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Ham Sökhön and the Rise of the Dynamistic Philosophy of History in Korea

Halla Kim

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is show the systematic significance and function that the concept of history has in Ham Sökhön's philosophy. Even though he was not the first philosopher of history in modern Korea, Ham enthusiastically presented and argued for the dynamic operation of the goal (*telos*) and force which he calls "*Ssi-al*"—the anonymous grassroots in the context of Korean history. In particular, the notion of suffering plays an important role in his teleological thinking, not by imposing a pessimistic outlook but rather as an integral part of the historical mission assigned to the Korean people. In the second part of the paper, I discuss how Ham applies these fundamental categories to the various phases of the historical development in Korea.

Keywords: God, History, suffering (*konan, sunan*), *Ssi-al*, (historical) dynamism, goal (*telos*), life

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“... we also glory in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope.”

– Paul of Tarsus, The Epistle to the Romans, 5:3

Introduction

Even though Ham Sōkhōn (1901–1989) was not the first philosopher of history in modern Korea, his historical understanding forms the basis of his general outlook.¹ He developed one of the most distinctive philosophies of history, emphasizing the role of teleological principle in the social reality of Korea from an historical vantage point. For him, this point of view is essential to understanding the peculiar identity inherent in the Korean people. Ham excavates and offers a unique understanding of history in Korea, where historical consciousness serves as the *sin qua non* foundation for gaining insights into the nature and origin of the Korean spiritual identity. But this historical development in Korea is not determinist or linear or circular—rather, it represents a dynamic process that gradually inches towards its goal within history. Ham’s philosophy of history, conceived under this dynamist perspective, must then be *prima philosophia*, indeed a propaedeutic to any further studies and reflections concerning the nature of the Korean spirit. What follows is a sketch of the first step toward this comprehensive interpretative hypothesis. In the first section, I discuss Ham’s view on the import of history. In the next section, the meaning of suffering in the entirety of the Korean history is offered. Following this, the third section examines Ham’s notion of Ssi-al as this is developed in history. The next several sections then discuss the development of Korean history in its various stages in light of Ham’s interpretation, while the final section offers a brief conclusion.

The Meaning of History

The main text and the main source of reflection for this essay is Ham Sōkhōn’s major work, *Ttūšūro pon Han’guk yōksa* (A Korean history from a spiritual

perspective).² This provides a vision of Korean history seen from a distinctively dynamistic teleological perspective.³ According to Ham, the entire history of Korea can best be viewed as having been moved by a force that may be described as divinely conceived, and thus both theological and teleological. This view of Ham's derives from the belief that, in the end, there must be a *telos*, an ultimate end or purpose that guides the people through processes in history despite numerous setbacks. Ham thus holds that the various stages of the historical development of Korea all point to a supreme goal where the different aspirations and projects converge and reconcile themselves. In this respect, at first blush the work shows a resemblance to the Augustinian perspective. According to Augustine, history progresses linearly toward its grand purpose, which has been divinely appointed. In this scheme of things, history is generally divided into two eras: the earthly city and the city of God.⁴ The former is dominated by the love of self. This is an era of the earthly time (*chronos*) where things have only a relative value. This is thus the era to which we belong. This, however, cannot be the whole of reality. For the proper fulfillment of its meaning, the earthly life must direct itself to the city of God. This is the era of the godly time (*kairos*). However, unlike Augustine, Ham holds that the ultimate motive force of history is not something located in another world beyond history, and the endpoint in history is not found in the yonder world. It is a hallmark of Ham's dynamic understanding of history that its goal is rather located in the temporal order somewhere down the road within history and as an integral part of it. It is thus the historical process itself that is important for Ham. *Kairos* then must be located and integrated within the structure of *chronos*.⁵

Ham considers history important because he is concerned with promoting life. First of all, history provides stages where life plays out—life develops historically (T 51). Further, history is a whole of which various parts, such as individuals, groups of individuals, and events can be coherently connected. For this reason, history is not a haphazard collection of heterogeneous parts but a unified whole (T 41), and the true life comes only from the whole. A mere part of a whole, as long as it is detached from the latter, does not represent a life in the genuine sense. Finally, life in its natural development, together with its diverse components, “begets history,” as Ham puts it (T 51).

Indeed, being a tireless promoter of philosophy at the center of the human scheme of activities, Ham is firmly of the view that philosophy itself should go back to its original concerns with life. In this respect, his philosophy resembles Friedrich Nietzsche's life-affirming proto-existentialism. Ham constantly attempts to come up with a new path of thought in Korea in a way that brings the historical conditions of life in Korea as well as the historical philosophy of life into relief. Thus, in Ham's view, this perspective also has to be situated in the concrete context of the Korean historical reality.

As far as history is concerned, conventional wisdom holds that facts are its basic building blocks. But a fact is not a fact until it is interpreted. There are simply no brute facts that are completely independent from our point of view. This is true in natural sciences as well as in humanities. In history, too, there is no objective fact apart from the judging subject (T 42). Historical facts are then interpreted facts. But this does not mean they are arbitrary. The subject that gives an interpretation and a meaning to facts cannot be a whimsical, contingent "self." It cannot be a "conflicting, false, private 'self' (나 na)" (ibid.). Rather, it should be a self that is valid for all, a genuine, living self. This view of the self should be authenticated by the collected data and the internal coherence within itself. When you have the right eyes to see, you can excavate the valuable facts that are relevant today. For example, the Sinai manuscript could have been used as kindling, but it was dramatically saved to serve as the primary source for the New Testament. The Rosetta Stone was just a rock with some gibberish engraved upon it until its value was appreciated for the actuality of life in ancient Egypt. A proper fact then must be a result of an interaction between the interpreter and the raw data.

Thus, historical understanding does not simply mean enumerating various facts and remembering them *verbatim*. To know history requires intense labor in thinking (T 39)—genuine activities of the mind. History then must be a product of mental penetration and reconstruction. Only mental activity can discern what is important among the facts of the past from what is not. This then requires a certain perspective or point of view. History is about things in the past, but these can be illuminated only from the present perspective. So, history is not a one-way dictation from the past, but rather a channel of two-way interactions between the past and the present. History then turns out to be

a two-way street between the objects and the mind. In history, the past comes alive because it is relevant to us who live today. And it is relevant because we give meaning to it from the *present* perspective.⁶

But, how do you know which one is a true, valid perspective among all? Was Jesus a rebel in a tiny corner of the vast Roman Empire, or was he a true spiritual leader who ushered in a new era in history? Was Kim Ch'unch'u (604–661), later King T'aejong Muyōl, a founder of the Unified Silla dynasty or a reactionary betrayer and destroyer of the true Korean nation? A genuine historical perspective is one that can be obtained when you transcend your narrow viewpoint and adopt a synoptic stand. It should provide a sweeping point of view where you can have a comprehensive survey of the whole universe and the whole of life. In other words, you have to overcome the narrow self with its exclusive focus on the momentary and immediate (T 47). This then can serve as the springboard for the alpha and omega of all the different viewpoints, i.e., a genuine historical perspective that overcomes itself (T 48). Ham then discusses this under the heading “The Religious Perspective in History” in Part I, Chapter 3 of *Korean History from a Spiritual Perspective*.

