

**Reviving Minjung Theology  
in the Technological Era:  
Kim Yong-bok's Seontopian Zoesophia  
in dialogue with Theo-Dao**

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**Abstracts**

This article explores into Kim Yong-bok's final reflections on Minjung Theology in dialogue with Theo-Dao, a theology of Dao. Kim's groundbreaking assertion that Minjung Theology is a sociobiography of Minjung broadens the cosmological Zoography (the narrative of life) beyond historical constraints. It matures into a sapiential Zoesophia (Wisdom of Life), envisioning a Seontopia (East Asian Utopia). Minjung Theology prompts preparation for the impending ultra-technological civilization, characterized by the burgeoning evolution of artificial intelligence, marking a stride toward the future. Kim's profound insights into Seontopian Zoesophia could serve as foundational pillars for the revival of Minjung Theology in the Anthropocene era of technological civilization. Furthermore,

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it extends an invitation to future theologians and scholars of religion to perpetuate this line of inquiry.

- Key Words

Seontopia, Zoegraphy, Zoesophia, Theodao, Minjung Theology,  
Kim Yong-bok

My last interaction with Dr. Yong-bok Kim (1938-2022) occurred at the 5th CGU Global Symposium at Gyeongsang Graduate University in Andong, Gyeongsangbuk-do, from June 28 to July 1, 2021.<sup>1</sup> The symposium centered on “Cosmic Spirituality in the Era of Artificial Intelligence and the COVID-19 Pandemic.” Through his engrossing lectures and dialogues at the symposium, Yong-bok introduced the concept of “Seontopia” (in Korean, Seon-Gyeong [仙境]) - a notion that appeared novel within theological discussions.

Yong-bok’s theological propositions underwent an expansive shift, incorporating cosmological aspects and layering indigenous Korean spiritualities over the socio-economic and historical bases of early minjung theology (predicated on the sociobiography of Minjung).<sup>2</sup> For an extended period, I have criticized the constrictive hermeneutical confines of his early theology, proposing alternatives such as a “socio-cosmic biography of exploited life,” a notion that cosmo-ecologically extends from the premise of “Theo-Dao” (a theology of Dao).<sup>3</sup> Over time, his historical perspective evolved from a socio-biographical viewpoint to a zoographical approach (narrative of life), and he started infusing theological insights into the conception of Seontopia (East Asian Utopia). Ultimately, we concurred that the Dao (道) and Seon (仙), as opposed to the Logos, should serve as the fundamental-metaphors underpinning our theological endeavors.

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1 For papers presented at the symposium, see Park Seong-Won, ed, *Cosmic Spirituality in the Era of Artificial Intelligence and the COVID-19 Pandemic* (Gyeongsan: Life Wave, 2021).

2 See Yong-Bok Kim, “The Socio-biography of Minjung and Theology,” in *Minjung and Korean Theology* (Seoul: Korea Theological Study Institute, 1982). Minjung generally means “the oppressed and alienated people” in Korean.

3 See Heup Young Kim, *A Theology of Dao* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2017), 24-33.

## I. Zoesophia

Yong-bok was an internationally recognized influencer in ecumenical theology, demonstrating an acute perceptiveness of global circumstances and an exceptional ability to interpret the zeitgeist. His passing is an incalculable loss, extending beyond the borders of Korea and Asia to resonate within the sphere of global theology. Despite his advanced age, he persistently sought to enhance his theological understandings, particularly in anticipation of the civilization-altering period precipitated by rapid technological developments, inclusive of the digital revolution and artificial intelligence, often termed the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Over two decades ago, he was at the forefront of discussions on transhumanism, the proposition that homo sapiens should evolve into posthumans, characterized by superintelligence and heightened capabilities, through the application of advanced scientific and technological tools.<sup>4</sup>

Fittingly, he transitioned from his initial focus on Minjung theology, grounded in the social biography of the Minjung, towards a Zoesophia (Wisdom of Life) predicated on a Zoegraphy (Life Biography). His presentation at the Andong Symposium elucidated his views on Zoesophia.<sup>5</sup> Notably, he posited “Zoesophia as the foundation for historical transformation towards a new civilization.” He deliberately employed the term Zoesophia instead of Zoelogy, choosing

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4 For an East Asian theological analysis of transhumanism, see Heup Young Kim, “Cyborg, Sage, and Saint: Transhumanism as Seen from an East Asian Theological Setting,” in *Religion and Transhumanism: The Unknown Future of Human Enhancement*, eds. Calvin Mercer and Tracy J. Trothen (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2014), 97-114.

