompromised, total opposition from the group of political idealists widely respected by many younger members of their congregations for its “religiously” devout, dedicated attitude towards the anti-colonial struggle, if not for its set of dogmas.

This series of developments made defining the relations between the institutional religion and leftist (basically, Communist) movement into an important task for the religious authors and activists catering to the younger audience, often seriously influence by the radical currents; the task was even more important for the “religionists” directly involved with the radical nationalist movement, who often kept working contacts with their leftist (Communist) counterparts. Han Yongun (1879-1944), one of the most prominent and radical among the Buddhist intellectuals of the time, had the experience of giving a congratulatory speech to the All-Korean Youth Party Congress as early as in 1923 (Kim, 2000:45), and

was among the 27 initiators of *Sin'ganhoe* in 1927, maintaining, in his capacity of the leader of Seoul branch, continuous - and, according to some of the Japanese police documents, indeed very friendly (Kang and Kajimura, 1972:95-97) - collaboration with the Communists and opposing to the very end the dissolution of the organization. Therefore, he hardly could avoid at some point defining what socialism could mean for a devout modern Buddhism with avid interest in political and social issues.

II. Han Yongun's way to Buddhist socialism - 1910s-1930s.

Han Yongun, who started his journey to the world of modernity as a radical Buddhist reformer of the 1900s-1910s, struggling to reconcile Social Darwinism he learned from China's great modern reformer, Liang Qichao (1873-1929), with the basics of *Mahāyāna* philosophy, was never tired from the very beginning of emphasizing the altruist and equalitarian nature of Buddhism - which guaranteed Buddhism, according to him, an appropriate place in the modern world, equalitarian and evolving towards a nobler state than today's Darwinist jungles with the "survival of the fittest" as their main law. This single-minded stress upon the "egalitarian nature" of Buddhism may look as a repetition of a apologist Buddhist *cliché* for a modern reader, but it by no means sounded as a trite piece of apologetics in the 1910s in Korea, where, under the influence of Meiji Japan's "patriotic" Buddhists - exemplified by famous Inoue Enryō (1858-1919), with his appeal to "defend the nation and love the truth [of Buddha]" and his understanding of Buddhism as indispensable for Japan's successful modernization and self-strengthening (Staggs, 1983:251-281) - Buddhism was understood as a religion successfully combining universalistic truth with ample possibilities of particularistic, nationalistic applications. For example, a typical younger Buddhist intellectual of that time, Yang Kōnsik (1889-?), known for his introduction of the contemporaneous Chinese literature to the Korean reader as well as for his pioneering attempts to transcend the fashionable Social Darwinism by appealing to

the Buddhist ideals of compassion and altruism (Kim, 1999:104-146), seemingly agreed with the view of Takakusu Junjirō (1866-1945), on whose writings he built his theory of “five major features of Buddhism.” Following Takakusu's lead, he was praising Buddhism for its “harmonization of the equalitarianism and discriminatory thinking”, that is, the balance it supposedly stroke between “nationalism (*kukkajuūi*) and cosmopolitanism (*segyejuūi*)” - unlike “Christianity with its negation of the distinctions between nations and states”, he was quick to add (Yang, 1915:14-21). Han Yongun's attitude was seriously different from those mainstream extolments of Buddhism's supposed capacities to adapt to the modern state-centred nationalism. In his seminal treatise *On the Revitalization of Korean Buddhism (Chosŏn Pulgyo Yusinnon*; written in 1910, published in May, 1913), Han Yongun cited the *Mahāyāna* ideas of the universal Buddha-nature immanent to all the beings, and concluded that, as equality was one of the main principles of Buddhism, Buddhism was both the religion of the liberal, equalitarian modern present, and - even more than that - utopian “great unity” of the future:

“In fact it may be said that both the liberalism and internationalism of modern times are the offspring of the truth of equality. The natural principle of freedom is said to be ‘the limits of one person's freedom is where it intrudes upon the freedom of the others’. If every person keeps his or her freedom and does not intrude upon the freedom of others, my freedom will become synonymous with the freedom of others and one person's freedom will become synonymous with another person's freedom. Everybody's freedom would make up a horizontal line in which there would be no internal differentiation. Can anything be more equal than this?