Now, as has been amply indicated, Ham argued that history should be viewed teleologically. History cannot be a mere eternal repetition of the same, as Nietzscheans believe. Nor can it be a circular loop repeating itself constantly in the way that Confucians and Buddhists conceive. Further, it cannot be an Augustinian linear development toward a goal. History cannot be a continually degenerative highway to hell, either. Otherwise, there would be no meaning to our lives, no significance to the universe, and no point to history. There must be a progress of life in history. Thus, history must lead to its *telos*, i.e., its ultimate end. This is why history should be viewed teleologically. But this progress is spiral; it involves a conic circular movement that continually goes up toward a goal. Ham thus suggests that to view things in the world biblically means to view things historically from a cosmological perspective (T 51).

This also means that we have to view things in the world from a God's-eye view. History cannot be a series of frozen and detached snapshots of things. Rather, it has to be a dynamic view of reality, a live shot of ongoing, developing reality zeroing in on a certain milestone in the future. History then must involve dialectical movements. History is not a collection of antiquated facts

nor is it a one-sided imposition of will onto the world; it must be a constant dialogue between the present and the past.⁷

In particular, Ham was committed to the view that history is developing spirally (Kim Kyōngjae 2001, 136). At the top of this spiral movement lies Hananim (God) but at the bottom lies the people whom Ham calls “Ssi-al” (씨알).⁸ The dynamical process moving from Ssi-al to Hananim is history. But this is not unilaterally determined by this ultimate end and must involve the work of Ssi-al. It should be constructed by humans. For Ham, Hananim does not interfere with historical events. Rather he “nurtures and leads.” He perfects the universe by means of Ssi-al (T 19). Hananim and Ssi-al are co-workers who are simultaneously responsible for the world.

According to Ham, the eventual purpose of history is to achieve unity or oneness. History is nothing other than a movement of ascent on the part of historical agents towards this unity (Kim Hap’ung 2001, 83). The unity is then the end point of history. This also informs his conception of paradise, or heaven, as a place where unity is achieved. In this paradise, there is no relevant difference or conflict among its members—there cannot be any relevant division or schism there. In the language of the Bible, this is the place of *agape*. And this is the will of God.

As we will see later, his emphasis on historical consciousness is not the only thing that was inspired by the Christian Bible. He also derived his prophetic critical attitude toward any social reality that is less than desirable from the same source. Among all the prophets in the Bible, he thinks especially highly of Isaiah and Jeremiah. Historical consciousness for Ham then is nothing other than this enterprise of critical thinking on and for our own age and within the bounds of the same age.

It is widely agreed that there are three pillars supporting Ham’s history-oriented intellectual edifice: his Korean spirituality, Christian background, and scientism. As for his Korean spiritual perspective, we can point out the influence of Yu Yōngmo (1890–1981). Yu not only taught Ham the belief in Christianity but also the value of the quintessentially Korean spirit.⁹ Being a Christian, a Biblical scholar, and an expert on Daoism and Buddhism, Yu played a large role in imbuing Ham with a distinctively Korean interpretation of Christianity. Ham simply called him “teacher” throughout his life. In this

connection, the influence of Kim Kyosin (1901–1945) should not be underestimated either. It is said that, despite being a devout Christian, Ham loved the Korean spirit more than Jesus. Ham worked as one of the editors of the monthly magazine, *Sōngsō Chosōn* (Bible Korea), which was founded by Kim in 1927.¹⁰ Ham regularly contributed to *Sōngsō Chosōn* from 1928 through the early 1930s. *A Korean History from a Biblical Perspective* (later changed to *A Korean History from a Spiritual Perspective*) grew out of the articles he contributed from this period. Even though Ham was aware of socialism and Marxism, he could not agree with their view that sequential stages of social development could be explained exclusively in terms of economic terms and principles.

In addition, the enormous impact that H.G. Wells' *The Outline of History* had on Ham should not be overlooked. This work gave him a decisive historical and cosmological perspective that formed the basis of his understanding of history. This is how Ham learned to think about Korean history within the broad context not only of East Asian history but also of world history. More importantly, this work gave rise to the scientific outlook in Ham.¹¹ Once, he even suggested that if any position in the Bible were not compatible with science, it should yield to the latter (T, preface). Ham's efforts to reconcile the Bible with evolutionary theory in the spirit of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin should be understood in this light. As Ham himself puts it:

Moreover, having carefully read H.G. Wells' *The Outline of History*, and having been influenced greatly by his ideas of cosmopolitanism and of the role of science, I consider it cowardly to disregard the principles of science for the sake of faith. If a scientist, who sacrifices his personal life and affairs in his struggle for truth, is condemned to hell on the mere grounds that he is not a member of the Church, then I would decide to have nothing to do with such a religion.¹²

Last but not least, we must mention Uchimura Kanzo (1861–1930) and the non-church movement that he initiated. Ham came into contact with Uchimura Kanzo when, led by Kim Kyosin, he began attending Uchimura's Bible study group in Tokyo. Uchimura did not believe in theology and church as an

institution. Relying on the Bible as the only authority, he firmly believed in the personal interaction with God through the Bible. Thus, he was the main progenitor of the non-church movement in Japan and Korea. It is no exaggeration to say Ham was thoroughly under the spell of Uchimura. He once said that “this one man [Uchimura] alone is more than enough to compensate for my thirty-six years of servitude under the Japanese colonial rule” (Kim 1998, ch. 3, sec. 1).¹³ Uchimura famously refused to bow to the Japanese Imperial re-script. He was also well known for refusing to bow to the image of the emperor of Japan, seeing the Japanese emperor as a man, not a living God.

But unlike Uchimura, Ham thought highly of East Asian traditional thought. Throughout his life, Ham constantly sought inspirations from the classics of the East Asian tradition, such as Laozi’s *Daodejing*. Even though Uchimura was a pacifist, Ham’s pacifism derived its main impetus from the Quaker pacifism of the late 1940s. Finally, Uchimura was also a Japanese patriot. He even once remarked that there were two Js in his life, Jesus and Japan. Even though he opposed the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905), he cheerfully accepted the Japanese victory over Russia. Uchimura also never explicitly criticized the Japanese colonialist policy in Korea. Ham was more interested in universal truth than national ideology. Ham was also critical of Korean participation in Shinto rituals (and the worship of Shinto *Kami*) and refused to bow in the direction of the imperial palace, for these were the products of Japanese imperial ideology and cases of religion being used to justify wars of invasion and statism (Jung 2006, 112).

