

Life, Ecology, and Theo-tao: Towards a Life Theology of Theanthropocosmic Tao

Ecological crisis was a great *koan* (an evocative question) for contemporary Christian theology. A scholar worried, “If current trends continue, we will not.”¹ Thomas Berry raised a serious question, “Is the human viable species on an endangered planet?” Furthermore, Lynn White criticized that, emphasizing divine transcendence and endorsing human “domination” over nature, Christianity has offered the “historical root” of the ecological crisis. Despite his defective knowledge of Christian theology, White made an important observation: “What people do about their ecology depends on what they think about themselves in relation to things around them. Human ecology is deeply conditioned by beliefs about our nature and destiny—that is, by religion.”² In fact, this statement of a scientist evoked scholars and theologians to reexamine Christian traditions and seek alternative resources in other religions.

Liberation (social justice), dialogue (world religions), and ecology (life) are regarded as the three most significant themes for Christian theology in the twentieth century.³ Various liberation, political, feminist/womanist, black, third-world, minjung theologies argued that liberation and orthopraxis are primary but neglected motives for Christian theology owing to the White, male, middle-class privatization of Christianity on the pretext of orthodoxy. Having realized values of world religions, Western theologians began to appreciate the wisdom of ‘other’ religions by means of interreligious dialogue, theology of religions, comparative theology, or religious pluralism. Nonetheless, late twentieth century contextual and constructive theologies lingered on in the division of these two major camps, the theology of religions (inculturationist) and liberation theology (liberationist), failing to surmount the inherited Greek dualism between *logos* (theory) and *praxis* (practice).⁴

The ecological crisis offered a common *koan* for theologians in this division. Western religious scholars and theologians have strived to find alternative means to overcome the ‘autism’ of Western religions in the interaction with the natural world.

¹ Daniel Maguire, *The Moral Core of Judaism and Christianity: Reclaiming the Revolution* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1993), 13.

² Lynn White, Jr., “the Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis,” *Science* 155 (1967), 1203-7; 1204.

³ See Peter Hodgson, *Winds of the Spirit: A Constructive Christian Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), esp. Part 2.

⁴ See Heup Young Kim, *Christ and the Tao* (Hong Kong: Christian Conference of Asia, 2003), 135-8, 155-9.

In the series foreword of *Religions of the World and Ecology*, Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim wrote, “[W]e are currently making macrophase change of the life systems of the planet with microphase wisdom. Clearly, we need to expand and deepen the wisdom base for human intervention with nature and other humans. This is particularly true as issues of genetic alternation of natural processes are already available and in use. If religions have traditionally concentrated on divine-human and human-human relations, the challenge is that they now explore more fully divine-human-earth relations.”⁵ Having realized the problems of anthropocentric ethics and worldviews in Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam), Western scholars begin to pay attention to eco-friendly and life-affirming East Asian religions.

Harvard University’s Center for the Study of World Religions organized an important conference on Christianity and ecology.⁶ Most of Western theologians in the conference agreed that three theological revisions are necessary to construct proper Christian ecotheology (e.g., Elizabeth Johnson, Sallie McFague, Mark Wallace); a shift of the fundamental vision from anthropocentrism to cosmo- or earth-centricism, a revision of theological metaphors and symbols, and a shift of the focus from orthodoxy and christology to orthopraxis and pneumatology. Ye, in spite of these valid revisions, Western ecotheologies so conceived seem to have not suitably overcome the inherited habit of Greek anthropomorphism.⁷ It might be too much to expect Westerners accustomed to personifying God in human form to fully transcend this deeply embedded inclination.

Therefore, to construct ecotheology or the theology of life would be rather a mission bestowed to East Asians who are not so much addicted to a narcissistic attachment to the human body, but instead more interested in keeping harmony with nature such as mountains, waters and trees (cf. Greek sculptures and East Asian landscapes). Grounded on “the harmony and symbiosis of humanity and things,” Korean thought is particularly ecological and life-affirming.⁸ Korean and East Asian religious thoughts can be profound resources for Christian ecotheology, but Christian theology needs an East Asian enlightenment to utilize them. Furthermore, the *Yang* Christianity developed in the soil of the anthropomorphic Greek culture and flourished

⁵ Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim, “Series Foreword,” in *Christianity and Ecology: Seeking the Well-Being of Earth and Humans*, ed. by Dieter T. Hessel and Rosemary Radford Ruether (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), xxiv.

⁶ The conference was held in Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA, 16-19 April 1998. Proceedings were published in *Christianity and Ecology*.

⁷ See Gordon D. Kaufman, “Response to Elizabeth A. Johnson,” in *Christianity and Ecology*, 23-27.