Internationalism means that one does not speak about one's own and another's country, this continent or that continent, this race or that race, but looks upon them as one family and regards them equally as brothers. It means that the whole world is being ruled as if it was one family, without competition or aggression. Should this be called ‘equality’ or not?

The above discourse may be regarded as a hollow academic

exercise today, but when in the future civilization has developed much further and reached its peak, [this equality] will without doubt be practised under Heaven. Why so? Because if there is a cause there must be an effect and if there is a principle there must be a phenomenon. It is like shadows following objects or echoes following sound. Even if one were to apply the strength necessary to lift a huge ceremonial cauldron or canons able to destroy mountains it would be of no use in resisting the coming of truth. Thus, the world of the future will be called 'the world of Buddhism'. For what reasons will it be called 'world of Buddhism'? Because it will be equal, because it will be free, and because the world will achieve great unity. That is why it will be called 'the world of Buddhism'. But how can Buddha's equality stop at this? All the innumerable lotus worlds, and every thing, every phenomenon inside them, will be totally equal, without exception" (HYC, Vol.2:104-105).

"Egalitarianism" in this context should be probably better understood as a sort of liberal internationalism, with a focus upon the idea of the equal rights of and "brotherly" solidarity between the individuals and nations, but hardly any understanding of the issue of *economical* equality. Indeed, the 11th chapter of the treatise, entitled "The recovery of the human rights of the monks should necessarily begin from the labour", ascribes the low social status of the monks to their inability to produce and trade on the capitalist market and appeals to them to form companies and enrich the temples through production of the agricultural good. Active participation in the monetary economy was essential for "survival" of Buddhism, according to Han Yongun, because "today's world is at least partly propped by the forces of competition for the monetary gains. All the ways of civilization are built upon the strength of money, and every success or failure are decided in the competition for profits. Once the production is stopped, the world would get destroyed, a country would get ruined, and an individual would not be able to achieve any position [in the society]" (HYC, Vol.2:117-118). However Han Yongun lamented the unabashed, inhuman cruelty of today's Social Darwinist jungles (HYC, Vol.2:110), however he might hope for the advent of the Buddhist "world of great unity" in the

future, he obviously remained convinced in the time of the writing of the treatise that the capitalist competition and subsequent *economic inequality* were natural, inescapable features of “modern civilization.” The word, which later became the stable translation of “socialism” into Korean, *sahoejuŭi*, is mentioned once in the treatise (HYC, Vol.2:115), but it meant rather the principle of social solidarity as opposed to the individual awakening of the *arhats* of *Hīnayāna*, than any sort of alternative world order.

The other salient feature of Buddhism, which was also identifiable as a component of modernity's progressive tendencies, was, according to Han Yongun, Buddhism's principle of compassion - or “altruism” in more modern parlour. Explaining this principle, Han Yongun was eager, first and foremost, to refute the old Neo-Confucian charge accusing Buddhists of being “egoists”, interested in their own salvation from the world, but devoid of righteousness and compassion and uninterested in saving the world (Chöng, 1993:454-458). He wrote:

“What is altruism? It is opposite of egoism. Many of those discussing Buddhism say that Buddhism is a religion that makes its adepts interested only in improving themselves. But this betrays an insufficient understanding of Buddhism, since improving oneself alone is something in total contradiction to Buddhism. In the *Avatamsaka-sūtra*, it is said: ‘I should broadly receive to the very end all the sufferings for all the living beings in all the worlds, in all the evil incarnations’.¹ It is also said: ‘I should make myself a hostage in hell, in the world of animals, to *Yamarāja*² in order to redeem and save all the living beings in the evil incarnations and lead them to the attainment of the liberation’.³ All the other *gāthās*⁴ and all the

1 Usually, being incarnated as an animal, a hungry spirit (*preta*), or in one of the hells was considered “evil (*apāya*).” The citation as a whole seems to summarise the general meaning of the altruistic practices of *bodhisattvas* as explained, for example in the chapter on the “Ten Practices” (C. *shixing*, 20th Chapter in *Śiksanānda's* 699 translation into Chinese from *Avatamsaka-sūtra*: T.10.105-111).