It was obvious to Ham that Christianity as a religion should keep its purity and refuse transformation into a state religion. This is also in line with the basic spirit of the non-church movement. Ham refused to change his Korean name to the Japanese style in the 1940s when the Japanese colonial government in Korea issued a name act. So what was the purity or essence of Christianity that none of its practitioners should ever abandon? According to Ham, it was the spirit of self-sacrifice or martyrdom. “Christianity is a religion of martyrdom, witnessing Truth through sacrifice” (Ham 1983, 7:293). In other words, Ham sought liberation from the suffering on the Korean Peninsula and inner spiritual peace through biblical means, resorting to faith and repentance as well as fellowship (Jung 2006, 113). In his early career in

the 1930s, he was most interested in national independence through the spiritual awakening of the people within the broad framework of the non-church movement without any direct involvement in politics. In this respect, Ham criticized the historical church, especially the institutionalized state church (Ibid., 121). Tolstoy once regarded government as political machinery of institutional violence that could not be compatible with religious conscience. Thus, he did not hesitate to embrace anarchism as his intellectual weapon. However, Ham could not embrace such anarchism. In this regard, he was more influenced by Gandhi than Tolstoy. For Gandhi accepted a role for government and sought political change through activism. As Ham once put, “Gandhi is at the center of the movement for peace in the world” (Ham 1983, 4:14). He also suggested that “Gandhi was the greatest among all modern figures. I have adhered to his non-violence” (Ibid., 5:397). Ham perceived Gandhi’s non-violence as based on God, i.e., on Truth. Yet his non-violence was not passive, but rather a courageous resistance to evil, tyranny, and sin, and part of an active pursuit of social change. In this regard, religion could not be separated from politics, for “Gandhi resolved political problems in light of the religious truth” (Ham 1983, 6:13). Note that Gandhi’s non-violence was centered on people. This suggests that he conceived non-violence as a movement “from below.” For this, Gandhi focused on the education of the people for the sake of popular “self-awakening.” Ham also believed that non-violence must emerge from the spontaneity of the people, which he identified later with *minjung* 民衆 or *Ssi-al*—anonymous ordinary people who, however, are the motive force of history. At the heart of his conception of non-violence is conscience. Ham clearly believed that human beings are intrinsically good, and are able to see and overcome evil. Even a tyrant must possess goodness. Non-violence is thus a strategy in a political struggle against dictatorship, and a vehicle for change in society and humanity.

Now, to understand the status and meaning of history in this distinctively Christian manner means understanding Christianity itself. The Bible speaks of history because it purports to speak of its purpose (T 51). And its purpose consists in helping us to get a hold of life itself, an eternal life that is the source of all beings in the universe. This source is nothing other than God, and the

essence of God is none other than *agape*. Ham says that if one were to summarize the sixty-six books of the Bible in a word, that word must be God—God of grace. He is infinite yet He limits Himself to reveal Himself in the universe and gives life to everything. Such is the meaning of the well-known passage in the New Testament: “He so loved the world that He gave His only son to the world” (John 3:16). God is a “giving tree” that never saves anything for Himself. This love, however, cannot be understood abstractly. Love is a concrete activity of life, not an abstract theory (T 49). Furthermore, it cannot be an undifferentiated love aimed at everybody blindly. In order to understand love, you cannot simply love humanity and do nothing else. To love humanity means to love a concrete individual in the very life that you live daily. Thus to love means to see the whole in a particular individual.

The Meaning of Suffering (*konan/sunan*)

As a middle school teacher of Korean history in the 1930s,¹⁴ Ham reflected thoroughly on the content and development of history in Korea and regularly contributed to the periodical Kim Kyösin edited. A leading question that naturally occupied his mind was: how do you teach young students a truthful Korean history? He could not teach that the “five-thousand-year history” of Korea was brilliant and glorious through and through. That would have been a sheer lie. On the other hand, he could not teach the official version of Korean history—a defeatist conception—that was the view of Japanese colonialists and the main current of the time. A proper history had to be addressed to young, burgeoning minds yet in a way that could elevate their souls and purify those minds. His work on history was designed to satisfy this need. In particular, this was part of his effort to answer the question “why did these people—whose characters are mild and innocent—suffer so much in history?” (An 2001, 59, 61).

According to Ham, Korean history is dotted with failures, near-misses, and miseries. As a matter of fact, he calls the totality of these misfortunes “suffering” (*sunan*) (T 411).¹⁵ So, the history of Korea is the history of suffering. Korea is truly the “queen of suffering” (T 109, 411) as he occasionally puts it.

Sometimes Ham compares Korea to “an old whore sitting on the street” beckoning customers that never come (T 412, 435). Indeed, she is “an old spinster raped by all sorts of bastards,” or “a gang-raped virgin” (An 2001, 62). She is also the “sewer of the world” or “a dilapidated pothole” at the entrance to the main road (Ibid., 60–61). C.D.B. Bryan is said to have once claimed, “[Korea] is the foulest country I’ve ever seen” (Cumings 2005, 459). Ham also characterizes the entirety of Korean history as a “broken axle” or as “disaster upon disaster.” By Ham’s account, Korea has been the doormat of East Asia and suffered invasion by foreign forces on average every thirty years.

But the suffering that Korea as a nation has endured is not limited to physical suffering; it includes intellectual suffering as well. As Ham puts it,

Throughout its history, Korea could not produce a David, Jeremiah, Dante or Milton. In spite of our wondrous nature, we were not capable of nurturing even one Wordsworth. Moreover, despite our provocative history we were unable to give birth to even one Tagore. (T 23)

More important for our purpose, for Ham, the lack of any extant ancient historical records (that is, records from the formative early period, i.e., the Three Kingdoms period, of Korean history, such as the no-longer extant *Paekche-gi* [Annals of the kingdom of Paekche]) was truly deplorable. This was perhaps an indication of the suffering that has been the hallmark of the entire history of Korea, he argues, or could be because those records were later erased from the national memory by pro-China factions.¹⁶ It then appears that in Korea, the poverty of the body led to the poverty of the mind. Finally, Ham argues, Korea’s suffering also includes spiritual suffering. By this he meant excessive reliance on others for the way that one lives one’s life. Many of the terms and phrases in Korea’s language, major festivals, culinary ingredients, etc., owe much to China. And more recently, Korea has relied almost exclusively on Japan for its modern gadgetry in architecture, transportation, and engineering *inter alia* (and now she still seems to show some strong one-sided tendency to rely on the US for its various products).

But this suffering must have a meaning because suffering is the intrinsic feature of life. A life would not be a life unless it contained suffering. Life was originally created out of the *agape* of God and will end with *agape* (T 81.) So the suffering we witness in life is a product of the same *agape*. If this suffering did not have any meaning, then *agape* itself would not have any meaning for us. One's task in life then must be to discover this meaning behind the suffering and to fulfill it, thereby elevating life to a high level of purity. This is true not only of an individual life but also of a collective life, e.g., the life of the nation. In general, the basic line of a nation's history is determined by its geography, people, and, above all, the will of God (T 91). In this, Korean history is no exception. Here Ham gives a thoroughly eschatological interpretation of Korean history. This history is on its course toward a pre-destined salvific stage due to God's inner nature. Hard sciences of nature cannot prove this, but this is about a way we can understand the past from the perspective of the present age. In other words, it is a hermeneutic exercise, or about giving meaning to historical events. In addition, there is also a very strong moralistic dimension in Ham's view of Korean history. Ham considers human beings as not only historical but also moral. Human beings are under the moral jurisdiction of God and they are under obligations to fulfill the missions of their lives by obeying moral commands. The history of humanity is not a progress merely of culture and technology but also of morality, and the human advancement is not just a biological evolution but also a moral and spiritual progress. Ham points out that we are the co-workers of God in history and we are "morally responsible for history" (T 61).

