

Holy Spirit and Korean *Ch'i* (氣)

Inter-religious Dialogue in a Postmodern Philosophical Context

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I. Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to engage in an inter-religious dialogue of the Christian Holy Spirit and Korean concept of *Ch'i* (氣) in a postmodern philosophical context. The term postmodernism is difficult to define precisely because there are several opinions about its nature offered by different thinkers. In general, postmodernism refers to two dimensions of it: one seeks to transcend *modernism* in the sense of the worldview that has developed out of seventeenth-century Galilean-Cartesian-Newtonian science; the other, modernity in the sense of the world order that both conditioned and was conditioned by the worldview of modernism.

Postmodernism presents a kind of new perspective deeply embedded with both anti-modernism and anti-modernity by creating a diffuse or synthetic sentiment rather than any common set of doctrines. From a more religio-philosophical point of view, postmodernism is a reaction against the philosophy of Enlightenment and its cultural and conceptual values such as reason, individual freedom, anthropocentrism, and logocentrism. Postmodern spirit challenges the traditional western assumption of a substance-based, dualistic cosmology, ontological determination with expressions of a more flexible, fluid, multifaceted, ever-processing cosmology and ontology.

The major division of the postmodernism involves with two movements: deconstruction and reconstruction. The mode of the deconstruction postmodernism has been mainly shaped by a cluster of French thinker including Jacques Derrida, Michel

Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, and Julia Kristeva.¹ While motivated by a deep skepticism of language and text, they attempt to eliminate the entire modern terms and concepts such as self, subjectivity, reason, universally valid norms and divinity. The mode of the reconstruction postmodernism has been developed by Alfred N. Whitehead, Charles Taylor, and Mark Taylor.² Having distinguished themselves from the deconstructionists, they seek to overcome the modern worldview not by eliminating the possibility of worldviews, but by constructing a postmodern worldview through a revision of modern premises. The major concern of the reconstructionists is not to end up with nihilism but to build up a profound ethical impulses with emancipatory concerns. They pursue to transcend modern values such as individualism, patriarchy, consumerism, militarism, and androcentrism by supporting the ethic, ecological, feminist, pacifist and other liberating movements of our time.

In order to engage in a dialogue between the Holy Spirit and *Ch'i*, the focus of this dialogue will be on the major features of the reconstruction postmodern philosophy particularly for its methodological concern. The method of this dialogue is a *process panentheism* proposed by process theologians and philosophical thinkers. To open up the dialogue, I shall look at Jürgen Moltmann's Holy Spirit as an example of Western Christian panentheism and Suun Choe Je-u's³ (thereafter Suun) concept of *Ch'i* in *Donghak* (東學) tradition as an example of Korean panentheism. Both of them, in my view, are much closer to the reconstruction postmodernist position, and especially Suun's panentheism can be viewed as a Korean version of process thought. The idea of process panentheism has already been existed in Korean traditions before the western Christianity was introduced into Korean cultural soil. It is important to point out the historical context of the concept and its implication in order to relativize the dominant use of the western methodological framework for inter-religious dialogue. The method of the process panentheism will be discussed with the major themes of the reconstruction

¹The deconstruction postmodernism can also be called *relativistic*, *eliminative* postmodernism or *ultramodernism*.

² The reconstruction postmodernism can also be called *revisionary* or *constructive* postmodernism.

³ Suun (水雲) is an honorific name of Choe Je-u.

postmodernism: ontological and cosmological relationality, confluence of the transcendence and immanence, and inter-subjectivity, and one-many paradoxical logic.

II. Process Panentheism

The word “panentheism” was coined by K. F. C. Krause (1781-1832 CE), a German philosopher of the early nineteenth century who was known as a student of Hegel and Fichte. As reflected in the prefix “pan” which means “all,” “theos” meaning “god,” and “en” meaning “in” in Greek. Hence, the literal meaning of panentheism is “all in God,” which emphasizes the all-embracing inclusiveness of God as compared to God’s separateness from creation which predominantly appeared in the traditional classical theism. Krause perceives the deity as a “divine organism inclusive of all lesser organisms.”⁴ For him, God is identified with the world, but God is more than the world. Krause’s understanding of panentheism has been taken up and modified by contemporary process thinkers, such as Hartshorne, Cobb, and Pittenger, as well as by such diverse theologians as Moltmann and McFague.

The core idea of panentheism as depicted by the authors mentioned above is that *God is in all things and all things are in God.*⁵ For this panentheism, God has her/his own identity apart from the universe, while God is in the universe, and the universe is within the reality of God. In other words, God is not reducible to creation or creatures, but rather transcends them; thus God’s primordial nature is affirmed.

For the methodological purpose of process panentheism, it is useful to consider panentheism specifically from the view of a reconstructionist thinker, especially Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947 CE)’s process perspective. His perception of the relation between God and the world is particularly useful to bring up the Korean concept of panentheism, which needs to be distinguished from the Western definition of panentheism. Korean panentheism is difficult to classify in Western terms, but

⁴ Charles Hartshorne, “Panetheism and Panentheism.” In *The Encyclopedia of Religion* Vol. II, edited by Mircea Eliade (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987), 171.