⁸ Hee-byung Park, *Hankook ūi Sangtae Sasang (The Ecological Thought of Korea)* (Seoul: Dolbaegye, 1999), 35.

for two millennia seems to have arrived at its limit, and a paradigm shift toward the *Yin* Christianity is in progress. The late Bede Griffiths said well:

This may sound very paradoxical and unreal, but for centuries now the western world has been following the path of *Yang* of the masculine, active, aggressive, rational, scientific mind and has brought the world near destruction. It is time now to recover the path of *Yin*, of the feminine, passive, patient, intuitive and poetic mind. This is the path which the *Tao Te Ching* sets before us.⁹

In this paper, I will propose three East Asian alternatives with reference to the revisions of Western ecotheology (vision, metaphor, and focus); a theanthropocosmic vision, a theo-tao (tao), and a pneumatociocosmic biography of the exploited life. In sum, (1) I advocate adapting a theanthropocosmic vision, East Asian triadic worldview in organismic unity of Heaven, Earth, and Humanity, as the foundation of ecotheology. (2) I propose constructing a new paradigm of theology, theotao, by changing the theological root-metaphor, from two Western metaphors--the logos and the praxis--to the lie-affirming East Asian metaphor, the tao. And (3) I suggest focusing on a pneumatociocosmic biography of the exploited life in the planet, pneumatologically and ecologically expanding the notion of sociobiography of minjung.

I. Theanthropocosmic Vision.

First of all, I advocate that a theanthropocosmic vision be adopted as the foundation of Christian theology in the ecological age. Heavily influenced by the tradition of salvation history and modern historical consciousness, theology became anthropocentric and history-centered. For the last five hundred years, the earth, nature, and the cosmos, “got lost” in Christian theology with an exclusive focus on God and the human self. In this situation, the ecological disaster in fact has awakened Western theologians to realize the devastating results of “such amnesia about the cosmic world” and become eager to find creation in the Christian tradition.¹⁰ Nevertheless, the inherited Western habit of dividing (‘either-or’) seems to be problematic again, selecting either God or Earth, or either humans or nature. However, God, Earth (the cosmos), and Humanity compose a

⁹ Bede Griffiths, selected and introduced, *Universal Wisdom: A Journey Through the Sacred Wisdom of the World* (San Francisco: HarperSanfrancisco, 1994), 27-8.

¹⁰ Elizabeth Johnson, “Losing and Finding Creation in the Christian Tradition,” in *Christianity and Ecology*, 4.

triad, an ontologically indivisible reality. True humanity can be realized only through the right relationship with God and the earth. A theanthropocosmic vision refers to this triadic communion of God, the cosmos, and humans.

As North American ecofeminist theologian Elizabeth Johnson elaborated, the loss of the creation or the amnesia of the earth is a modern phenomenon that had not happened for the first fifteen hundred years of Christianity. First of all, both “the Jewish and Christian scriptures honor the religious value of the earth.” The Jewish scriptures speak of the earth filled with the glory of God. The Christian scriptures are obviously “earth-affirming,” as it is expressed in the notions of incarnation, resurrection of the body, eucharistic sharing, and eschatological hope. Early and medieval theologies dealt with humanity in association with the natural world as the common creation of God. “God-world-humanity: these form a metaphysical trinity.” “[C]osmology, anthropology, and theology of God formed a harmonious unity” (e.g., Hildegard of Bingen, Bonaventure, and Aquinas).¹¹ Hence, the theanthropocosmic vision is nothing new but an original vision of Christian theology.

Nevertheless, both Catholic and Protestant theologies “focused on God and human self, leaving the natural world to the side.” The Reformation’s doctrines of Christ alone, faith alone, grace alone, and scripture alone made Protestant theology and subsequently Catholic theology “an intensively anthropocentric turn.” “The center of gravity shifts to the human subject.”¹² However, the thoughts of reformers like John Calvin were in fact affirmative toward nature, endorsing it as the inscribed locus of the divine glory. The antinatural views of modern science, philosophy, and history accelerated this shift. Francis Bacon proudly declared, “Nature with all of her children to bind her to your service and make her your slave.”¹³ The Cartesian idea of the self and the Kantian turn to the subject “divorced” the human person (the internal, active subject) from nature (the external, passive object). The modern emphasis of history reinforced this division. History (actual events in linear time) was regarded as the locus of God’s salvific work, whereas nature (cyclical time) was seen as the realm of paganism. Most of twentieth century theologies such as existentialist theology, neo-orthodoxy, political theology, and early liberation theologies did not take creation seriously.

At last, the ecological crisis has awakened Western theologians “to incorporate the natural world as part or even the center of their work.” Geocentric, unchanging, hierarchical medieval cosmology and deterministic, mechanistic modern worldview are

¹¹ Johnson, 5-6. See also 6-8.

¹² Johnson, 8-9.