In this scheme of things, God is not only transcendent but also immanent as he works as the "inner voice" of reason (Kim 1998, ch. 2, sec. 2). In this respect, God may be viewed as the source of a complex of ethical commandments. Initially and superficially, the suffering, it seems, is due to the bearer of the suffering in Korean history. It is of Koreans' own making. Koreans had many opportunities to rectify wrongs and retrieve the righteous at critical junctures in their history, but they were simply unable to stand up to the demands of such situations.

Ham occasionally compares the suffering of the Koreans to the suffering of the Israelites or even that of Jesus of Nazareth (Kim 1998, ch. 2, sec. 2). At times Ham even compares Korea to a dismembered Samson in the Old Testament: “We just gouged out our eyes, shaved off our hair, bound our hands with shackles and set ourselves to grinding in the dungeon like Samson” (T 56). In the Old Testament, Isaiah proclaimed the sufferings of the coming Messiah for Israel. But, this is all part of God’s plan to elevate the soul on the part of Israelites: “He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering” (Isaiah 53: 2–4).¹⁷ Likewise, Ham believed that the suffering on the part of the Koreans has a biblical foreshadowing. Thus, Ham suggests, “in terms of suffering which stemmed from Christianity, I see the appearance of Christ [suffering] in the Bible as the appearance of the one nation [the suffering of Korea] in the world’s history” (T 321). Korea then turns out to be a lofty stage on which the drama and the great plots of the Bible are played out. Suddenly, Korea takes on a cosmological meaning and now has a mission to discharge and a purpose to fulfill in history.

Korea necessarily goes through suffering because suffering is the principle of life. Thus, at the center of his spiral, dynamistic view of the Korean history is the realization that Korean history is intrinsically intertwined with suffering. Suffering then is the key concept for approaching that historical reality particular to Korea. Ham’s basic underlying insight is that the entire history of Korea can be characterized as suffering.

Ham does not know from where the suffering originally derives, but he thinks it is clear that suffering is the principle of the way of life in Korea. Nothing is accomplished without suffering in life. As Ham puts it, “suffering cleanses sins... Suffering deepens our life and makes it great... It leads to God” (T 315). It is through suffering that the Korean soul can overcome its parochialism, taboos, and animism to reach the essence, the purity and unity. This is the meaning of history. We can thus see that the conception of suffering in Korean history has an irreducibly biblical origin. Christianity has given a decisive impetus to Ham’s view of Korean history as teleological and eschatological. Despite the past miseries and calamities, this can be clearly overcome.

Indeed, this historical suffering can be actively internalized and integrated into native, built-in resources to serve as a stepping stone towards a new chapter in history. There is no denying that nothing can be done about past suffering. But that suffering now takes on special meaning because it will form the basis for constructive, positive steps forward on Korea's path toward the fulfillment of its purpose. And this is the will of God (T 461). Suffering can cleanse the sins within us. Suffering can deepen our insights into life. In view of this, suffering is a necessary step in the development of humanity (T 465). Despite its past suffering, Korea's future will be rewarding and promising with hope. But this reward is not concerned with material prosperity. This hope is not about military might. Rather, it is about living a life that is courageous and truthful (T 480). This line of thinking is due to the injection of biblical historical consciousness into the Korean context, i.e., the Korean self-consciousness in history. That is the meaning of history, and that is the message of Christianity for the history of Korea. As 2 Corinthians (5:17) puts it, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come." Ham's point is simply that this is especially true of Korea.¹⁸

Finally, Ham's insight about the essential nature of Korean history as suffering comes from his historical perspective. True, Ham was not a conventional historian. In particular, he was not a positivist historian. In other words, instead of describing past events in a chronological order objectively, he was more interested in *interpreting* what happened and how those events happened from his own teleological point of view. As long as his work shows the tendency toward explaining the "how" of the past rather than the "what," he was a historiographer *par excellence*. But, of course, he did not offer any sophisticated theory and methodology in viewing history in any social scientific sense. He gave his prescient view of Korean history like a poet, rather than on the basis of any thorough analysis of source materials. As Ham sees it, his writing on history is "not a study of history but a prayer, an act of faith" (Kim 2008, ch. 8, sec. 16), for it is about the significance of "losers" in history, i.e., those who were unrecognized and underrepresented yet propelled the progress of society, and the role that they played in world history. The historical suffering of Korea was not just due to her political and military feebleness; at its deepest level it carries a biblical significance. Ham suggests:

Herein is our mission; to bear our load of iniquity without grumbling, without evading and with determination and in seriousness. By bearing the load we can deliver ourselves and the world as well. The result of iniquity will never vanish without someone bearing their burden. For the sake of God and humanity we must bear it—the consequences of the world's iniquities are laid on us, and if we fail in cleansing them, then there is no one else to do it. Hence it is our mission, to which only we are equipped. Neither Britain nor America can cope with it, for they are too well-off, too highly placed, to do it. (Kim 1998, 11)

Ham does not know the root cause of this suffering, but it is presented to us as the undeniable reality of each phase of Korean history. Even though the origin of suffering may be hidden behind a veil of ignorance, Ham suggests that it has been assisted by the failure on the part of Korea to discharge her duty, a failure to assume the responsibility of the ages. She lost her spirit and was never able to sufficiently regain it (T 247). This situation was aggravated by the conspicuous lack of proper philosophy, the perspective of the thinking people.

Thus, the concept of philosophy enters into Ham's historical thinking in a formative way. He diagnosed the problem in Korea as that of a lack of philosophy.¹⁹ In particular, Korea fell short of developing a philosophy of its own. This then led to intellectual dependence and lazy reliance upon foreign concepts from Chinese (and later Japanese and most recently English) to describe the experiences of the Korean people. He laments the life of intellectual dependency and reflects on the possibility of a thought reflective of Korea.²⁰ Despite Korea's respectable tradition of scholarly achievement, Ham laments a poverty of thought in Korea.²¹ To Ham, the problem with the learned class was that they merely borrowed and imitated ideas produced by other countries. Most seriously, though clearly cognizant of the national script (*han'gŭl*), they refused to use it, favoring Chinese characters instead. While accepting the contemporary significance of the Chinese classics of antiquity, Ham believed that the exclusive use of Chinese characters was inadequate to express the Korean mind. This is why he encouraged thinking and writing in and with the Korean script. The lack of a philosophical tradition in Korea, Ham implies, is in no small measure due to the lack of written language in

Korea, which was not invented before the fifteenth century and has been relegated to a secondary language fit for the uneducated.