2 Kor. *Yōmnataewang*, Ch.: *Yanmodawang* - Vedic god of the dead, which became a king of hell in the Buddhist mythology.

3 A similar, though not completely identical phrase appears in the *Record of the Mirror of Orthodoxy* (C. *Zongjinglu*, K. *Chonggyōngnok*, compiled by Song Dynasty's Yanshou in 961):

words of the *sūtras* never abandon the desire to save living beings, so how can this be the path of saving only one person? It was precisely Buddha, who went all the way in his desire to save others, so how can we living beings repay his kindness?" (HYC, Vol.2:104-104).

The text then goes on to describe the willingness to suffer for the sake of others on the part of China's legendary sage emperors, Confucius and Jesus Christ, but offers very little to the understanding of how this Buddhist principle of compassion should manifest itself in today's uncompassionate world of monetary gain, competition and Social Darwinist "survival." All in all, it may be argued that already in 1913 Han Yongun was painfully aware about the inhumane nature of the "civilization built upon the strength of money" and was, consciously or unconsciously, attempting to contrast the doctrinal values of Buddhism - described in a modernized way as "equalitarianism and altruism" - with the realities of what he aptly called "today's barbaric civilization" (HYC, Vol.2:110) but he hardly could see any realistic ways to the ideal Buddhist "society of the great unity", was unable to contextualize the Buddhist ideas of "equalitarianism and altruism" in the concrete socio-political settings of the modern times, and resigned himself to believe that, at least for the time being, there was no way out of the society driven by the "competition for profits."

The experiences of leading the March 1st independence movement in 1919, being arrested immediately in the wake of the movement, serving the prison term (released on December 22, 1921) and further participating in a variety of Buddhist and general social and national movements (among other things, as the formal chairman of the Korean Buddhist Youth League from 1924) could not but greatly change Han Yongun's perception of modern realities. On one hand, his original belief in the support of the WWI victors for the independence of all colonial people, Korea included, and in forthcoming help from the

T48.913a02. Interestingly enough, the expression "redeem and save (C. *qixu*, K. *kusok*)" is often used in Chinese translations of the Christian texts.

4 K. *kesong*, C. *jiesong*. The verses found in the *sūtras*, which praise Buddha or/and explain Buddhist teachings, often giving short and precise synopses of the prosaic texts.

“powers” to the cause of Korea's independence (HYC, Vol.1:361-373) was crudely betrayed: was he mistakenly understood in the beginning as a “new era of peace” and “great defeat of the militarism and imperialism” (HYC, Vol.1:354-355) was indeed just a beginning of a new chapter in the history of imperialist competition, and no victorious power was going to challenge the “rights” to Korea of Japan, one of the members of the victors' coalition. On the other hand, Han Yongun recognized that the German revolution, which played, as he thought, the crucial part in the “defeat of Keiser's militarism”, was “done by the hands of the Socialist Party”, and in addition, “under the influence of the Russian revolution” (HYC, Vol.1:356); he also was observing in prison the influence the Russian revolution exerted upon Korea's own contemporaneous society (HYC, Vol.1:376). Consequently, his way of defining Buddhism in the socio-political context of modernity underwent perceptible changes in the direction of more open radicalism, with clear allusions towards the newly fashionable socialist ideas. For example, Kropotkinian “mutual help”, greatly popular among Korea's anarchists and some early Communists in the early 1920s (Yi, 2001:103-107), served now to Han Yongun as a tool for concretizing Buddhism's “universal love.” In March 1924, he wrote in the monthly *Kaebiyŏk*:

“Then, what is the practical activity in Buddhism? It is the same universal love and mutual help. With or without consciousness, everything and everybody is to be loved and to help each other. It is not limited to the humans only - it is applied to all the beings. In today's world, with imperialism or nationalism having acquired the predominant real strength, such words as universal love or mutual help sound very detached from the reality, but the truth is the truth. And because it is the truth, it will eventually become the reality” (“Buddhism I believe in”, HYC, Vol.2:288).