¹³ Francis Bacon, *The Masculine Birth of Time*, recited in Johnson, 10.

inaccurate views. Rather, the natural world discovered by contemporary science is “surprisingly dynamic, organic, self-organizing, indeterminate, chancy, boundless, and open to the unknown.” Furthermore, the “rape of the earth” has a close link with “male hierarchy over women and nature,” that is “violent sexual conquest of women, and of virgin forest.” Accordingly, Johnson argued for an ecofeminist approach: “To be truly effective, therefore, conversion to the earth needs to cut through the knot of misogynist prejudice and shift from the worldview of patriarchal hierarchy to a holistic worldview of relationships and mutual community.”¹⁴

Ecofeminist theology is without doubt an important contemporary theological movement with rightful correctives to Western theologies. However, from an East Asian perspective, it is still questionable whether ecofeminist theology can fully transcend the inherited habit of an ‘either-or’ way of thinking (either anthropocentrism or cosmocentrism) or monistic dualism (not unrelated to essentialism, substantialism, and reductionism, though ecofeminist theology tries to avoid them). By monistic dualism, one cannot achieve a genuine holistic, mutual, and reciprocal mode of relationship (cf. Tillich’s analysis of monism and dualism). A theanthropocosmic vision presupposes an entirely different paradigm that is ‘both-and,’ pluralistic (triadic) and concentric. The history of world religions presents three great religious visions; namely, ancient cosmocentrism, medieval theocentrism, and modern historico-anthropocentrism (R. Panikkar).¹⁵ However, all of these are inaccurate, one-sided, reductionistic views (monocentrism) of the reality. On the contrary, God, humans, and the cosmos constitute three inseparable and concentric axes of the one reality. Early and medieval theologies presupposed this theanthropocosmic (or cosmotheandric) vision. Moreover, the genius of the doctrine of the Trinity lies in the capacity that enables to articulate the pluralistic and concentric reality of Triune Godhead beyond Greek monistic dualism.¹⁶

Since the beginning of their history, Korean people have believed in the triadic reality of Heaven, Earth, and Humanity, by calling it the Trinity (三才) or the Triune Ultimate (三極). The ideographic structure of Korean language prominently embodies this triadic vision. It also appears saliently in the trigrams and the hexagrams of *I-ching*, a foundation of East Asian thought.¹⁷ In this regard, Confucian scholar Cheng Chung-ying made an illuminating suggestion:

¹⁴ Johnson, 11, 13, 17.

¹⁵ See Raymond Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience: Emerging Religion Consciousness* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1993).

¹⁶ See Hodgson, *Winds*, esp., 45-50, 109-10.

¹⁷ See Hellmut Wilhelm, *Heaven, Earth, and Man in the Book of Changes* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1977).

The concept of the trinity is derived from Christian theology, in which God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit form a triad and yet are considered one, though as three positions within one. As this trinity is historically soteriological, the question of how a trinity may be applied to cosmology, ecology, and ethics is a subtle and challenging question. . . . [W]e might see God the Son as the ideal human, God the Father would be Heaven (the creative spirit), and God the Holy Spirit the earth (the receptive co-spirit), or agent of the world which testifies to the accomplishment of the divinity.¹⁸

Furthermore, in Korean Christianity, the theohistorical vision (salvation history) of Christianity encounters the anthropocosmic vision of East Asian religions (esp., Neo-Confucianism). This encounter leads to a fusion of hermeneutical horizons that entails a the-anthropo-cosmic vision.¹⁹ In Korean Christianity, Christian theology, East Asian religions, and ecology meet together. It is an ideal locus to construct a viable paradigm of the theology of life for the third millennium. For Christian theology presents a thoughtful view on God (Heaven), East Asian religions (Neo-Confucianism) offers a profound wisdom on humanity and life (the Son), and ecology (natural sciences) submits the most updated knowledge on the earth (the Holy Spirit). Thereupon, Christian theology, East Asian religions, and ecology constitute the triadic polarities that entail a Triune Great Ultimate (三太極). A theanthropocosmic paradigm of Christian theology can be constructed with these three great resources in a Triune Great Ultimate. These relations may be illustrated as follows:

<i>Triune Great Ultimate of Theotao</i>					
Christian Theology	<i>Theos</i>	Heaven	<i>Ki (Ch'i, Pneuma)</i>	Father	Emancipation
East Asian Religions	<i>Anthropos</i>	Human (Life)	<i>Society</i>	Son	Dialogue
Ecology (Natural Sciences)	<i>Cosmos</i>	Earth	<i>Cosmos</i>	Holy Spirit	Ecology
<i>Theanthropocosmic Vision</i>			<i>Pneumatosociocosmic Biography</i>		

II. Tao Paradigm of Theology: Theo-tao.

¹⁸ Cheng Chung-ying, "The Trinity of Cosmology, Ecology, and Ethics in the Confucian Personhood," in *Confucianism and Ecology: The Interpretation of Heaven, Earth, and Humanity*, ed. Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Berthrong (Harvard University Press, 1998), 225.

¹⁹ Simply, the anthropocosmic vision refers to the Confucian idea of the unity of Heaven and humanity, whereas the theohistorical vision means the Protestant view of salvation history. For the anthropocosmic vision, see Tu Wei-ming, *Centrality and Commonality: An Essay on Confucian Religiousness*, rev. ed. (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989). For the fusion of these two hermeneutical horizons, see Heup Young Kim, *Wang Yang-ming and Karl Barth: A Confucian-Christian Dialogue* (Durham: University Press of America, 1996), esp., 175-180.