5 See Yong-bok Kim, “A Creative Spiritual Convergence for Conviviality,” in Park, *Cosmic Spirituality*, 45-54.

the sapiential root-metaphor, Sophia, to challenge the dualistic Logos-based paradigm pervasive in Western theology. In this context, it becomes evident that both his Zoesophia and my Theo-Dao strive to disengage from the traditional theology of logos (theo-logos). Furthermore, Sophia encapsulates concepts closely aligned with the East Asian root-metaphor of Dao, rendering the comparative exploration and dialogue between Dao and Sophia an intriguing avenue for future research.<sup>6</sup>

Yong-Bock outlined the primary attribute of Zoesophia as “the cosmic web of life.” In his words, “All living beings are creative subjects of life who are spiritual beings. All living beings sustain themselves as the web of life, in spiritual communion throughout the web. Zoography, as part of Zoesophia, is a paradigmatic way to describe the history of life and its opposite: the Thanatography of the history of Zoecide.”<sup>7</sup>

Yong-bok demonstrated a remarkable aptitude for creating novel theological terms. His theological reflection and written discourse appeared to initiate in English. I can empathize with this, having also commenced my theological journey at the same American seminary. Writing first in English indicates the inception of theological thought in the same language - a possibility afforded by a sensitive awareness of global theological currents that extend beyond local circumstances. This approach facilitates the invention of novel theological terms that encapsulate and express our unique perspectives within our specific contexts. While a patriotic Korean theologian, Yong-bok possessed a remarkably broad global perspective

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6 See Antoine Arjakovsky, *Towards an Ecumenical Metaphysics, Vol 1: The Principles & Methods of Ecumenical Science* (New York, NY: Angelico Press, 2022), esp., 267-68.

7 Yong-bok Kim, “A Critical Convergence,” 48.

that superseded most of his contemporaries. Consequently, he functioned as an inevitable boundary figure. Originating neologisms in English facilitated more accessible communication within English-speaking circles. However, translating these into Korean, a language embedded in a different cultural-linguistic context, presented a challenge. While the meaning of these English neologisms is relatively straightforward, a Korean translation that fully captures their essence remains an ongoing endeavor.

Therefore, an explication of Yong-bok's text, particularly his novel terminology, is required. For instance, 'Zoesophia' signifies a departure from Western Logos theology in at least two ways. Firstly, it delineates between wisdom (Sophia) and knowledge (Logos). Instead of Zoe-logy, which would be more conventional and associated with Logos, he opted for the compound term Zoe-Sophia, connoting wisdom, a concept more robustly developed in Eastern Orthodox theologies. This signifies a fundamental shift in the theological root-metaphor from Logos to Sophia, mirroring my own theological transition from Theology to Theo-Dao. Secondly, it differentiates between life (Zoe) and death (Thanatos), suggesting that theology concerns itself with the narrative of life, not death. This insight segues into his other neologism, "Zoe-graphy" (the story of life), which will be discussed further.

## II. Zoegrrophy

Yong-bock's divergence from conventional Western Logos

theology was further evident in his distinction between Zoography (history of life) and Thanatography (history of death). He posited that theology is not a Thanatology, associated with the Logos and potentially sliding into metaphysics, but a narrative of life with Minjung as the subject of life opposing the life-annihilating forces of death. Zoography constitutes a Zoesophic Minjung theology that broadens the sociobiography of Minjung to encompass the cosmic dimensions of convivial life.

Zoography is the spiritual life story, from birth to death, the spiritual cycle of life, and the web of life of all living beings. The essential core of the living being is that it is the subject, which means the spiritual subject, and this subject lives in a spiritual communion of convivial life in the web of life. All religions and spiritual traditions understand this as the essence of all living beings.<sup>8</sup>

It is also notable that Yong-bok referred to the “sociobiography of Minjung”, rather than the sociography. The term “sociobiography” already encompasses ‘bios’ (life), implicitly considering the body or living organism. Consequently, a more precise translation would be the “social life (body) story” of Minjung. The shift here is that, from the three Greek words for life featured in the New Testament — Bios, Psuche, and Zoe — he selected Zoe (Zoography), considered more spiritual. Typically, Bios denotes the life of the physical body (Luke 8:14), Psuche signifies the life of the soul (Matthew 16:25), and Zoe

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8 Ibid. 49

represents divine life (John 1:14). The more fundamental, holistic, and ontological term “Zoe” is chosen to highlight the primary spiritual subjectivity and conviviality (symbiotic fellowship) of life. Consequently, it can be argued that his later theology sought the ‘Dao of All Life,’ which promotes mutual benefit and shared circulation, as opposed to a dialectical dualism (modeled on an ‘either-or’ dichotomy) distinguishing between life and death or Minjung and anti-Minjung. His ultimate focus was on conviviality and convergence, not anti-conviviality and divergence.