Ssi-al as the Active Agent in History

Ham asserts in numerous places that Korean history has been actively moved by the force of the losers, whom he sometimes calls “Ssi-al” 씨알. What then is this Ssi-al? Ssi-al was originally a term coined by Yu Yōngmo to replace *min* 民, the Sino-Korean word for people, but it was Ham who made extensive use of it, culminating with the publication of the periodical *The Voice of Ssi-al* (Ssi-al ūi sori) in the 1970s. This term refers to the common people from the most egalitarian perspective with strong implications of autonomous and creative agency. “Ssi” 씨 here literally means a seed, and it has the connotation of life or a source thereof. It is also what enables individuals to bear fruit. Individual human beings may die and decay but Ssi does not die, for it expresses life itself (Yu 2001, 36).²² The “al” 알 in old Korean is composed of three components: “a” ㅇ, *arae a* “·”, and “l” ㄹ. Here, the first component “a” denotes the transcendent heaven or sky. The second component “·” means an infinitesimal and also an immanent heaven or self. The third component “l” means the activity or development of life (Ibid.). So “al” altogether means the heaven or sky actively operating within. It is thus a great spirit in us or *atman* that comes from heaven.²³ In other words, it is God who has been internalized within us. It is also an archetype of human nature designed in the image of God. Since it is the vehicle of God’s activities in history, it must be the basic unit and agent of history. In this respect, Ssi-al then is none other than God incarnate in the phenomenal world. God works in history through Ssi-al, and God suffers when Ssi-al suffers. God is not one who stands high above, aloof from the world, but is actively involved in it. Now each individual Ssi-al may be weak but when they work in unity they are able to accomplish many things that had been hitherto unthinkable. So, each Ssi-al is a part whose authentic being is in the life of the whole (An 2001, 37). Ssi-al in this collective sense then must be God busily working in history, interacting with the world. As Ssi-al is temporally subject to suffering in history, God is also affected with

suffering in history. But this suffering now has a meaning because it will eventually lead to ultimate salvation in history.

Who then can exemplify this Ssi-al? A factory worker? A farmer? A homemaker? A teacher? A merchant? Or perhaps Jesus himself? All of these, yet none of these. Ssi-al is a pure human being who is uncontaminated by any distorted indoctrination and false ideology; a being whose original nature, i.e., an archetype of humanity, is preserved (An 2001, 67). Ssi-al in Korea can fall no further because they are already at the bottom. They are innocent, probably naive, perhaps ignorant, and they are incapable because they are easily manipulated by their oppressors (Ibid., 66). However, Korean history belongs to Ssi-al, as they can make things happen and serve as the active force in history (An 2001, 68; Ham 1983, 2:523). Ssi-al is different from the proletariat, who are the product of a feudal system. Ssi-al is the expression of the age of democracy with philosophical and religious implications (Yu 2001, 35). Another name that Ham frequently uses in place of Ssi-al is *minjung*, which refers to the marginalized and dispossessed. You can deceive individuals occasionally, but you cannot deceive the *minjung* (T 188). The difficulty of an era stems, on the part of the leaders, from the lack of achieving agreement or identity with the *minjung*'s interests and feelings. The *minjung* becomes easily excited, but is not exclusively dominated by emotions. It is attracted by economic interests, but not exclusively determined by the laws of economy. The *minjung* consists of *saram*, human beings in search of meaning. A true leader is one who can identify with the *minjung* (T 192). Ssi-al thus represents the self-consciousness of the thinking people.

At the center of Ham's view of Ssi-al is the notion that life consists in "doing on one's own" (Pak 2001, 102). Ssi-al is thus spontaneous, active, and free. In life, there is a constant "drive to create something new" (Ibid., 103). Doing on one's own is not only the principle of life in nature but also the fundamental principle of humanity and history. All the different intellectual traditions in East Asia suggest that life consists in doing on one's own. This view of life can also be found in the Western Enlightenment. Descartes's dictum *cogito ergo sum* speaks of the importance of spontaneous thought in humans. Kant's view of enlightenment also stresses the importance of the escape from self-imposed immaturity. This principle of doing on one's own is

also expressed as an antithesis against any external and intrusive constraining forces (Ibid., 111). Living on one's own is thus opposed to any forces that limit it from outside. But this is a struggle against death (Ibid., 112). This struggle has to be non-violent. Otherwise, both the self and the invading force, i.e., a non-self, will end up destroying each other; none will emerge victorious. The struggle has to be non-violent both for the self and the non-self (T 114). The conception of non-violence was an important theme in Ham's thought, at least since 1947 when he was made aware of the Quaker conscientious objection to war (Jung 2006, 120). The spiritual peace of the non-church movement had now been transformed into Quaker pacifism. This view is in fact based on the Christian Bible. Jesus teaches pacifism in the Sermon on the Mount. As Ham puts it, "Jesus was primarily a peacemaker" (Ham 1983, 4).

In the Beginning: The Starting Point of Korean History

We are now ready to move on to Ham's reflections on the particularities of the historical development as they actually unfolded in Korea. The beginning of history in Korea was flawless. It was a "brilliant start" (T 133). Tan'gun is said to be the founder of the Korean nation. It is doubtful Tan'gun is actually the name of a particular individual. Central Asia appears to be the place of origin for the Koreans as the ancient Koreans were mostly nomadic hunter-gatherers. Later they settled down in southern Manchuria and northern Korea for farming. This mythical place of the original settlement is called Sinsi ("holy city") on Mt. T'aebaek (Paekdusan), where Tan'gun is thought to have originated (T 137). Tan'gun was not only a political leader but also a religious one. The primitive religion of ancient Korea developed in association with Tan'gun was focused on the worship of heaven. "Hananim" (God) in Korean has something to do with heaven. "Han," "khan," "Hwan" as in "Hwanin" in the Korean creation myth, etc., all stem from the same etymological origin. Mountains are integral to the cultural identity of the Korean people.²⁴ The worship of heaven took place in the mountains. Further, mountains were the place they received heavenly blessings, held worship ceremonies, and offered sacrifices. The significance of Tan'gun is that he or his clan well represented

the spirit of unity and self-independence. The entire history of Korea then belongs to Tan'gun and his spiritual ilk. such as King Tongmyōng (trad. 58 BCE–19 CE) the founder of Koguryō kingdom (trad. 58 BCE–668 CE), Koguryō's King Kwanggaet'o (trad. 374–413 CE), Wang Kōn (King T'aejo of Koryō; 877–943), the founder of the Koryō dynasty (918–1392), Myoch'ōng (?–1135), the rebellious Buddhist monk of Koryō, etc., but these are clearly contrasted with the pariahs of Korean history, such as Kim Ch'unch'u (King Muyeol of Unified Silla; 604–661) and Yi Sōnggye (King T'aejo of Chosōn; 1335–1408), founder of the Chosōn dynasty (1392–1910), among others.