Given the fact that “imperialism” was uncompromisingly opposed, and “nationalism” - criticised by anarchist and Communist radicals in early 1920s Korea, the contrasting between “imperialism” and “nationalism” on one side and “mutual help” on the other side in this

text does seem to have certain radical connotations. Interestingly enough, the same article makes a clear attempt to defend Buddhism against possible accusation of being an “idealist philosophy”:

“It is only a superficial impression that Buddhism is built upon an idealist theory - in reality, the mind and the matter are not independent from each other in Buddhism. The mind is becoming the matter (‘emptiness is form’), and the matter is becoming the mind (‘form is emptiness’). So, the mind in Buddhism is the mind, which includes the matter. As it is said that ‘only the mind exists in the three worlds’ and ‘there is no matter outside of the mind’, it becomes even clearer, that the mind in Buddhism is inclusive of the matter. In this case, what is the reason this [complex entity consisting of both mind and matter] is mentioned just as ‘mind’? That is because, especially with us, humans, it is more often that the mind (that is, consciousness) prevails over the matter (that is, flesh) than otherwise” (“Buddhism I believe in”, HYC, Vol.2:288).

Although the *Yogācāra* thesis that “only the mind exists in the three worlds” and “there is no matter outside of the mind” hardly represented any sort of valid argumentation for 1920s Korea's rather dogmatic students of “dialectical materialism”, Han Yongun seemed to be rather sincere and consistent in his attempts to describe Buddhism in the terms acceptable for the contemporary radicals. In an interview with the monthly *Samch'ŏlli* in August 1929, he stresses that, despite the metaphysic “emptiness” of all the “forms” (*rūpa* - forms of material existence), the eternal Buddha-hood is immanent to everything in the world - and that provides the metaphysical grounds for the belief in the complete equality of all things, sentient or not:

“Form is emptiness - that is, everything is empty. Everything in the universe neither gets born nor dies, neither decreases nor increases. What is called ‘form’ can be known by us only through our organs of perception. But even what is not seen by us, like the air, also belongs to the realm of ‘form’. ‘Form’ is everything - mountains and rivers, grasses and trees, sun, moon and stars, running poultry and flying birds, fishes and turtles of

the seas and rivers, the humans and the six sorts of animals - everything. And all those things are also empty, because they belong to the realm of 'form'. As they are empty, they neither get born nor die; neither decrease nor increase. Their basic essence remains intact forever. But in the phenomenal world they individually might appear or disappear in some part with time, while what is called their Buddhahood in Buddhism remains just as it is, intact. In possessing Buddhahood, all the myriads of thing are the same" ("What happens with the life after the death", HYC, Vol.2:289-290).

While the relativist dialectics of the classic *Mahāyāna* philosophy, with their simultaneous negation of the self nature (*svabhāva*) of the things and - in *Yogācāra* philosophy - the ultimate reality of their existence at all outside of the perceiving mind, might have been a difficult stuff to explain to the adepts of "dialectical materialism" mindful of Lenin's invectives against "empiriocriticism", "subjective idealism" and "negation of the reality of the matter" (Lenin, Vol.14:70-362), the socio-economic ethos of early Buddhism provided the ample ground to validate the claims about the "socialist" nature of Buddha's teaching. It was exactly Buddha's "economic socialism" that Han Yongun emphasized in the strongest possible way in his interview published in the *Samch'ŏlli* in November 1931:

"In a Buddhist scripture, it is said that you have to take off and give away one cloth if you have two. Of course, that is what Buddha should have done. Generally, Śākyamuni was negative about the accumulation of property. He criticised the economical inequality. He himself always made the clothes with grasses and worn them while preaching around. His ideal was to live without the desires to own anything. ... I am recently planning to write about Buddhist socialism. Just like there is Christian socialism as a system of ideas in Christianity, there must be also Buddhist socialism in Buddhism" ("Śākyamuni's spirit: dialogue with a journalist", HYC, Vol.2:292-293).