⁵ Sinclair B. Ferguson and David F. Wright, eds. *New Dictionary of Theology* (Leicester, England: Inter Varsity Press, 1988), 486.

Whitehead seems the closest among Western thinkers to the Korean way of thinking the Ultimate.

...It is as true to say that God is permanent and the World fluent, as that the World is permanent and God is fluent. It is as true to say that God is one and the World many, as that the World is one and God many. It is as true to say that in comparison with God, the World is actual eminently. It is as true to say that the world is immanent in God, as that God is immanent in the world. It is as true to say that God transcends the world, as that the world transcends God. It is as true to say that God creates the world, as that the world creates God...⁶

The distinctive aspect of Whitehead's panentheism is that he opened the possibility of the transcendence of the world while affirming a dipolar theism in which both the primordial and consequent nature of God are observed. This dipolar principle of the perception of God can be called "dual transcendence" which implies that there is that in the creaturely realm which God is not able to influence due to the genuine indeterminacy and universal freedom of the world and its inhabitants. In Whitehead's panentheism, God who can be seen as both the cause and effect of the world, is involved in time, and thus knows the future only as a set of possibilities or probabilities. Accordingly, human beings and other beings can exercise a significant amount of free will and, as "co-creators" with God, become participants in the continuing creation as evolution of the world. This idea shall be further explored in relation to the understanding of Korean panentheism characterized by the concept of Korean *Ch'i*.

III. Moltmann's Spirit of Life

Moltmann identifies himself as a panentheist theologian and argues that the Spirit of God is present in all things. He conceives of the Holy Spirit as "the power and life of the whole creation,"⁷ and further explores her in the perichoretic relation between God and the world as *shekeinah*, God's indwelling. He sees the "world of nature as bearing the prints of the Triune God and as being the real promise of the coming kingdom."⁸ In

⁶ Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*, corrected edition edited by D. R. Griffin and D. W. Sherburne (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1978), 528.

⁷ Jurgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation* (London: SCM Press LTD, 1985), 17.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 64.

his latest work on the Holy Spirit *The Spirit of Life: An Universal Affirmation*,⁹ he devotes his full attention to developing a doctrine of the Holy Spirit within a trinitarian framework. He provides a creative interpretation of pneumatology which emphasizes the fact that the experience of the Spirit cannot be restricted to Christian church but must be extended to the whole community of creation. His major effort in this book is to promote a holistic pneumatology in which the traditional dichotomy between Spirit and body is replaced by an understanding of the relation between the Spirit and life. For him, the source of the variety of life originates in the restless power of Yahweh's *ruah* and his/her indwelling *shekinah* which is actualized further in Jesus' experience of Spirit and the church's experience of the risen Jesus Christ through the Spirit.

Moltmann's concern with a holistic pneumatology begins by rejecting the limitation of dialectical theology, which merely stresses the divine Word and dismisses the human consciousness. For him, however, human experience can be considered as one of the sources for acquiring the knowledge of God the Spirit, as he attempts to reconsider the contribution of the nineteenth-century liberal and pietistic theology led by Friedrich Schleiermacher. Moltmann criticizes the exclusive claim that the Holy Spirit remains entirely on God's side, so that it can never be experienced by human beings. God as the Wholly other is far removed from human life and experience and merely resides in a timeless eternity all by himself.¹⁰

Moltmann's trinitarian understanding of God locates the Spirit in the inter-relational fellowship, *koinoia*. In this respect, the inner being of the Holy Spirit refers to relational sociality. He calls the Spirit *Spiritus Congregator*, which functions as conferring the fellowship of the community. He explains,

⁹ Jurgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992)

¹⁰ Moltmann rejects Barth's trinitarian hypostatic-modalism,¹⁰ in which the Son and the Holy Spirit are not distinct divine persons but only two ways in which the monotheistic God the Father is historically revealed. The modalist denies that the Son and the Spirit hold a distinct substance or personhood within the Godhead. They are portrayed instead as masks which the Father wears in His/Her historical manifestations. The modalism is highly problematic for Moltmann, as it confines the Holy Spirit to "the mode of efficacy of the one God." Modalism rejects the concept of "person" as the term for the deployment of the nature and role of the members of the Trinity and as the hermeneutical principle for the foundation of trinitarian theology. For Moltmann, the distinctive personhood of the Holy Spirit is important to explain that God corresponds to a social and communitarian perspective of humanity and nature.

In the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in the triune God himself in an open, inviting fellowship in which the whole creation finds room: 'That they also may be in us,' prays the Johannine Christ (John 17:21). The fellowship of the Holy Spirit 'with you all' (II Cor. 13:13) corresponds to his fellowship with the Father and the Son.¹¹

For Moltmann, the Spirit of life is always identical with the Spirit of *koinoia*, *Spiritus Congregator*, which is perceived not only as a special gift of the Spirit but also as her essential nature and character. Just as the fellowship means a reciprocal relationship that involves opening oneself to the other and moving into mutual participation and recognition, the Spirit as *koinoia* plays a significant role in creating the fellowship and sustaining it with the Father and the Son. In this sense, the major role of Spirit is to relate the Father and the Son in order to make a trinitarian community or fellowship, and to bring that community into the fellowship of the entire universe that is the origin and the ultimate purpose of all creation.¹² In other words, the Spirit works by joining disparate living entities into *koinoia* and replicates the social experience of God the Triune God throughout the world.