However, he never lost sight of the Minjung’s historical struggle for life, thematizing the biographies of life-preserving spiritual resistance movements (Zoography) against life-destroying violence (Thanatography), and their historical convergence. He posited that within this convergence of life-preserving biographies (Zoographies), one must identify the hermeneutical foundation for a cosmic spirituality of life characterized by conviviality.

Spiritual resistance to the polity of violence against life, occurring throughout 5,000 years of history, can be the hermeneutical key to discerning the spirituality of convivial life in convergence. Spiritual religions emerged in human civilizations to counter despotic power regimes, and Karl Jaspers called the resultant changes civilizational mutations. Resistance of the peoples against imperial polities of old, as in the despotic Egyptian regime, the Babylonian empire, the Greek empire, the Persian empire, and despotic Chinese rules, provided a spiritual context for the reformation



movement of Western Christianity in this matrix of historical civilization. In modern times, resistance movements of the colonized peoples in Africa, Asia and the Americas against the colonial powers have been fertile grounds for spiritual revitalization toward the liberated SangSaeng [the original Korean word for conviviality] Web of Life. Resistance to the present globalized, neo-liberal economic and geopolitical power regime calls for cosmic convergence of spiritualities for ecumenical resistance against the regime.<sup>9</sup>

### III. Seontopia

Kim Yong-bok was not only a theologian but also a dedicated patriot with a profound love for his nation. He often counseled me, whenever I was tempted to venture abroad, that Korean theologians ought to remain in Korea, the true locus of their theology. He identified the utopia of Zoography within the primitive life community of the Korean people, conceptualizing the spiritual life of the ancient tribal village as Seon-Gyeong (선경) or Seon-topia, yet another neologism.

The five thousand years of Zoography (history of life: 생명의 역사) on the Korean peninsula and in East Asia can be a pivotal locus. We know the story of the primitive communal villages of living beings in ancient times. This story is known to the people in and around the Korean peninsula about 5,000 years ago. In brief, I would like to call the

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

spiritual life of ancient Korean tribal communities Seontopia. This is described in the saga of the Tangun [the legendary forefather of the Korean people] and related stories. Seontopia has evolved and converged with various spiritual experiences. [That is to say] the Sangsaeng web of life with its spiritual communion of life of all living beings (이화상생, 홍익인간, 태평천하). Modern historiography has neglected this dimension of spiritual communion and convergence in the framework of the web of life on Earth.<sup>10</sup>

This narrative signals the evolution of Yong-bok's theology from a resistant Minjung theology to a convivial Zoesophia, ultimately culminating in a "Theology of Seon." Here, his endeavors to transition from the Western theological paradigm to an authentically Korean and East Asian theological framework are more pronounced. Regrettably, he did not live to complete this shift, which remains an important task for future scholars. If Minjung theologians can understand and expand upon his attempts, it may facilitate their escape from the constraints of Western thought and ascend to a genuinely subjective thought of life (and Minjung) for us and the world.

Yong-bok investigated Korean history, from the Three Kingdoms period (18 BC–660 AD) to unearth the spiritual resistance narrative - a Zoegraphy of Seontopia. Firstly, he associated Seontopia with Pungryu (風流), "one classical spiritual event in the community of the people." He endeavored to formulate a Minjung theology of Pungryu in alignment with the concept of Seontopia. He facilitated a convergence, fusion, or

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10 Ibid, 49-50.

union of Korean indigenization theology and Minjung theology narratives, which had been a troubling dichotomy in Korean theology.

This spiritual foundation had manifested in the Three Kingdoms period, though this was the time of royal regimes and their landed aristocratic classes. One classical spiritual event in the community of the people was a market festival called Pungryu. In the story of the three thousand palace women, we find the spiritual resistance against the brutal war caused by the military alliance between Shilla [57 BC–935 AD] and Tang Dynasties [618-907 in China] for the unification of three kingdoms. Subsequently, the Maitreya Minjung Buddhist spirituality movement developed in the Honam province of Korea. This may have been a sequel to the convergence of the Nestorian Christian spirituality and Tang Buddhism in 6th-century China.