Together with Buddha's negation of the caste system (HYC, Vol.2:292), the communal property-owning of the early Buddhist

monastic communities and Buddha's criticism of the acquisitive instincts as the worst forms of "desire" (*rāga*), the basic cause of suffering were the grounds, where Buddhism and modern radicalism could embrace each other. Not surprisingly, very similar ideas on the basic similarity of the Marxist and Buddhist socio-economic ethics were also shared by the Buddhist socialists in Japan in the later 1920s - earlier 1930s. For one example, Seno'o Girō (1889-1961), a radical Nichiren sect priest and the leader of Buddhist socialist New Buddhist Youth League (*Shinkō Bukkyō Seinen Dōmei*, formed on 5 April, 1931), maintained that the early Buddhist principles of the universal brotherly love and "communal society" (*kyōdō shakai*), free of selfish, possessive and acquisitive desires, went even further than Marxism in their struggle against the root psychological causes of the human misery and suffering, and were in complete opposition to the capitalist exploitation, inequality and war (Stephen, 1987:153-171) - the beliefs, which closely parallel that of Han Yongun.

It is also should be noticed that reference to "Christian socialism" in Han Yongun's interview is hardly accidental. Although the hardened ideological attacks by the Communists after *Sin'ganhoe's* dissolution (May 15, 1931) worsened considerably the Christian attitudes towards the leftist camp and its ideas, the 1920s witnessed an upsurge in debates about possibilities of Christian socialism among younger Christian activists - a development, which hardly could evade Han Yongun's attention. Forced to defend themselves against the leftist accusations of being an ideological prop for the unjust social order, painfully aware about the desertion of some young Christian intellectuals into Communist camp (for example, prominent Communists Han Wigön, Pak Hönnyöng and Yun Chayöng had Christian backgrounds) and influenced in no small degree by the writings of Japan's well-known Christian socialist, Kagawa Toyohiko (1888-1960; Bikle, 1970:447-453), often translated into Korean and serialized in the Christian journals of the 1920s, a group of YMCA's student activists led by an An Ch'angho's acolyte, Yi Taewi, propagated a gradualist and non-violent version of Christian socialism. This movement managed neither to assume any

stable organizational form no to reach out to a wider community, but the preaching on Jesus as “non-violent socialist”, on “Christianity as the religion of the weak, and the opponent of militarism and violent domination”, and on the future “society of mutual love and aid”, where capitalists would prioritize workers' interests over profits and the poverty would be eradicated through class collaboration, did leave its imprint upon many urban Christian intellectuals (Chang, 2001:163-172). This trend, as well as deep engagement of more senior Christian leaders, such as Sin Hŭngu (1883-1959), with the ideas of “Social Gospel” in the 1920s (Chŏn, 1971:178-235), were likely to have been influential in prompting Han Yongun into more active search for the Buddhist answers to the Christian alternatives to capitalism's Social Darwinist jungles.

III. Concluding Thoughts - Han Yongun's Troubled Encounter with Leftist Thought and Practice.

Mahāyānist Buddhist with strong philosophic sympathies for both *Yogācāra's* ideas of “consciousness” (*viññāna*) as the only true reality in the world and *Avatamsaka's* teachings of interdependent totality, and a meditation school (*Sŏn*) practitioner, Han Yongun never became either Marxist or “Communist” in the sense of agreeing with the dogmas of “dialectic materialism” dominant in the East Asian (and not necessarily only East Asian) Leninist movements in the 1920s-1930s. Politically, he was scathingly critical of the Stalinist religious policies, writing, for example, a long article on “Communism and Anti-religious Ideal” in 1938, where he summarized all the information on the arrests of the religious leaders and activists on “espionage” and “sabotage” charges, destruction of churches, “atheist” propaganda in schools and the restrictions upon the religious communities in the contemporaneous USSR he could glean from Korean and Japanese press, and concluded that the trials might have become the renewed source of strength for the Orthodox faith and its remaining faithful, and that persecutions could only strengthen the religious persuasions of those who really