The trinitarian pneumatology, which stresses the interrelatedness of the bodily, political and environmental dimensions of the Christian experience of the Spirit, has some significant ethical implications in terms of the social and communal relations in the world. The universal activity of the Spirit does not shy away from issues of domination and discrimination, but embraces the reality of human and ecological suffering working as a relational and liberating power. He is certainly aware of the God-negating destructive power of racial, sexual, and cultural subjugation, political tyranny, economic oppression, the destruction of human rights, and ecological crisis. The Spirit suffers with suffering people, and thus the experience of suffering is part of life in the Spirit. In this context, Moltmann explores the experiences of a wide range of liberation movements, suffering people, and ecology.

In connection with the issue of human and ecological liberation, Moltmann's panentheistic vision of the Spirit is further emphasized. In that pneumatology that

¹¹ Ibid., 218-219.

¹² Ibid.

portrays the Spirit as the immanent transcendence, the two characterizations of the relation of God to the world are not contradictory.¹³ One is the experience of God in all things; the other is the experience of all things in God. The former goes over against a theological transcendentalism, which presupposes the assumption that everything comes from the revelation of God's otherness. The transcendence, in the words of Moltmann, is immanent in all things in the world, and can be inductively discovered. He explains this perspective as "infinite in the finite, the eternal in the temporal, and the enduring in the transitory."¹⁴ For him, identifying nature with God or presenting God's presence in nature already indicates the idea of God's immanent transcendence.

The latter which is the experience of all things in God leads us show the transcendent immanence. This means moving from "the all-embracing horizon of the world and perception to the individual things which appear against this background," a process which invites us to perceive "the finite in the infinite, the temporal in the eternal, and the evanescent in what endures."¹⁵ Human experience of the world blends with the experience of God, and reverence for life becomes part of the adoration of God. In this context of thought, human beings enter lovingly into relationships with God, and therefore God can in no way be described as an "unmoved mover." Rather God is deeply aware of human feelings and has knowledge of what human and ecological sufferings.

Moltmann emphasizes that the Spirit is not only the source of life but is also the transcendent eschatologically and christologically-determined source for the ultimate revitalization of creation. These trinitarian and eschatological concepts of God as dwelling among God's people, in God's Christ and through God's life-giving Spirit is the central foundation of his panentheistic interpretation of God the Spirit. Moltmann proposes his vision of panentheism as follows:

The *ruah* is certainly present only when and where God wills it to be so; but with his will towards creation it is also present in everything, and keeps all things in being and in life.

¹³ M. Douglas Meeks summarizes Moltmann's contributions on the idea of immanent transcendence in his article, "Jurgen Moltmann's Systematic Contributions to Theology," *Religious Studies Review* Vol. 22, No.2 (1996), 95-102.

¹⁴ Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*, 35.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 36.

When we think about the *ruah* we have to say that God is in all things, and all things are in God—though this does not mean making God the same as everything else.¹⁶

In Moltmann's panentheism, the Spirit is the divine breath of life that fills everything with its own life, and which bridges the difference between creator and creature. The one God who created the world through His/Her life-giving breath always enters into the continual communication and relationship between God and the world. In this way, he differentiates the way in which the world dwells in God from that in which God dwells in the world. He clearly differentiates his panentheism from pantheism, in which all distinctions between transcendence and immanence are dissolved.

Based on the argument of Moltmann's process panentheist perception of the Holy Spirit, his pneumatology can be characterized with four major points. First, the Holy Spirit is the "life-giving Spirit." Moltmann affirms that the Hebrew word *ruah* and the Greek word *pneuma* can be interpreted as the life-giving Spirit, which is conceived as the creative and life-sustaining power existing in each creature as the breath of life. As some biblical references¹⁷ suggest, both *ruah* and *pneuma* are part of the vital force that grants

¹⁶ Ibid., 42.

¹⁷ Some of examples of the biblical passages are as follows:

For my part, I am going to bring a flood of waters on the earth, to destroy from under heaven all flesh in which is the breath of life (*ruah*); everything that is on the earth shall die (Genesis 6:17)

Everything on dry land in whose nostrils was the breath of life (*ruah*) died (Genesis 7:22).

By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of his mouth (*ruah*) (Palm 33:6).

When you hide your face they are dismayed; when you take away their breath (*ruah*), they die and return to their dust. When you send forth your spirit (*ruah*) they are created; and you renew the face of the ground (Palm 104: 29-30).

I will cause breath (*ruah*) to enter you, and you shall live (Ezekiel 37:5).