Secondly, I argue that theo-tao should be a paradigm of Christian theology for the third millennium. Theotao searches for the theanthropocosmic Tao, the Way of the Triune Great Ultimate where the Heavenly way (天道), the human way (人道), and the earthly way (地道) are united as one. It seeks the way to embody the trinity of theology, life, and ecology through profound insights of Christianity, East Asian religions, and natural sciences. Therefore, theotao is a theology of learning how to participate in this holistic trajectory, i.e., the theanthropocosmic Tao.

The dominant root-metaphor of Christian theology for the last two millennia, logos, seems to have reached a limit. Having rooted in the Greek hierarchical dualism, it was moreover reduced to technical reason by the influence of modernism. Logos has become an inappropriate root-metaphor for ecotheology. Thus, instead, I argue that tao should be the new root-metaphor of Christian theology of life. First of all, tao is “the most life affirming” root-metaphor.²⁰ Further, tao is more biblical than logos. For Jesus said, “I am the way, truth, and life” (Jn 14:6a), that is say, the ultimate way (tao) of life. Jesus did not identify himself as the incarnate logos but as the tao toward God (Jn. 14:6b). Furthermore, the original title for Christianity in Greek was *hodos* (way) that was translated as tao in the Korean Bible (Acts 9:2; 19:9; 22:4; 24:14, 22).

I coined the term theo-tao (tao) to contrast with the traditional theo-logy (logos) and its modern alternative, theo-praxis (praxis).²¹ As its Chinese character consists of two ideographs, meaning ‘head’ (being) and ‘vehicle’ (becoming), tao means both the source of being (logos) and the way of becoming (praxis). It denotes the being in becoming or the logos in transformative praxis. Tao does not refer to an option of either-or, but embraces the whole of both-and. It does not force one to stay at the crossroad of logos (being) and praxis (becoming), but actualizes one to participate in a dynamic movement to be united in the cosmic track. The tao as the ultimate way and reality embodies the transformative praxis of the sociocosmic trajectory of life in the unity of knowing and acting.

If theo-logy is a perspective from above and if theo-praxis is that from below, then theo-tao is a perspective from an entirely different dimension, theanthropocosmic intersubjectivity. Theotao as a theology of life is neither logos-centric (knowledge) nor praxis-centric (action), but tao-centric (so to speak, *sophia* in action). Theotao can

²⁰ In the series forward of *Religions of the World and Ecology*, Mary Everly Tucker and John A. Grim stated, “The East Asian traditions of Confucianism and Taoism remain, in certain ways, some of the most life-affirming in the spectrum of world religions” (“Series Forward,” xxvi).

²¹ Heup Young Kim, “A Tao of Asian Theology in the 21st Century,” *Asia Journal of Theology* 13:2 (1999), 276-93; idem, *Christ and the Tao*, 135-54.

be reduced neither to an ortho-doxy (a right doctrine of the church) nor to an orthopraxis (a right practice in history), but should embrace holistically the right way of life (ortho-tao), the transformative wisdom of living in a theanthropocosmic trajectory. What theotao pursues is neither only a metaphysical debate for church doctrines nor exclusively an ideological conscientization for social action, but a holistic way of life. The key issue is whether we are in proper communication with the Spirit to participate in the loving process of theanthropocosmic reconciliation and sanctification.

While orthodoxy emphasizes faith and while orthopraxis underscores hope, orthotao focuses on love (I Cor. 13:13). Whereas the primary theme of the traditional theology is the epistemology of faith and whereas that of the modern theopraxis is the eschatology of hope, the cardinal theme of theotao is the pneumatology of love. If the classical definition of theology is the *faith-seeking-understanding* (*fides quaerens intellectum*) and if that of theopraxis is the *hope-seeking-practice*, then theotao takes the definition of the *love-seeking-tao*. Whereas theology (God-talk) focuses on the right understanding of the Christian doctrines and whereas theopraxis (God-walk) does on the right practice of the Christian ideologies, theotao (God-live) searches for the way and wisdom of Christian life.

In fact, the actual teachings of Jesus were not so much an orthodox doctrine, a philosophical theology, a manual of orthopraxis, or an ideology of social revolution, but the tao of life and living. Jesus Christ cannot be divided between the historical Jesus (theopraxis) and the kerygmatic Christ (theology). Following the first Korean Catholic theologian Yi Pyŏk (1754-1786), theotao conceives Christ as the crossroad of the Heavenly Tao and the human tao; that is to say, the theanthropocosmic Tao (neither Christo-logy nor Christo-praxis, but Christo-tao).²² Christotao comprehends Jesus Christ as both the Tao of crucifixion--the way of theanthropocosmic reconciliation--and the Tao of resurrection--the way of theanthropocosmic sanctification-- that teaches us how we, cosmic sojourners, can live fully human in solidarity with other cosmic co-sojourners, particularly with the fullness of other exploited lives.