The Significance of the Three Kingdoms Period

Silla in the southeast was the most underdeveloped of Korea's ancient three kingdoms (Silla, Paekche, and Koguryō) and suffered frequently from the invasions of the Wa, an early kingdom of Japan, as well as from the other kingdoms of the peninsula. But this disciplined and strengthened her and eventually enabled her to unify the three kingdoms of Korea. Later, Silla accepted and developed Buddhism with the help of pioneers such as Yi Ch'adon, the Buddhist martyr, as well as the philosopher Wonhyō. Buddhism in turn paved the way for the emergence of the Hwarangdo (an elite military youth organization). Paekche in the southwest had an advanced culture and frequently interacted with China over the Yellow Sea and especially with Wa Japan to the southeast. Koguryō in the north had a brilliant founder king in Chumong, i.e., King Tongmyōng, who may be taken as a model for all Koreans, for he was able to sympathize with *minjung* (or Ssi-al) and founded a militarily and culturally strong nation (T 161). Significantly, he founded his nation in southern Manchuria. Koguryō's King Kwanggaet'o in the fourth century expanded the national territory, and Ŭlchi Mundōk in the sixth century capably defended the kingdom against an invading army from Sui China. Koguryō was also the first among the three kingdoms to adopt Buddhism. The traditional native religion of shamanism, with its concern for immediate benefits in the present life, could not provide the strong foundation for a nation with an indomitable spirit. Nor at this point in time could Confucianism provide that

foundation. Only Buddhism, with its emphasis on deep reflection and its power of spirituality (T 169 -170), could provide that basis. Buddhism was thus able to help Koreans create something of lasting value out of meager inputs, and provide fertile ground for later cultural developments.

Despite this achievement, according to Ham, the Three Kingdoms period turned out to be a fiasco. Most importantly, this marks the beginning of the history of suffering in Korea. In the process, the land north of the Ch'ŏngch'ŏn River in northern Korea was lost as well. Above all, Korea lost the old territory of Koguryŏ to foreign powers. Most tragically, Korea lost Manchuria. Silla was able to unify the three kingdoms but she was able to do it only when she invoked the assistance of Tang China. The kings of Silla, in particular Kim Ch'unch'u (King Muryŏl), slavishly resorted to an alliance with Tang China. The unification of the three kingdoms by Silla was thus only a partial success. The Korean nation lost something beautiful. What Ham deplors most was that it opened the gate to a national poison—the slavish imitation of China. Koreans now began to imitate China in all respects. It marks the beginning of flunkeyism. Silla changed its bureaucratic system by adopting the Chinese one. It voluntarily changed people's names to the Chinese style. The people of Silla began to wear Chinese-style costumes. It gave Chinese-style names to its cities, regions, and provinces. Instead of developing its own script, it relied on Chinese characters exclusively. It thus lost the spirit of unity and indomitable independence. This was the self-imposed inability to think for oneself, as Kant later famously describes. But was Silla to blame? No, the spirit of history was lost because Koguryŏ in the north disappointingly failed to stand up to expectations. It was Koguryŏ that represented the spirit of the Korean nation, yet it miserably failed in the end. Had it prevailed, it could have exerted substantial influence over that part of Northeast Asia and also provided a strong presence in terms of peace and respect. Thus, its sudden demise represents the beginning of tragedy in Korean history. Because of this God's original plan for the Korean nation had to change. The unification of Silla, therefore, was not a true unification. Nominal in its substance, it was not really a true unification. That is yet to be achieved.

The Historical Import of Koryō (918–1392)

Ham characterizes the Koryō period as dominated by the politics of “cowards.” However, there is no such a thing as an eternal failure. Even if one errs, one can soon realize it and bounce back—one can rise to the occasion again. For a failure in one’s project is simply the command to do it again, and it is itself the promise of an eventual success (T 181). To Ham, the Three Kingdoms period was clearly a failure (ibid.). It fell far short of its lofty goal. Koryō could have realized its historical mission and pursued the national ideal during its 500-year history. Yet, it miserably failed time and again—like oppressed child-beggars (T 183). It basically inherited the disease from the Three Kingdoms period. It lost itself and did not try to recover from it. Underlying this failure is the lack of self-knowledge and self-confidence. This means the true I that has been lost is yet to be found. As she developed, Koryō showed irresponsible and excessive admiration for things Chinese. Thus, Koryō suffered from the same Chinese disease as had Unified Silla. The vast majority of its politics can be characterized as an outcome of the mentality of reliance on others. We can call it the Korean self-alienation. A true understanding of Confucianism was not a blind subscription to it. Ham clearly and unmistakably praises the Japanese on this score. “If Confucius and Mencius led an army and invaded Japan,” say the Japanese, “we should arm ourselves and fight off and repel the invading army” (T 185). Ham notes that this is the true teaching of Confucius and Mencius. Koreans just failed to realize this. If you lose your identity, it is of no use to subscribe to Confucianism, it is of no use to accept Buddhism. By implication, the same goes for Christianity as well.

The founding father of Koryō, Wang Kōn, inherited the independent spirit of Kung Ye, his former overlord, in naming the country “Koryō” after “Koguryō.” He wanted to distance himself from China and the Khitan, and hoped to recover the lost land in the north. Yet this was not meant to be. There was a sporadic push to uphold this ideal, as one can see in such things as the Buddhist monk Myochōng’s rebellion, but it never really materialized. The government was too weak with the literati bureaucracy. This was followed by a reckless and aimless military government. Then the whole nation was in the grip of the scourge of the massive and relentless Mongol invasion. Later, King

Kongmin revolted against the Mongols and had a noble ambition, and the nationalist General Ch'oe Yōng followed up on this. When Ch'oe Yōng died at 73 at the hands of betrayed General Yi Sōnggye, all of Korea wept for him. It was a solemn farewell to the last bastion of the spirit of Korean independence. He was dead yet not dead. His spirit lived on. But the defeat of the ideal at the hands of Yi Sōnggye left a deep scar and haunted the succeeding dynasty through its entire history.

The Significance of the Chosŏn Dynasty (1392–1910)

Yi Sōnggye (1335–1408), i.e., King T'aejo, failed to respond properly to the call of the *minjung*. Instead, his instinct for political realism prevailed when he seized power through a military coup in 1392. More importantly, lacking any ideological legitimization, he slavishly sought approval from Ming China for the dynastic change. This sense of political reality enabled him to obtain the Ming emperor's nominal authorization of Yi's right to rule Korea. Furthermore, in order to strengthen his ideological basis he suppressed Buddhism, which is of Indian origin and was the state ideology of Koryŏ and, instead, promoted Neo-Confucianism that originated from Sung China. The spirit of *minjung* was doomed from the start. In the ensuing melee among the princes, Yi Pangsŏk, i.e., King T'aejong, emerged the victor. However, during his reign, we see the emergence of the world's greatest map in the *Kangnido*,²⁵ along with other cultural breakthroughs that gained momentum during the reign of his son, King Sejong.