The angel said to her, "the Holy Spirit (*pneuma*) will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God" (Luke 1:35)

Thus, it is written, "the first man, Adam, became a living being"; the last Adam became a life-giving Spirit (*pneuma*)." (1 Corinthians 15:45)

vitality to creation. The source of all life is God. Although God shares her life with the creaturely life, a profound awareness of the distinction between God as the source of life and human beings as the recipients of life is clearly observed.

Second, the Holy Spirit is the “beyond and yet within” Spirit in terms of the ontological sense. Moltmann portrays the Holy Spirit with the paradoxical expression of “immanent transcendence and transcendent immanence.”¹⁸ He claims that the two characterizations of the Spirit are not contradictory with the panentheistic interpretation of God. One is the experience of God in all things; the other is the experience of all things in God. The former challenges a theological transcendentalism which assumes that everything comes from God’s otherness. The transcendence, for Moltmann, is immanent in all things in the world, and can be inductively discovered. The latter, the experience of all things in God, leads us to speak of transcendent immanence of the Holy Spirit. Human beings enter lovingly into relationships with God, and therefore God cannot be described as an “unmoved mover.” Rather, God as the Spirit is deeply aware of human feelings and has knowledge of all human and ecological sufferings.

Third, the Holy Spirit is in the trinitarian structure in the sense of the cosmology. Moltmann locates the Spirit in the inter-relational fellowship, *koinoia*. The inner being of the Holy Spirit refers to the relational sociality. The major role of the Holy Spirit is to relate the Father and the Son in order to make a trinitarian community, and to bring that community into the fellowship of the entire universe that is the origin and the ultimate purpose of all creation.¹⁹

Fourth, the Holy Spirit is eschatological Spirit of God. Moltmann emphasizes that the Spirit is the transcendent eschatologically and christologically-determined source for the ultimate revitalization of creation. These trinitarian and eschatological concepts of God as dwelling among God’s people, in God’s Christ and through God’s life-giving Spirit is the central foundation of his panentheistic interpretation of God as the Spirit.

Moltmann distinguishes the way in which the world dwells in God from that in which God dwells in the world. He clearly differentiates his panentheism from

¹⁸ Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*, 35-36.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 218-219.

pantheism, in which all distinctions between transcendence and immanence are dissolved. We now turn to the Korean concept of *Ch'i* in *Donghak* tradition.

IV. Suun' *Ch'i* in *Donghak* Tradition

Suun presents a Korean process panentheistic philosophy of *Ch'i* in *Donghak* (東學) tradition.²⁰ The distinctive characteristic of the *Ch'i* is the syncretic combination of the pantheistic feature of Shamanist, Taoist, and Confucian traditions and of the Korean indigenous *Hanûnim* faith. In this sense, the *Ch'i* is the totality in which transcendent personal God and the immanent natural *ch'i* are interfused.²¹ The *Ch'i* not only

²⁰ *Donghak* is a Korean indigenous religion developed by incorporating traditional Korean religions such as Buddhism, Confucianism, Shamanism, and Taoism. *Donghak* was founded by Choe Je-u (1824-1864) whose honorific name is "Suun" (which means "water-cloud") in 1860, in an effort to find a way of salvation for the people, *minjung*, who were suffering under socio-political oppression in Korea during the late *Chosôn* Dynasty (1394-1910). In the nineteenth century, Korea was faced with crises through the internal corruption of political leaders, the exploitation of a ruling group and the spread of infectious diseases, as well as external threats and attacks from foreign nations. At that time, the political leaders of the *Chosôn* Dynasty, who followed the Confucian ideology, severely oppressed and exploited the people in order to maintain the nation's centuries-old feudalism. At the same time, Korea, along with other Eastern Asian countries, was being threatened by the influx of Western capitalism. At the end of the *Chosôn* Dynasty, the Korean people, learning about the humiliating defeat of China by Western nations, had good reason to be afraid of Western expansion. The Korean people, therefore, realized that the most urgent task was to protect themselves from Western aggression. In this historical context, Suun named the religion *Donghak* (it became *Chôndokyo* 天道教 later), which means Eastern Learning, in contrast to Western Roman Catholicism. For that reason, *Donghak* thought contains some anti-Western elements. First, because of the political situations mentioned above, a strong antagonism existed against the infiltration of Western imperialism. Second, at the prospect of the demolition of their nation, the Korean people turned more nationalistic and sought ways to protect the purity of their traditional religions and cultures from the heterogeneous capitalistic Western civilization. Thus, they felt a need to equip themselves with a strong moral sense of defense whenever they engaged in disputes with Westerners. Subsequently, these anti-Western sentiments brought about a number of disputes between Western trade-boats and the people in local villages. Some examples which created a crisis among the Korean people are the invasion of Pyôngyang (1866) by the American steamship General Sherman, French Admiral Roze's attack on Kang-Hwa Port (1866), the smuggling activities of E. Oppert, (a Northern Prussian merchant, to rob the grave of the King's grandfather), and American Admiral John Rodgers' attack on *Kanghwa* Port (1871). Consequently, the people began to look for a new religion for spiritual support. In this emotional situation, *Donghak* religion emerged.