Ryu Young-mo (1890-1981), a seminal Korean Christian thinker, conceived the cosmogonic Christ from the deepest heart of the East Asian hermeneutical universe of tao. He believed that, in Christ, the Non-Ultimate (or the Ultimate of Non-being) and the Great Ultimate (*T'ai-chi*, *T'aegŭk*) become one. In Neo-Confucianism (Chou Tun-i), this unity denotes the ultimate complementary and paradoxical opposites of the

²² For Yi Pyŏk, see Jean Sang Ri, *Confucius et Jesus Christ: La Premiere Theologie Chrestienne en Coree D'apres L'oeuvre de Yl Piek lettre Confuceen 1754-1786* (Paris: Editions Beauchesne, 1979). For christotao, see Heup Young Kim, "Toward a Christotao: Christ as the Theanthropocosmic Tao," *Studies In Interreligious Dialogue* 10:1(2000) 5-29; also idem, *Christ and the Tao*, 153-82.

ineffable Vacuity (the Non-Ultimate) and the Cosmogony (the Great Ultimate).²³ From the vantage point of this supreme cosmogonic paradox, Ryu understood “the cross as both the Non-Ultimate and the Great Ultimate . . . Jesus is the one who manifested the ultimate in Asian cosmology. Through the sacrifice of himself, he achieved genuine humanity (*jen*). That is to say, by offering himself as a sacrifice, he saved the human race and opened the kingdom of God for humanity.”²⁴

Further, Ryu articulated the cross as “the blood of the flower” (*kkotpi*) through which the Son reveals the glory of the Father and the Father the glory of the Son.²⁵ Seeing the blossom of this flower of Jesus (at the cross), he envisioned the glorious blossom of the cosmos (cosmogony). For Ryu, “the cross is a rush into the cosmic trajectory, resurrection is a participation in the revolution of the cosmic trajectory, and lighting up the world is the judgment sitting in the right-hand side of God.”²⁶ Hence, according to him, the Crucifixion and the Resurrection of Jesus Christ do not refer to a narrow story about God’s saving work exclusively for a species of *homosapiens* in the linear history in a tiny planet of the solar system, the Earth. On the contrary, these events signify a grand narrative of theanthropocosmic drama that Jesus, true humanity, has successfully penetrated into the cosmic trajectory to achieve the cosmotheandric union, lightening up the entire universe, and thus becoming the christic tao of true life (cf. Col. 1:16-7, Jn 1:3).

Furthermore, according to Ryu, the Crucifixion and the Resurrection are events that make the Being in Non-Being. Western christologies, preoccupied by being (substantialism), neglect this dimension of non-being. In fact, the core of christology is in this paradoxical mystery of creating the being (resurrection) from the non-being (crucifixion), which is God’s cosmogonic principle (*creatio ex nihilo*). From his vantage point, Ryu formulated a fascinating Korean apophatic christotao. Jesus is the One who “Is” in spite of “Is-Not,” that is to say, “Being-in-Non-Being (*Ŏpshi-gyeshin nim*).” Whereas we are those of non-being-in-being, He is the One of Being-in-Non-Being. Whereas we are the “forms” that are “none other than emptiness” (*Heart Sutra*), He is the “emptiness” that is “none other than form.”²⁷ Christian theology needs to embody this cosmogonic principle of being-in-non-being in order to be

²³ See Chan Wing-tsit, trans. and compiled, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 1963), 463-5; also, Michael Kalton, trans., ed., *To Become a Sage: The Ten Diagrams on Sage Learning by Yi T’oegye* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 37-50.

²⁴ Kim Heung-ho, “Ryu Young-mo’s View of Christianity from the Asian perspective,” Park Young-ho, ed., *Tasók Ryu Young-mo* (Seoul: Muae, 1993), 299.

²⁵ By this Korean word, Ryu expressed two metaphorical meanings of the cross simultaneously. On the cross, Jesus spilled blood like the blood of flower, which is also like the blossoming of the flower (of life).

²⁶ Kim Heung-ho, “Ryu Young-mo’s View,” 301.

²⁷ Kim Heung-ho, *Jesori* [The Genuine Voice: The Words of Ryu Young-mo] (Seoul: Pungman, 1985), 68.

ecological and life-affirming. Here is the significance of the medieval traditions of negative theology (*via negativa*) and *kenosis* (emptiness).

Tao-te ching describes tao with basically feminine metaphors: “mother of all things,” “the root,” “the ground” (of Being), or “the uncarved block” (the original nature). Tao is called “the mystical female”: “The spirit of the valley never dies. It is called the mystical female. The gateway of the mystical female is called the root of Heaven and Earth” (*Tao-te ching*: 6). “Can you play the role of the female in the opening and closing the gates of the Heaven?” (10).²⁸ This feminine vision is based on *Lao-tzu*’s principle of “reversal.” *Lao-tzu* always put the preferential option to the strategy of *yin* rather than that of *yang*.²⁹ This *yin* principle of reversal is closely connected with the principle of return. “Attain complete vacuity, maintain steadfast quietude. All things come into being, and I see thereby their return. All things flourish, but each one returns to its destiny. To return to destiny is called the eternal (Tao). To know the eternal is called enlightenment” (16).³⁰ The principle of reversal and radical return entail the spirituality of tao with the paradoxical power of weakness and emptiness.