The reign of the next king, Sejong, marks the heyday of Chosŏn. King Sejong understood the suffering of the *minjung* with respect to the difficulty of learning written Chinese. Thus, he invented *han'gŭl*, the Korean alphabet. This was the victory of the spirit of self-awakening on the part of the *minjung*. There were many extensive advancements in the arts and sciences. In the north he prevailed over the Jurchen, and in the south he drove out and ruled over the Wako by controlling Tsushima, the virtual home base of the Wako pirates.

But this was soon overshadowed by the internal blood bath in the royal family—the subversion of King Sejo over the juvenile King Tanjong, in which

the uncle (Sejo) killed his own juvenile nephew in order to ascend the throne. This was the lowest point in the moralistic scheme of things.

The one hundred years of seeming peace in the sixteenth century was a prelude, like the calm before a storm, to a national disaster from the south. Toyotomi Hideyoshi, the warlord of Japan, unified Japan and had the ambition of conquering Korea and China. Under his orders, his generals invaded Korea with an army of 160,000 in 1592, an event that led to great suffering in Korea. The entire Korean Peninsula was quickly overrun by the Japanese and the pitiable king of Chosŏn, Sŏnjo, fled all the way to the border with Ming China, where he pleaded for Ming intervention for the sake of his country. Soon, realizing the gravity of the situation, Ming China sent in massive troops. But it was the Korean people who suffered the most from such catastrophes. Many fell victim to the marauding armies of Hideyoshi. Many more simply starved to death during the all-out war. Occasionally, in order to survive, the starving people had to eat what the Ming Chinese soldiers vomited on the street following drinking binges. Others who were too old or weak to obtain such scum in time just wept, stooping down on the street (T 316). Also, numerous people were killed and had their noses cut so Hideyoshi's army could bring evidence of their bravery and martial achievements back to Japan. Later, these were buried in the nose mound (*hanazuka*, later nominally changed to *mimizuka* the "ear mound" to lessen the apparent cruelty) in Kyoto, Japan. Some had their noses severed while they were still alive and conscious. Why did the *minjung* have to suffer? Moreover, within forty years this all-out war with Japan was followed by the Manchu invasions. These were some of the most miserable times in Korean history.

But Chosŏn Korea failed to learn the lesson from the Hideyoshi invasions. It not only failed to "purify and deepen its national spirit" but also "failed to turn away from the evil ways" (Chi 2001, 228). The Manchu invasion was then the scourge from God.

The sheer misery towards the end of Chosŏn period was beyond description. Ham sees the glimmering hope in the rise of practical learning in Tasan (1762–1836) and others (Ibid.), which was made possible by the flowering of the arts and the development of new forms of Confucianism beginning with T'oegye (1501–1570) and Yulgok (1536–1584) in their respective works. Yet

this was not powerful enough to overcome the barrier presented by the foul political and social realities of the period.

A Glimpse Beyond: Modern History

After a 280-year absence, the Japanese returned to Korea in 1876. In less than thirty years, Korea fell victim to a rapidly modernizing and aggressive Japan. The significance of the Japanese occupation should be assessed properly. Modern Japan influenced Korea in the most fundamental ways, from the most basic manners and customs to the very pattern of thinking and mentality. It is history's irony that Japan, the beneficiary of the culture from Korea in the dawn of her history, ended the Chosŏn dynasty and began thirty-five years of colonial rule over Korea.²⁶ Ham says this was the first time a whole nation was completely obliterated from history (T 389). The closest ethnic kin to Korea was her worst enemy. Koreans had to endure much at the hands of the harsh Japanese colonial government. Liberation from Japan in 1945 arrived like "a thief in the middle of a night" (T 393). It was a gift from heaven. Yet this blessing of liberation by way of the Japanese defeat was a curse in disguise because it quickly led to the division of the nation into two halves. Here was the Korean paradox: Germany was divided because of its responsibility for the war in Europe. However, it was Korea, not Japan, who had to pay for the war atrocities in East Asia. This was another form of curse, another form of suffering on the part of Korea. According to Ham, the joy of liberation also quickly led to a new realization—the paucity of Korea's own spirituality and a widespread mental bankruptcy. The poverty of thought was especially obvious and rampant. "Nothing has changed in the past fifty years," said the patriot Philip Jaisohn (Sŏ Chaep'il; 1864–1951)—once a protagonist in the *kapsin* revolt of 1884—when he returned to Korea from Philadelphia in the late 1940s following Korean liberation (T 412). Yet the only resource that Koreans had was their spirit, their soul. Despite the initial popularity of the new regime in the North under the influence of Soviet Russia, Ham was opposed to the communist dictatorship in North Korea and was soon incarcerated. He then had to escape to the South.

The division of Korea into two halves also led to the Korean civil war in 1950, an unprecedented catastrophe for the Korean Peninsula. This also occasioned the call for the renewed need for Christianity. The role of Christianity in Korea was to awaken the spirit of a lost nation (T 410). Doing on one's own is the principle of life. The Korean War was a test of this truth. The collective failure on the Korean Peninsula was due to the lack of a proper appreciation of freedom and unification. The worst disaster in its entire history, the civil war in Korea gave rise to the gradual but sure sense of self-awareness on the part of Ssi-al. Ssi-al was now aware of its mission on the world stage for the first time in Korean history.

The Korean War was followed by the military dictatorship of the 1960s. Ham now asks, "How do we evaluate the May 16 military coup?" and answers in the negative. In toppling the democratically elected government, Ham points out the wrongness of the motive behind General Park Chung Hee's (1917–1979) military coup of May 16, 1961 of a democratically elected Chang Myōn government. He also protested strongly against the less-than-dignified terms of the Korean reestablishment of diplomatic ties with Japan in 1965. But Ham was most opposed to the military regime of Park Chung Hee by way of non-violence on the principle of antimilitarism. To Ham, militarism could never bring about true peace (Ham 1983, 3:43). The military made frequent use of national security in the presence of the belligerent North Korean communist regime, but it was a mere pretext to maintain its power. For example, martial law was declared in 1971 and Park declared a *yusin* (revitalization) Constitution for the sake of promoting national security.²⁷ The end could never justify the means for Ham. Democracy was all about process, all about respect for the people on the path to truth.

Even though Ham carried the torch of democracy, peace, and human right during the military regimes, the North Korean government constantly presented a challenge to Ham's project. How do we deal with the confrontation with the North? Here again, the Quaker idea of peace and non-violence played a role on the issue of reunification of the two Koreas. Towards a peaceful reconciliation of the South and the North, Ham developed the idea of threefold progression, starting with a non-aggression treaty followed by mutual disarmament, culminating in the two Koreas being invited to work together for complete unification. At first blush, this looks like an ideal without any foundation in reality,

and thus we cannot accept this without revision. Nevertheless, it attracted serious attention from theorists of Korean unification and served as the basis for further discussions on the topic (Jung 2006). For Ham, then, the unification of the two Koreas would represent a major milestone in Korean history. For him, it was incumbent on all Koreans to understand that this history solemnly demands Koreas be united. This is simply the sacred postulate of the present age.