²¹ Although some sinologists like Hall and Ames argue that the term "transcendence" is inappropriate and problematic in the East Asian cultural context, I can still retain it as the following three meanings: 1) the self-spontaneity of the *Ch'i*; 2) the state of perfect harmony, which is theoretically within reach but in reality never complete in any human community; and 3) that by which humans always find themselves in need of self-cultivation. Of course, all these three, especially the latter two, are related closely together with one another; the second is more collective and the third more individual. The difference between this transcendence and the traditional Western use of the same term is that while, at least in theory, there is an

designates the origin of all forms of life of the universe, but embraces the union of spirit and matter in the life of the universe. The ontological form of the *Ch'i* is one totality in which spirit and matter are interrelated as the part of harmony, complement, and completeness.²²

Suun defines the *Ch'i* “one *Ch'i* of the primordial chaos (*Honwon Ji Ilch'i* 混原之一氣).” Here, the idea of chaos indicates undifferentiated state of the *Ch'i* of heaven and earth, which constitute the myriad creatures. The notion of one means totality of the *Ch'i*. The *Ch'i* as the basic and primordial life participates in all the affairs of the universe and exists spontaneously without a beginning or an end in its true essence. Suun’s *Ch'i* is perceived as the basic idea of the supreme spirit-matter, which is the ultimate cause of the complexity of the present--the evolutionary force through which all things are manifested.²³ According to *Donghak* thought, the evolution of nature is dependent on the movement of the *Ch'i*. The world is also the self-evolutionary or spontaneous manifestation of the *Ch'i*. Suun's explanation of the *Ch'i* is as follows:

The Ultimate *Ch'i* (支氣) being here and now,
I yearn for its great descent.
Waiting on God, I have naturally become.
Eternally not forgetting, I become aware of all.²⁴

The *Ch'i* is both from within and from without, which is pervasive in the universe, in all the myriad creatures. Consequently, the *Ch'i* becomes a term equivalent to Suun's perception of God, *Hanûnim* or *Sang-ti* (上帝). This denotes the evolutionary manifestation of itself within the phenomenon of the world. The *Ch'i* also explains the principle and power, which comes from the total and original entity from which all things have come into being

unbroken continuity between immanence and transcendence for the former, the latter includes a radical discontinuity of that which is transcendent from this world.

²²Lee Don-wha, *The Philosophy of the Divine Human Being* (Seoul, Korea: Iisinsa, 1963), 9.

²³Paek, Se-myông, *Donghak Thought and Chôndokyo* (Seoul: Donghaksa, 1956), 59.

²⁴Choe Suun, “*Chumun* (呪文) [Incarnation].” In *Dongkyông Daejôn* (東經大典)

Choe Bong-ik, a scholar of *Donghak*, contends that the Ultimate *Ch'i* is "a root of the world and mother and life of the Universe. All things in the world come from the ultimate *Ch'i* and go back to it."²⁵ The *Ch'i* is not only the ultimate energy of the universe, but also the very substance of the phenomenal world. In other words, the *Ch'i* as energy moves and forms all phenomena in the world. What makes then the *Ch'i* occur? How does the *Ch'i* work or operate in the world? For the discussion of the causality of the *Ch'i*, two paradoxical notions: *puryon kiyon* (不然基然) and *muwi ihwa* (無爲以化), need to be introduced.

First, the literal meaning of *puryon kiyon* is that "it is a suchness and not a suchness" or "it is like that because it is thus and not thus." In other words, "there are beings or things that are as they are," which is a kind of principle for not naming and reasoning. Suun says, "since remote antiquity, all myriad creatures are found each other in their own way." It is true to day that he refuses to speculate on the nature of causality by saying "although the way things are shown may inform us of their being such and such, as far as their origin is concerned, it is difficult to say one way or another." For him, the problem of causality is simply mysterious and unknowable.

In contrast to the primary cause of Western classical thinking, Suun's *Ch'i* is not a determinate cause of beings. The world is produced without a preliminary plan or intention. The existence of the pure divine realm, which is consistently found in Christian tradition, is absent in this idea of suchness. Accordingly, the ontological and epistemological question: why God felt the necessity of creating the world, with which Christianity has struggled, is simply not raised. According to the notion of *pulryon kiyon*, the *Ch'i* is causeless and beginningless, operating in a spontaneous movement of cosmic energy, referring to the state in which things and beings unfold and develop or process of their own accord.

Second, the cosmic existence of the *Ch'i* emerges with the principle of *muwi ihwa* which commonly means "working through non-action" or "letting thing develop by themselves." This does not indicate "quietism" in a passive manner, but designates a paradoxical way of actualizing or realizing the spontaneous movement of the *Ch'i*. The

²⁵Choi, Bong-ik, *Introduction of Korean Philosophy* (Seoul: Hanmadang, 1989), 229.

concept of *muwi ihwa*, which can be said to be “an expression for the ultimate,” in fact, has little to do with “total inaction” or “doing nothing,” but intimates the workings of the ultimate reality. The nature of this concept is, in this sense, “unpremeditated, nondeliberative, noncalculating, nonpurposive action.” The spontaneity of the *Ch'i* is a prime characteristic and is considered another way of expressing the normative ideal for how things and beings are to exist and progress.