III. Pneumatociocomic Biography of the Exploited Life.

Thirdly, I suggest that theotao, as a theology of life in this age of ecological crisis, should take this spirituality of tao seriously. In order to resist merciless processes of genocide, biocide, and ecocide, theotao needs to be equipped with a strong Christian spirituality that embodies the principle of radical return and reversal with the paradoxical power of weakness and emptiness. Through his life-act, Jesus Christ taught us this spirituality of tao. The life saving mystery of His resurrection entails a Christian principle of radical return (the victory of life over the power of death). At the same time, His crucifixion on the cross denotes a Christian principle of reversal

²⁸ Chan, *A Source Book*, 144.

²⁹ A. C. Graham, *Disputers of the Tao: Philosophical Argument in Ancient China* (La Salle, IL.: Open Court, 1989), 223. Graham contrasted this strategies of *yin* and *yang* in the following chain of oppositions:

<i>Yang</i>	<i>Yin</i>	<i>Yang</i>	<i>Yin</i>
Something	Nothing	Before	Behind
Doing Something	Doing Nothing	Moving	Still
Knowledge	Ignorance	Big	Small
Male	Female	Strong	Weak
Full	Empty	Hard	Soft
Above	Below	Straight	Bent

³⁰ Chan, *Source Book*, 147.

with the paradoxical power of weakness and emptiness (cf. Isa 53:5, Lk 6:20f, I Cor. 1:18). The preferential option (the *yin* strategy) should be placed not only to the poor, minjung, and women but also extended to the wounded ecosystem as a whole including endangered species. In this regard, theotao should focus on sociocosmic biographies of the exploited life, i.e., underside histories of ecological suffering, oppression, and exploitation. With these narratives as a point of departure, theotao can embody the Christian spirituality of reversal and return to execute sociocosmic transformatory praxis, the tao, healing the wounded mother Earth. In Christian faith, this spirituality implies nothing other than the eschatological hope of resurrection.

Kim Yong-bock argued that the social biography (the underside history) of minjung is a more authentic historical point of reference for theological reflection than doctrinal discourses (the official history) superimposed by the Church and in the orientation of Western rationality.³¹ It was an important proposal for Asian theology to realize minjung as the subject of history and a legitimate correction to traditional theology, primarily based on autobiographical (psychological) or church (official) narratives. Nevertheless, its focus on the political history of God and subsequently the anthropocentric history hinders Asian theology to embrace profundities of Asian religious and ecological thoughts. Theotao as an Asian theology includes underside histories of whole life systems on the earth. It needs to thematize a sociocosmic (not only social but also cosmic) narrative of the exploited life, creatively crossing over both the social biography of minjung and the East Asian anthropocosmic vision. It is impelled to tell the story of the sociocosmic network of the exploited life in the light of the spiritual communion of outpouring *sin-ki* [*shen-ch'i*, *pneuma*], a primordial *ki* or vital energy, that is salvific, emancipatory, and reconciliatory.³² Hence, theotao should focus on the pneumatosociocosmic biography of the exploited life.

Kim Chi Ha, a famous Korean poet, wrote an insightful essay, "The Ugūmch'i Phenomenon," that illuminates deeper meanings of *sin-ki* and pneumatosociocosmic biography of the exploited life.³³ To heal his sickness from the long period of

³¹ Kim Yong-bock, "Theology and the Social Biography of Minjung," *CTC Bulletin* 5:3-6:1 (1984-5), 66-78.

³² This term *sin-ki* (Korean transliteration) is composed of two Chinese characters *shen-ch'i*. The first character *sin* (*shen*) has various translations such as ghost, spirit, soul, vitality, and sacred. The second character *ki*, well known in the Chinese term *ch'i*, similar to the Greek word *pneuma*, has also various translations such as energy, vital force, material force, and breath. For the following Chinese terms, in this paper, I use their Korean transliterations to preserve peculiar nuances in their Korean usage:

Chinese	<i>ch'i</i>	<i>shen-ch'i</i>	<i>T'ai-chi</i>	<i>Wu-chi</i>
Korean	<i>ki</i>	<i>sin-ki</i>	<i>T'aegŭk</i>	<i>Mugŭk</i>
Translation	energy	vital energy	Great Ultimate	Non-Ultimate

³³ Kim Chi Ha, *Sangmyung* (Seoul: Sol, 1992), 188-92. For a full English translation, see Kim, *Christ and the Tao*, 138-42.

imprisonment by the military dictatorship, Kim Chi Ha retired to a small city in the southwestern part of Korea. In front of his house there was a little stream. The once pristine stream was now hopelessly polluted by industrial waste. However, when it rained, the situation changed. The rain not only swept out the wastes but also made the water clean again. Moreover, he was surprised to see many small fish swimming upstream against the flood of water! How could such feeble fish swim upward against such a turbulent flow? This act puzzled him.