An outstanding Minjung historiography of *Samguk Yusa* (三國遺事 [Overlooked Historical Records of the Three Korean Kingdoms] is the Minjung spirituality described in the Saga of Tangun, which is a resistance story of Sentopia against 40-years-long Mongol military siege against the Koryeo Kingdom [918-1392]. This story has great importance in the history of spiritual convergence in Korea.

In the early period of the Joseon Kingdom [1392-1910], the political economy took the form of a people-centered economy, seeking to overcome the socio-economic violence of the ruling Yangban in the Koryeo Dynasty. Toward the end of the Joseon Dynasty [1392-1910], the people-centered

economy and the Donghak Peasant Movement's economy (Donghak people-centered economy: 東學의 經世濟民) were the fruits of spiritual convergence in resistance to the socio-economic violence that was damaging the web of life.

During Japan's colonial domination over Korea, the Donghak legacy, the Confucian righteous "voluntary army" (義兵), the Donghak Movement, the Minjung Buddhist Movement, the Korean Christian Messianic Movement, and the liberal and social movement of the West all converged on the ground of the Seontopia legacy to declare a new vision of the web of life for a SangSaeng political economy, as expressed in the Declaration of the March 1st Independence Movement. This spiritual convergence laid the foundation for the liberated Korean peninsula.

However, the post-WW II situation, with the national division, the Korean War and the global regimentation of the Cold War, did not allow the SangSaeng political economy of life to nurture freshly the web of life and spiritual communion of life. Nevertheless, despite the dire historical conditions after the Second World War, the Korean people in both the North and the South shared the same deep aspiration for a SangSaeng political economy in a reunified, peaceful East Asia.

This aspiration of the Korean people for the peninsula and East Asia provides an axial, pivotal point for historical transformation toward SangSaeng and a grand peace in East Asia. In this global context, let us deliberate on a creative spiritual convergence for Earth's web of life.<sup>11</sup>

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11 Ibid, 51-52.

To some extent, these ideas were expressed in his doctoral dissertation at Princeton Theological Seminary. As a student there, he often told me that he spent more time in the Oriental Studies courses and library at Princeton University than at the seminary. At that time, the seminary president was Dr. James I. McCord (1919-1990), a staunch global ecumenist. Yong-bok Kim was one of the “McCord kids” that McCord mentored for the globalization of ecumenism. Transitioning between Princeton Theological Seminary and Princeton University’s Oriental Studies Library and seminars, he nurtured his theological subjectivity by studying Oriental Studies at the university, resolving his longing for his homeland while actively participating in global ecumenical theological discussions.

Yong-bok and the other Asian “McCord Kids” returned to their respective countries, collectively earning the nickname “the Asian Mafia,” making significant contributions to the development of Asian theology and ecumenism. These include Kim Yong-bok of South Korea, Feliciano Carino, former secretary of the Asian Christian Council (CCA), K. C. Abraham of India, and Yeow Choo Lak of Singapore. The Congress of Asian Theologians (CATS) was founded in 1997 in Suwon under their leadership. CATS is a theological platform for all churches in Asia, including Roman Catholics, the only such continent-wide ecumenical organization globally.

However, the Zoographies listed above must be revisited and updated by new research on Korean history, especially ancient history. For example, Yong-bok recognized the history recorded in the *Samguk Yusa* as a Zoography, interpreting it as the story of a Seontopian resistance to the Mongol Empire’s

invasion. While his intentions can be appreciated, it is essential to reconsider whether this aligns with the original purpose of his Minjung theology: to excavate the sociobiographies of Minjung, initially marginalized by vested interests. Some Korean archaeologists have criticized that Il-Yeon, the author of *Samguk-yusa*, mythologized the historical figure Tangun for political manipulation. By rediscovering the remains of the Yoha and Hongsan civilizations, ancient Korean history, including Gojoseon, becomes an intriguing field that warrants further study and updates by Korean theology, including Minjung theology.

#### IV. Grand Taegeuk Convergence of Spirituality in the Global Womb of Life

Kim Yong-bok proposed that we must extend the perspectives of SangSaeng Zoesophia and Zoegraphy beyond Korea and East Asia to encompass the entire Earth, in alignment with the spiritualities of the Pacific, Africa, and the indigenous communities of the Americas.