Philosophically speaking, the idea of non-action or spontaneity is used to describe the ineffable phenomena of nature and to convey that nothing further can be explained. The spontaneous cosmic order offers an ontological basis of self-manifestation of the *Ch'i* in the process of harmony. In accordance with this principle, God or *Hanunim* in the work of the *Ch'i* is portrayed as *Ch'ihwa Chisin* (氣化之神) or *Ch'ihwa Sinrong* (氣化神靈)²⁶ who is the movement of constant change and transformation. In the philosophy of the *Ch'i*, no clear distinction has been made between the concept of God and the *Ch'i*. In fact, it is quite interchangeable. God exists with a continued interaction of the *Ch'i* in which all forms of the myriad of creatures are germinated and generated.

The ontological structure of the *Ch'i* can be further examined with Suun's doctrinal teaching of *Shi Chonju* (侍天主). Suun defines *Shi Chonju* as follows:

Shi (waiting on) means that one has spirit within and energy without, which cannot be transferred to other people. *Ju* (God) means serving God in the same manner as honoring parents.²⁷

Here, *Shi* includes the meaning of both being filled with the *Ch'i* inside and feeling the harmony of the *Ch'i* outside. Suun explains the meaning of *Shi*, into three dimensions.

First, *Shi* is “one's having the spirit within.” According to Paek Se-myung, in its developing process, the total life of the universe has gradually become individuated and complex, having reached its most highly developed stage in the human world after passing through the plant and animal stages. In this respect, he argues that humans have

²⁶ Kim, Chi-ha, *Life* (Seoul, Korea: Sol, 1992), 205-206

²⁷ Choe, Suun, “Nonhakmun (Writing on Learning 論學文)” In *Dongkyông Daejôn*.

the most highly developed intellectual capacity "to have the spirit within" among all beings.²⁸

Second, *Shi* is also "one's having energy without," which means that humans are an individuated form of life and that the *Ch'i* is the total life. In other words, a relationship of totality and individuality exists between the *Ch'i* and humans respectively. In this relationship, a dualistic separation cannot be maintained. Since a human's relationship with the *Ch'i* is like that of a part to the whole, it is necessary for humans to be dependent and to wait on the *Ch'i*. Also, this means that although other plants and animals possess the *Ch'i* since human beings represent the most highly developed stage of life in the world, the human being is the image closest to the divine.²⁹

Third, *Shi* indicates that "all the people of the world know and cannot be transferred," which means that when humans realize the new principle of Tao, they practice it without unnatural action or movement. Once humans are aware of the truth of Tao, they just act and live naturally and quietly in accordance with the truth. At this stage, there can be true progress based on authentic knowledge. Therefore, this phrase has the futuristic meaning of waiting on the Ultimate *Ch'i* with new knowledge and having made genuine progress.³⁰ With this understanding of *Shi*, these three magic characters can be broadly defined as words for "waiting on the Ultimate *Ch'i* faithfully."³¹ Another possible type of interpretation of *Shin Chônju* is found in *Yongdam Yusa* (龍潭遺詞; Song of *Yongdam*).³²

What fortune befell you
That you desire a free ride?
Are you foolish enough
to depend on me?

²⁸Paek Se-myung, *An Interpretation of Donghak Scriptures* (Seoul: Hanguk Sasang Yônguhoe, 1963), 80.

²⁹Son Uiam, "The Doctrine of the Transmigration of the Spirit." In *Sermons of Uiam*.

³⁰Paek Se-myung, *An Interpretation of Donghak Scriptures*, 81-82.

³¹ Also, according to Suun, this carries the idea of "serving the Ultimate *Ch'i*." Then, *Shi Chônju* can be thought of being similar to *Wi Chônju* (爲天主; serving the Ultimate *Ch'i*). According to Suun, the character *Ju* means "to serve the ultimate *Ch'i* as a kind of filial piety." It would then seem fit to interpret *Shi Ch'onju* as meaning the same thing as *Wi Chônju*.

³² "Song of Teaching Virtues." In *Yongdam Yusa*.

Do not count on me
 But trust in God alone.
 While God is within you [literally, "your body"]
 Would you still look far and away?