Through meditation, he realized that such a thing could happen by the work of *sin-ki*. The movement of one's *sin-ki* enables one to be aware of the *sin-ki* of others. When the *sin-ki* of a feeble fish becomes united with that of water, it can swim against even a mighty turbulent flood. Furthermore, as *ki*, "energy," always consists of *yin* and *yang*, the *ki* of water also moves in both directions of *yin* and *yang*. From the exuberant palpitation of the *sin-ki* of many fish in union with the *yin* movement of the water, Chi Ha discovered the key to understanding the mystery of the Ugŭmch'i War³⁴ in which the feeble minjung--literally a multitude of people (in this case several hundred thousands)--fought vigorously against Japanese troops armed with powerful mechanized weapons. Their collective *sin-ki* inspired and empowered the minjung to participate courageously in the movement and to be united with the primordial *ki*, in the same manner as the feeble fish that swim vigorously upstream against the formidable flood to be in union with the *yin* movement of the water. The fierce palpitation of the minjung against the turbulent flood of historical demons is in fact a great cosmic movement united with the *yin-yang* movement of *ki*. Chi Ha called this the ugŭmch'i phenomenon.

The first realization of Chi Ha in this parable was an ecological insight that nature ("rain") has a self-saving power to bring forth life in a fateful environment ("the polluted water") seemingly beyond remedy. He saw a hope for life in this spiritually fragmented and ecologically destructive world spawned by the developmental ideology of modern technocized, commercialized, and cemented culture. A more important realization, however, is that from the tao world he found the clue to transcending historical dualism and the real source of the life energy which outpours such a vigorous vitality to the feeble fish and the minjung in Ugŭmch'i.

This marked a radical turning point for his thought. Chi Ha was the one who had formulated a creative Korean hermeneutics of suspicion from the perspective of *han*, "the suppressed, amassed and condensed experience of oppression caused by mischief

³⁴ The last and fiercest battle during the second uprising of Tonghak peasant revolution that broke out on the Ugŭmch'i Hill of Gongju, Korea, in December of 1894.

or misfortune so that it forms a kind of ‘lump’ in one’s spirit.”³⁵ He argued that minjung must be free from the vicious circle of *han*-riddenness to resolve their *han*. This inspired Korean theologians to formulate minjung theology, and *han* has become a famous idiom of minjung theology. Some minjung theologians went forward to argue that a main task of theologians is to become priests of *han* to motivate and participate in the movement of *hanpuri* (a collective action to release *han*) of minjung and women.³⁶

Chi Ha finally returned to the old tao world. It tells of a paradigm shift in his thought from a Korean version of the dualistic mode of contradiction (*han*) to the East Asian correlative mode of complementary opposites (*yin-yang*). The shift involves his enlightenment to the true source of the tremendously life-empowering force manifested by the feeble fish in the turbulent flood and the multitude of minjung in the Ugŭmch’i War. The key to revealing the mystery of the ugŭmch’i phenomenon is the notion of *ki*, a very East Asian term. Just like *pneuma*, *ki* is not so much dualistic and analytic as holistic and embracing; at the same time, it is both the source and the medium of empowerment. In this phenomenology of *ki*, the East Asian anthropocosmic vision can be expanded to the new horizon in the unity of Heaven (God), Earth (the cosmos), and Humanity through the spirit (*ki*, *pneuma*), namely, “a pneumatoanthropocosmic vision.”³⁷ This pneumatoanthropocosmic vision can cultivate a symbiosis of the life network through the communication of *ki* that fosters the human race’s relationship with other lives more holistically and profoundly.

Neither the logos nor the praxis paradigm fits with this phenomenology of *sin-ki* and fall short of the analogical imagination that it presents. If the polluted flood metaphorically refers to the force of destruction, the feeble fish represent the force of life. Deconstructionism has unveiled that the logosphonocentric paradigm has had more affinity to the force of destruction than the force of life. Rather it has helped the demonic movement of the historical flood, by its involvement with sociological plots such as androcentricism and ethnocentricism and endangering global life by its dualistic fragmentation.

Although the praxis paradigm aggressively resists the force of destruction, it also remains within the limit of narrowly defined historical, social, economic concerns that do not proceed beyond the logic that the force of destruction constitutes. It does not set out a self-sufficient description for the force of life, but ends with a reactionary

³⁵ The definition of Suh Nam-dong, a founder of minjung theology in *Minjung Theology*, 65. Suh’s theology of *han* was heavily influenced by Chi Ha’s philosophy of *han*.

³⁶ See Chung Hyun Kyung, “*Han-pu-ri*: Doing Theology from Korean Women’s Perspective,” *The Ecumenical Reviews* 40:1 (1988), 27-36.

³⁷ For the pneumatoanthropocosmic vision, see my “Asian Theology,” 285-7.

articulation against the force of destruction. Nor does it retain a deep understanding of the complex relation among God, humanity, and the cosmos such as those expressed in the Asian theanthropocosmic vision and the phenomenology of *sin-ki*.