There has been the rich indigenous spirituality of the web of life among the native community in American continents as well as in the islands of the Pacific Ocean, in Africa (Ubuntu ['being self through others']) and in the spiritualities of Asia. These spiritualities have been revitalized at times of historical crisis in their community life and their web of life. These legacies of spirituality have responded to the colonial

regimes of the West and to the modern industrial capitalist economy by their revitalization to create new foundations for their web of life. These spiritual revitalizations in all the continents have laid catalytic foundations for new visions of the life of all living beings and their web of life.

There are clear signs of these transformative revitalizations on all continents, from local grassroots communities to national and continental dimensions, in response to the critical signs of 21st global civilization, particularly the technocratization of the world economy.

The trans-continental black movement of spirituality beyond the national, continental, global boundaries, challenging Western encroachment and global hegemony, is continuing its creative catalytic incubation of a new vision for the web of life for a convivial web of life. The movement was led by Martin Luther King. Jr. in the 20th century has a pivotal point of this spiritual revitalization, affecting all black communities in the world, as well as all communities suffering the global hegemonic geopolitical war regime and the war economy.

The spirituality of West Asia, Central Asia, South Asia and East Asia has been generating revitalizing at the bottom of all communities of life, deep in their web of life, from the time of colonization by the West, throughout the Cold War, and up to the present time of globalized economy and geopolitical hegemonic struggles by the world powers in the current post-Cold War age.

There is much to learn from the spiritual revitalization taking place in Native American communities, which have

been the womb of wisdom about the “web of life” in the cosmos.

The convergence of spirituality in Asia is yet to come. However, there are strong historical connections among West Asia, South Asia, Central Asia, South East Asia and East Asia, and there are signs of a creative ecumenical convergence of spirituality at this time of crisis of global civilization. Islamic spirituality, Buddhist spirituality, Hindu spirituality, East Asian Confucian and Taoist spiritualities can all interact across religious and cultural boundaries in response to the West and Western technocratic civilization.<sup>12</sup>

Yong-bok sought to unearth the spirituality of Zoography within the indigenous spiritualities of Asia, Africa, and the Americas. He suggested that this spirituality converges with the Black and Women’s theological movements of the 20th century. To counteract the Western technocratic civilization, anticipated to grow more dominant in the 21st century, he called for a Grand Convergence, an ecumenical interaction with all global religions and spiritual traditions.

Yong-bok proposed a Korean title more advanced than the English one for this concept. The English title was “Grand Convergence of Spirituality in the Global Womb of Life”. However, he changed the Korean title to “Convergence and Fusion of Life in the Mode of Taegeuk in the Global Womb of Life” (생명의 세계 자궁에서 영성의 태극적 수렴과 융합). This modification introduces the cosmology and methodology of Taegeuk’s (太極 [Taiji], the Great Ultimate) to clarify his

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12 Ibid.



somewhat unclear concept of “convergence,” alternatively used as convergence or fusion. This is a significant step from the perspective of Theo-dao (Theology of the Dao).<sup>13</sup> Finally, his Seontopian Zoesophia and my Theo-dao have found a more concrete “pivotal point” where they can converge and fuse. Unfortunately, his passing deprived us of a dialogue partner to develop this convergence further.

Contemporary astronomy continues to discover new things about Black Holes. Everything in the universe converges and fuses in these all-consuming black holes. Taegeuk is perhaps the closest image and metaphor to such a black hole. Taegeuk, while providing an accurate image of the black hole, also serves as the primary East Asian metaphor for cosmogony. The diagram of Taegeuk (Taegeukdo) by Zhu Donyi (1017-1073), a fundamental Neo-Confucian, manifests its alignment with the Big Bang cosmology.<sup>14</sup> In terms of modern astronomical cosmology, the first phrase of Taegeukdo, “the Non-Ultimate is the Great Ultimate (無極而太極),” can be inferred to mean the creation of the universe (the Great Ultimate) by a Black Hole (the Non-Ultimate).

Taegeuk is divided into yin and yang, stillness and motion, principle (理 li) and vital force (氣 ki). However, it also serves to converge and fuse these opposites to create all things and birth life. Thus, the five elements of fire-water-wood-gold-earth (火水木金土), which are created, cycle through each other in opposition and symbiosis to birth life. The universe and life are generated and emerge through this Taegeuk movement of dialectical

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13 For theological applications of Taegeuk, see Heup Young Kim, *A Theology of Dao*, 48-50, 61-64.