In this poetic scripture, Suun urges his children and relatives to wait on the ultimate *Ch'i* which exists within them. Suun also admonishes them not to be lazy as they search for enlightenment. In this connection, what is entailed is that "all human beings are able to wait on the *Ch'i*."³³ In this understanding of *Shi Chônju*, then, we see a balanced tension between the transcendent and the immanent aspects of the *Ch'i*. On the one hand, the ultimate *Ch'i* is one to be served, and, on the other, the presence of the *Ch'i* within all human beings is so pervasive that it cannot be defined completely as an objective reality nor as a "I and Thou" relationship. More accurately, the *Ch'i* is both transcendentally and immanently identified with us. Therefore, *Shi* here means a holistic vision of reality and indicates a radical union between divine and human beings, which includes the social union among human beings; the revolutionary union between individuals and society; the ecological union between human beings and the universe.³⁴

For Suun, the *Ch'i* is One who participates in the process of all forms of life. This power to change or move, following Whitehead's notion, is not a coercive one; it is instead the power to ceaselessly care for the well-being of all beings. All the world's formations and changes are included in the process of becoming divine. Accordingly, Suun experiences the *Ch'i* that constantly reveals the transcendent essence of the divine mind in a mysterious way through human beings. Therefore, the *Ch'i* of Suun is not the "wholly Other" being, but the "beyond and yet within" Spirit of life. This process panentheist aspect of Suun's *Ch'i* presents a Korean form of panentheism which relates to the world and brings harmony into the universe.

V. The Fruit of the Dialogue

First, the dialogue begins with the question of causality of the Holy Spirit and the *Ch'i*: where do the Spirit and the *Ch'i* come from? As seen earlier, the biblical concepts of the

³³Choi, Dong-hee, "The Thought of *Donghak* and Foreign Characteristics." *Study of Korea* III, 1974, 8.

³⁴ Kim Chi-ha, *The Story of Donghak* (Seoul, Korea: Sol), 16.

Holy Spirit are used in conjunction with that which causes the wind, breath, and life. They are deeply rooted in the idea of self-transcending source as they are connected with that which brings and sustains life. Here, the idea of self-transcendence means that something new comes out of precedent, but we cannot explain it by its precedents.³⁵ It can be said that the *Ch'i* has also an external source while maintaining the inner dynamic of the self-organizing nature. However, the subtle difference between the two is that, whereas Moltmann emphatically proposes a radical immanence of the Spirit without compromising or reducing God's transcendence, Suun emphasizes the nature of self-creation of the *Ch'i* without an external-transcendent animator or impulse. As observed in Suun's mystical experience, the external force is none other than that internal transformation.

Second, this dialogue presents different notion of oneness of the Holy Spirit and the *Ch'i*. Moltmann's panentheistic construction is in part derived from neo-Platonic idea of One and its emanation³⁶ God is the One who is beyond all distinction and cannot even distinguish herself from herself as the One who becomes beyond self-consciousness. Interestingly, Moltmann goes against a reductionist position of the monistic thinking which erodes the absoluteness of God and the distinction of good and evil when everything is treated as one. He rather holds the language and the idea of transcendent God in rejecting the notion that God becomes in any way less through the process of emanation. It is quite true for him to say that the world proceeds from God by divine necessity, and God the prior One remains "its own place" always transcending the subordinate being.

The cosmology of the *Ch'i* is not based on the idea of creation but the notion of harmony, which suggests that creation is possible without a totally transcendent creator, and mystical union is possible without an absolute reality to unite with. In Suun's religious experience of the *Ch'i*, he falls into the ecstasy in which the boundary between the divine and human realm becomes blur. The enlightening state of Suun is a key concept for entering into harmony with the Ultimate reality that results in the

³⁵ Wolfhart Penneberg, *Toward a Theology of Nature: Essays on Science and Faith* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/ John Knox Press, 1993), edited by Ted Peters, 135-137.

³⁶ Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*, 211-213.

transformation of self. This is not the denial of the transcendent existence of the divine but a different way of understanding the relation between the divine and the human world. Suun is, of course, aware of the difference between the two worlds but not in an ontological sense. The state of harmony of the *Ch'i* emphasizes the notion of the transformation of self through the process of changing or becoming God.

Third, a distinctive ontological structure of inter-relationship can also be observed. In Moltmann's panentheism, the Holy Spirit has been always held the position of the Third person of the Trinity, which relates not only the Father to the Son, but also to the entire creation in its relational fellowship. This is the trinitarian doctrine of *perichoresis*,³⁷ which holds a relational and social character of each member of the trinity and a function of the mutuality of the three persons.

In the idea of the *Ch'i*, the number three or the trinitarian formula does not occupy as a central issue,³⁸ because the idea of the *Ch'i* is predominantly conceived as the undifferentiated one *Ch'i* or the *Ch'i* of the chaos, which fills the Heaven, Earth, and the human beings. The idea of one *Ch'i* has paid particular attention to the relationship between the one and many. As a basic dynamic, the one *Ch'i* existed prior to the world and everything that exists is only an aspect of it in a lesser or greater state of condensation and dispersion. Condensed, life is germinated, dispersed, it remains indefinite potential. The one *Ch'i* is here not a numeric sense but indicates the totality of the reality, which consequently includes multiple forms of life.³⁹ This is not a reduction of a multiplicity of the *Ch'i*, but a production of a multiplicity out of a unity.

³⁷ The term *perichoresis* connotes mutual interpenetration or eternal circulation of divine life. Its initial theological use was Gregory Nazianzen and Maximus Confessor who employed it in connection with the two natures doctrine in christology. For the detailed discussion, see, L. Prestige, "[*Perichoreo*] and [*perichoresis*] in the Fathers," *Journal of Theological Studies* 29 (1928), 242-244.