Therefore, theotao needs to thematize a *sociocosmic biography of the exploited life*, creatively pushing beyond a dialectical sociobiography of minjung and an innocent anthropocosmic vision.³⁸ The ugŭmch'i phenomenon is an example of the sociocosmic biography of the exploited life, metaphorically telling the story of the two exploited lives, the feeble fish in the turbulent stream and the multitude of minjung in the Ugŭmch'i War. In addition, *ki* as both spirit and matter offers a clue to the mystery of incarnation. While the birth story of Jesus refers to the pneumatanthropocosmic vision *par excellence*, the passion narratives of Christ tell the sociocosmic biography of the exploited life *par excellence*. Jesus Christ as the theanthropocosmic Tao entails the life-breathing *pneumatosociocosmic trajectory* of the *sin-ki*.

Finally, theotao as a new paradigm of Asian theology in the 21st century invites us to participate in re-habilitating the exploited life, including not only minjung and women but also endangered life systems and the polluted nature, by the outpouring power of *sin-ki*. As the ugŭmch'i phenomenon illuminates, it requires the spirituality of tao that empowers the principle of radical return and reversal with the paradoxical power of weakness and emptiness. A primary task of theotao as a Christian theology in the third millennium is to re-habilitate our planetary and cosmic habitats, i.e., 'our' home (*oikos*) in universe, with the re-visioning of the true com-union among God, humanity (the life), and Earth (the cosmos) and by the outpouring power of the cosmic Spirit, *sin-ki*. Therefore, doing a proper ecumenism for the third millennium demands not just an inter-Christian or an inter-religious dialogue, but a theanthropocosmic communion to embody the transformative praxis in the pneumatosociocosmic trajectory, the Tao.³⁹

³⁸ Kim Yong-bock argued that the social biography of minjung is a more authentic historical point of reference for theological reflection than the doctrinal discourses superimposed by the Church and in the orientation of Western rationality; see his "Theology and the Social Biography of Minjung," *CTC Bulletin*: 5:3-6:1 (1984-5), 66-78. For the sociocosmic narrative of the exploited life, see my "Asian Theology," 285-90.

³⁹ A version of this paper was published in *Windows into Ecumenism: Essays in Honor of Ahn Jae Woong*, Preman Niles ed. (Hong Kong: Christian Conference of Asia, 2005), 140-156.

Abstract

Life, Ecology, and Theo-tao: Toward a Life Theology of Theanthropocosmic Tao

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Rampant ecological crisis is threatening the whole life system on the globe. The sign of time indeed asks us to construct a theology of life in a new key. To meet this request, this paper proposes three theological paradigm changes; (1) a the-anthropo-cosmic vision, (2) a theotao with the Tao as a new alternative root-metaphor, and (3) a pneumato-socio-cosmic biography of the exploited life as a major theme for the theology of life.

In the last 500 years, Western Christian theologies have lost the concern for the creation world by the influences of the Protestant overemphasis on personal salvation and anthropocentric mentality of the Enlightenment ("a turn to the subject"). Western theologians have been trying to correct this mistake by "a turn to the earth" and formulate earth- or cosmo-centric ecotheologies. However, this simple shift of the center of the fundamental vision from humanity to the earth is an insufficient solution for the complex ecological problems. For it is not only a continuation of Greek dualism and either-or thinking, recognized as a primary metaphysical reason to bring this ecological disaster, but also betrays a reductionism and essentialism, recognized as another reason for the crisis. The reality of universe is rather dynamic and relational, consisting of the Triads of Heaven, Earth, and Humanity, closer to the traditional East Asian cosmology. Hence, I argue for a major theological paradigm change toward a theanthropocosmic vision that believes that God, humanity, and cosmos are mutually interrelated but irreducible three axes of universe.

The logos that has flourished and dominated as the root-metaphor for Western Christian theology for almost two millennia now has reached its limit, as postmodernism vehemently criticizes. As feminist theologies have proved, the logos theology is problematic and defective for ecotheology (eg., the ontology of the hierarchy of being). I argue both for the adoption of the Tao, a cardinal East Asian metaphor, an alternative root-metaphor for Christian theology and for a construction of 'theo-tao' (God as the Tao), a new paradigm of theology of life that embraces and explicates properly the theanthropocosmic vision.

Finally, I argue that a pneumato-socio-cosmic biography of the exploited life should be a major theme for the theology of life. In this serious ecological crisis, a theology of life need to be based on a strong Christian spirituality to enable to resist against human selfish mischief in the merciless process of genocide, biocide, and ecocide. It should give a preferential option to the exploited life that include not only *minjung* and women but also the wounded ecosystem and endangered life species. It need to hear and tell pneumatosociocosmic biographies of the exploited life, the ecological stories of suffering, oppression, and exploitation. These narratives should be a good point of departure for a theology of life to explore wisdom with the Christian spirituality of hope and resurrection to execute a socio-cosmic transfromative praxis to healing the wounded mother earth.

Key Words:

theanthropocosmic vision, theotao, pneumatosociocosmic biography of the exploited life, sociocosmic transformative praxis, sociobiography of minjung, Tao, ki, han, Great Ultimate, Non-Ultimate, Kim Chi Ha, Kim Yong-bock