possessed them before, and awaken the interest in religion among the previously non-religious youth (HYC, Vol.2:281-285). For Han Yongun, anti-religious movement was a truly Sisyphean effort, as religious belief lied somewhere in the nature of the human beings - Communism itself being a sort of modern religion (HYC, Vol.2:278-281). But at the same time, in Korea's own politics Han Yongun was continuously urging the unity of the - predominantly Communist - left and the independence-oriented “uncompromising” nationalist right-wing in the all-important struggle for the national independence (HYC, Vol.1:379-381) and making interesting and productive attempts to define and represent socio-economical ideals of Buddhism in the socialist terms, further building on his 1910s efforts to “reconstruct” Buddhism as a religion of “equality and altruism.” These attempts have much in common with the radical Buddhist currents in 1930s' Japan - which Han Yongun was doubtlessly well aware of.

Glossary of Chinese Terms

(K=Korean, C=Chinese, J=Japanese, S=Sanskrit, P=Pali)

An Ch'angho (K) 安昌浩

Apāya (S) 險, 下, 罪

Arahan (S) 阿羅漢

Avataṃsaka Sūtra (S) 大方廣佛華嚴經

Chin Yǒngch'ŏl (K) 陳榮喆

Chŏnchosŏn ch'ŏngnyŏn tang taehoe (K) 全朝鮮青年黨大會

Ch'ŏndogyo (K) 天道教

Chosŏn Nodong Konjehoe (K) 朝鮮勞動共濟會

Chosŏn Pulgyo Yusinnon (K) 朝鮮佛教維新論

Chungang hangnim (K) 中央學林

Chungang puljŏn (K) 中央佛專

Gāthā (S), Kesong (K), Jiesong (C) 偈頌

Han Yongun (K) 韓龍雲

Hinayāna (S) 小乘

Hwayop'a (K) 火曜派

- Inoue Enryō (J) 井上圓了
Kaebyōk (K) 開闢
Kagawa Toyohiko (J) 賀川豊彦
Kim Ch'ōnhae (K) 金天海
Kim Hagūi (K) 金鶴儀
Kim Kyōngju (K) 金敬注
Kim Saguk (K) 金思國
Kim Sōngsuk (K) 金星淑
Koryō kongsan ch'ōngnyōnhoe chungang ch'ongguk
(K) 高麗共產青年會中央總局
Kukkajuūi (K) 國家主義
Kyōdō shakai (J) 共同社會
Liang Qichao (C) 梁啓超
Mahāyāna (S) 大乘
Meiji (J) 明治
Nichiren (J) 日蓮
Okch'ōnsa (K) 玉泉寺
Pongsōnsa (K) 奉先寺
Preta (S) 餓鬼
Pulgyo ch'ōngnyōnhoe (K) 佛教青年會
Qiuxu (C), Kusok (K) 救贖
Rāga (S) 貪慾
Rūpa (S) 色
Sahoejuūi (K) 社會主義
Śakyamuni (S) 釋迦牟尼
Samch'ōlli (K) 三千里
Segyejuūi (K) 世界主義
Seno'o Girō (J) 妹尾義郎
Sin'ganhoe (K) 新幹會
Sin Hūngu (K) 申興雨
Shinkō Bukkyō Seinen Dōmei (J) 興仏教佛教青年同盟
Shixing (C) 十行
Sōn (K) 禪
Sūtra (S) 經

Svabhāva (S) 自性
 Takakusu Junjirō (J) 高楠順次郎
 Tōyō University (J) 東洋大學
 U Bongun (K) 禹鳳雲
 Vijñāna (S) 識
 Yamarāja (S) 閻羅大王
 Yang Kōnsik (K) 梁建植
 Yi Chongch'ōn (K) 李鍾天
 Yi Kwangsu (K) 李光洙
 Yi Taewi (K) 李大偉
 Yogācāra (S) 唯識
 Zongjinglu (C), Chonggyōngnok (K) 宗鏡錄

Abbreviations

- HYC *Han Yongun chōnjip* (Complete Collection of Han Yongun).
 Vol.1-6. Seoul: Sin'gu munhwasa. 1973.
- T *Taishyō-shinsy-daizōkyō* (大正新修大藏經; Japanese Edition of Chinese *Tripitaka*). Tokyo: Taishō-Issaikyō-Kankōkai.

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