³⁸ If one insist on the idea of trinity in East Asian culture, that would be *Samje* (三才) which is Heaven, Earth, and human being. This relationship can be an East Asian form of Trinity. For the discussion of East Asian Trinity, see, Lee Jung-young, *The Trinity in Asian Perspective* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996).

³⁹ In Korean Neo-Confucian tradition (particularly in Yulgok's cosmology), the notion of *T'ai-chi* (太極) is understood as a both unifying and multiplying principle operating through the interchange of yin and yang. Ro's treatment of yin and yang is here not conceptual but symbolic that underlies a holistic approach to the reality while surpassing concepts. Yin and yang which reflect the core nature of *T'ai-chi* is a "cosmic and a dynamic process of *being* and *becoming*." For further discussion of the Yulgok's idea of *T'ai-chi* which presents in a framework of "one and yet many," see, Young-chan Ro, "Ecological Implications of Yi

Fourth, the concept of time works in a different way. Moltmann's pneumatology works in an eschatological manner, which involves the future consummation of the Kingdom of God. The category of time is related to the unity of the immanent Trinity in drawing the anticipation of the coming kingdom of God, which is the essential element of hope in Christian gospel. For him, a real theological eschatology can only be achieved through the Spirit of Christ and the Christ of the Spirit who is a genuine future and hope in God.⁴⁰ This eschatological Spirit of God is based on the linear and teleological convergence in Western culture.

If the Holy Spirit is eschatological, the *Ch'i* operates in a cyclical way without a teleological concept. In the philosophy of the *Ch'i*, all forms of life are circular: they begin and turn without end. The idea of beginning and ending is related together in the work of the ultimate *Ch'i*. The constant and continuous movement of the *Ch'i* ensures the cosmic rhythm and order which in turn gives rise to the transformation of *yin* and *yang* through the inner process of renewing and recreating. There is no need for the development of linear concept of time, which identifies a single beginning from which all things process.⁴¹ The process of existence of the *Ch'i* is fundamentally cyclical in which no final beginning or end is required to sustain the concept.

Yulgok's Cosmology," in *Confucianism and Ecology* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1998), edited by Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Berthrong, 169-186.

⁴⁰ Moltmann says, "the whole eschatology of the history of Christ... can also be described as the history of the Spirit, a result of the workings and indwellings of the Spirit through which the future that is hoped for enters into history." *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* (London: SCM Press, 1977), translated by Margaret Kohl, 34.

⁴¹ Chuang Tzu challenges the notion of an absolute beginning. He says, "There is a beginning. There is not yet begun to be a beginning. There not yet begun to not yet begin to be a beginning. There is being. There is nonbeing. There is not yet begun to be nonbeing. There is not yet begun to be not yet begin to be nonbeing. Suddenly there being and nonbeing. And yet I don't now what follows from there 'being' non being. Is it 'being' or is it 'nonbeing'?" *Chunag Tzu*, Harvard-Yenching Institute Sinological Index Series, Supp. 20. (Peking: Harvard-Yenching Insititute, 1947), 49. For further discussion of East Asian concept of time, see, Michael Loewe, *Chinese Ideas of Life and Death* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1982).

VI. Conclusion

In the previous dialogue, we have seen that the Holy Spirit and the ultimate *Ch'i* find their common ground in the idea of process panentheism, and yet each has been distinctively developed with its own cultural and philosophical framework. Moltmann's panentheistic pneumatology accentuates the fact that the world is ontologically created by a transcendent creator who makes herself creator in the act of creating, whereas Suun's panentheistic pneumatology proposes the world is created by decisions within its own creating process. In the framework of Moltmann, the distinction between ontological and cosmological unity is clearly maintained. The Holy Spirit is cosmologically creative in its own right and yet the product of ontological creation. In other words, the work and the presence of the Holy Spirit would be self-creative in a cosmological sense, but would be wholly dependent in an ontological sense. The recognition of an ontological creator is the uncompromising condition in Moltmann's panentheistic pneumatology, while for Suun, the distinction between ontology and cosmology is not so significant in terms of monistic and yet multiple nature of the ultimate *Ch'i*. In this sense, the relation between God and the world is still asymmetrical in causality in Moltmann's pneumatology, whereas the cosmo-ontological principle of spontaneity of the *Ch'i* entails a symmetrical relation on which the distinction between God and the world is dissolved in the fullness of life.

Despite the different cultural and philosophical context, both the Holy Spirit and the ultimate *Ch'i* suggest the comprehensive life principle that animates all forms of life and integrates both physical and spiritual dimensions. This common theme of the vitality is particularly important and relevant to today's life-destroying world, marked by the massive poverty of the Third world, eco-cide, and other "isms oppressions" (racism, sexism, classism, etc.). The organic and relational view of the life-giving Spirit becomes a corrective to the dualistic worldview and suggests an integration of the reality. This provides the context for an agenda of holistic liberation including the transformation of every dimension of life in its socio-political, cultural, and ecological aspects.

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