Conclusion

For Ham, the suffering in the history of Korea is occasioned by the failure of Korea to discharge her duty, a failure to assume the responsibility of the ages. She lost her spirit and was never able to recover it sufficiently (T 247).²⁸ Was Ham then pessimistic or nihilistic about Korean history? Does his philosophy of history offer only a dark picture of Korean reality with despair and forlornness? Very far from it. He is a staunch and adamant defender of the positive outlook on Korean history. His philosophical body of work is motivated not only by the historical circumstances of Korea but also tied to what he considered as the future of Korea. This brings us to one constant theme in his thought: the idea of dynamic transformation and the positive outlook on life it affords. The world for him is in constant motion, not just mechanically but also spiritually. He not only advocates the need for a new Reformation but also proposes a philosophical transformation beyond power politics and a life of greed and violence. This transformation hinges upon an unremitting faith in humanity to bring the world out of the disorder and befuddlement created by our blind, narrow-minded pursuit of pleasure and money. That is why he repeatedly speaks about faith even when he discusses philosophy, as in “Life Philosophy” (Ham 1983, 12:219–271). The nation of Korea then cannot sit idly. Under the renewed or rediscovered self-identity achieved in light of the dynamistic historical consciousness, it now has a whole set of lofty missions to complete and an historical purpose to fulfill. Just as Fichte had done to the German nation almost two hundred years before (Fichte 2009, 183–185), Ham can be clearly seen as addressing the Korean nation to actively perform

its sacred duties. Ham then holds that a proper historical consciousness on the part of Koreans must serve as the foundation for the elevation of the national spirit and also for the overcoming of suffering. The worst enemy on the part of historical consciousness at this juncture is not foreign forces, such as China, Japan, Russia, or for that matter the United States, but rather the lack of genuine self-awareness on the part of Koreans themselves. The suffering that Koreans witnessed throughout history expresses their own failure *vis à vis* the ineliminable task of self-awareness. Despite the self-incurred suffering, Ham asserts that Korea has to forge ahead and return to its original historical mission assigned to her by the love and grace of God. Like the prodigal son in the Bible, Korea will be embraced by God no matter how sinful it may have been in the past. The lofty ideal of true self in the collective Korean consciousness is then something that must be overcome by way of fulfilling the mission that God has solemnly set for her.

Notes

- 1 For an examination of the most prominent views of history in modern Korea, see Halla Kim (2016).
- 2 Ham Sōkhōn (2001). Citations of this work in this paper will hereafter be designated “T” for short. All quotations from this work are my own translations. An alternative English translation has appeared as *Queen of Suffering: A Spiritual History of Korea*, trans. E. Sang Yu (London: Friends World Committee for Consultation, 1985).
- 3 Ham began his career as a Christian, but it is clear that by the end of his life he had abandoned traditional Christianity and embraced religious pluralism. See for example, the preface to the 4th edition of *Tūsūro pon Han’guk yōksa* (1965). However, the truth remains that the book as a whole was conceived and written under the strong influence of Christian orthodoxy.
- 4 See for instance, Augustine’s *The City of God*, Book XIX.
- 5 Further, as we shall see in the next section, for Ham, history is progressive but not linear. He rather holds a spiral conic view, which is what I call a historical “dynamistic” view.
- 6 Benedetto Croce even suggests that all true history is contemporary history.
- 7 See E.H. Carr (1974). For Toynbee, it is a process of challenges and our response to them.

- 8 We will discuss this concept in depth later in this paper.
- 9 To Sin Ch'aeho (1880–1936), nationalism was the idea whereby one nation was not subordinate to the intervention of another nation. In this sense, nationalism is in fact what gives a nation its distinctive identity.
- 10 For Kim Kyosin's work on *Bible Korea*, see Kenneth M. Wells (2001). For the background to his thought, see Yang (2013).
- 11 This scientist's view of Ham must be distinguished from the kind of scientism espoused by positivist philosophers. For Ham, the latter view is a disease to be treated since it reflected a wrong-headed philosophy. In fact, it exposed the ills of contemporary Western civilization. Ham is well-known for his antagonism toward what contemporary philosophy had become, a purely polemic, argumentative, and narrow-minded scientism found in the West today.
- 12 "Kicked by God" (Hanūnim palgile ch'aeyō) in Ham (2009, 19). This was a talk originally delivered before the Seoul Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends in Korea in 1969.
- 13 The "thirty-six years of humiliation" refers to the period during which Japan controlled Korea (1910–1945).
- 14 He majored in history at Tokyo Teacher's University and began his career as history teacher at his alma mater Osan High School in North Korea in the early 1930s.
- 15 Note that Ham does not deny that there were glorious moments in Korea's history. What he suggests is those parts of its history catered more to the interests of the ruling class and their allies. The history of suffering should be reserved for the common people, i.e., Ssi-al.
- 16 The oldest extant history of Korea is Kim Pusik's *Samguk sagi* (History of the Three Kingdoms; 1145). Kim (1075–1151) was a prominent example of a pro-Chinese historian.
- 17 Scriptural quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version (2011).
- 18 Further, the conception of history derives additional impetus from Fujii Takeshi, a contemporary of Ham and also a student of Uchimura Kanzo. Fujii holds that history is the product of labor. See Chi (2001, 208).
- 19 Ham, "Saenghwal ch'ōrhak" (Life philosophy), in Ham (1983, 12:242).
- 20 "Saenara kkumt'ūlgōrim" (Birth of our nation), in Ham (1983, 2:237).
- 21 Ham, "Salim sari" (Livelihood), in Ham (1983, 2:301); Ham (1987, 87).
- 22 Yu Tongsik (2001, 36); Ham, "Ssi-al ūi che sori" (The own voice of Ssi-al), in Ham (1983, 8:273). See also, Plato's *Phaedo*.

- 23 Ham, “Saenggakhanün Ssi-al iraya sanda” (Only thinking Ssi-al can live), in Ham (1983, 8:56). See also, “Saenggakhanün paeksöng iraya sanda” (Only thinking people will live), in Ham (1983, 14:109–123).
- 24 Even a cursory examination of Kim Chönggho’s map, “Taedong yöjjido,” will confirm this.
- 25 See, for example, Halla Kim (2012).
- 26 According to Yi Öryöng (1994), the Korean cultural pioneers dispatched to the early kingdom of Wa played virtually the same role as the Western advisors to the Meiji government in the history of modern Japan. This book is a sequel to Yi’s original *Ch’ukso chihyang üi ilbon* (2003 [1982]).
- 27 The same Chinese characters were used for Yusin as for Japan’s Meiji restoration of 1868.
- 28 As is well-known, Ralph Waldo Emerson distinguishes such thinkers from “Man Thinking.” The latter is one for whom thinking, or thinking for oneself, was an essential part of being a new American. Language is important to Emerson’s “Man Thinking” to the extent that each age must write its own books, rather than being held hostage to the books of the past. Emerson’s new thinker, therefore, was a writer, whereas Ham’s new thinker was a speaker.

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