14 For Taegeukdo, see Micael C. Kalton, *To Become a Sage: The Ten Diagrams of Sage Learning* by Yi T'oegye (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 37-42.

opposites (SangGeuk: gold > wood > earth > water > fire > gold) and cyclical conviviality (SanSsaeng: gold-water-wood-fire-earth-gold). The concept of Taegeuk can provide space for Minjung theology to develop further alongside (and not separate from) East Asian thought beyond the Western dialectical and analytical framework of the dualistic paradigm. Kim Yong-bok's Seontopian Zoesophia already provides this.

## V. Minjung Theology and Theology of Dao: The Confluence of Two Stories

During the Minjung Theology for Life and Peace conference held in October 2022 in Jaeundo, Shinan, Jeollanam-do, I presented my argument for the historical intertwining of minjung theology and the theology of Dao.<sup>15</sup> I asserted that minjung theology, distinct from Latin American liberation theologies, was originally established in alignment with early theodaoian thinkers. For the future development of minjung theology, I urged emerging theologians to deepen their understanding of their own religious cultures, citing notable collaborations like those between Suh Nam-dong and Kim Chi-ha, Ahn Byung-mu and Yu Young-mo, and Kim Yong-bok and Theodao.

Suh Nam-dong (1918-1984), a pioneer of minjung theology, was greatly influenced by Kim Chi-ha's (1941-2022) innovative analysis of Minjung's han, a term encapsulating the accumulated

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15 See the sourcebook, "Speaking the Green Newspaper Name in Shinan," 2022.10.24-26, Ramada Hotel in Shinan, South Jeolla Province, 20.

feelings of oppression and alienation. This deep connection means that Suh's theology must be examined alongside Chi-ha's original thoughts. As his ideas matured, Chi-ha shifted his focus from Minjung to life, or 'Saengmyeong' (생명) in Korean. In his seminal work, "The Ugeumchi Phenomenon (우금치 현상),"<sup>16</sup> Chi-ha argued that the Minjung's Ugeumchi uprising (1984) was not just a manifestation of their han, but a representation of a cosmic life movement embodied by Taegeuk. His ideas gradually formed a distinctive theodaoian perspective, though this shift was not universally accepted among minjung theologians. Despite the controversy, Chi-ha continued to expand on the hermeneutical understanding of the Minjung's life movement, as exemplified in the Battle of Ugeumchi. He did so by incorporating principles of restoration and reversal found in the *Daodejing* and *Yi Jing*. In light of his ideas, I developed the 'hermeneutics of *ki*' (vital force) as a methodological framework for constructive Korean theology; for example, a Christology of Dao (Christo-dao) interpreting the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ as cosmic events of the Dao's reversal.<sup>17</sup>

Ahn Byung-mu (1922-1996), another crucial figure, is typically associated with Ham Seok-heon (1901-1989). However, this overlooks the substantial influence Yu Young-mo (1890-1981), the shared mentor of Ahn and Ham, had on Ahn's thinking. Even Ham's central idea of "ssial" 씨알 (seed) traces back to Yu. As Ahn's last teaching assistant during his visit to the United States as a visiting professor at the Pacific School of Religion in 1989, I saw first-hand his struggle to shift his focus from Minjung to 'min'

16 See Kim Chi-ha, *Life* (Seoul: Sol Publishing House, 1992), 188-192. For English translation, see Heup Young Kim, *A Theology of Dao*, 18-23.

17 Heup Young Kim, *A Theology of Dao*, 18-26.

(민), the Korean word for 'people'. His association with Yu's thoughts, including Yu's devoted student Kim Heung-ho (1919-2012), should be considered in future studies of Ahn Byung-mu.

Lastly, I want to draw attention to the relationship between Kim Yong-bok and the theology of Dao. Starting with the sociobiography of Minjung, Yong-bok's minjung theology evolved into Seontopian Zoesophia. This transformation highlights the paradigm shifts he navigated in response to global theological changes since the 20th century: from sociological considerations to an understanding of the global web of life, and from there to an engagement with world religions in a united response to the impending ultra-technological Western civilization. His cosmological expansion from minjung theology to Seontopian Zoesophia aligns with Theodao's attempt to narrate a 'Big History' that identifies signs of cosmic life movement within the "pneumatic-socio-cosmic trajectory," exposing through the "socio-cosmic biography of the exploited life."<sup>18</sup> After all, is not minjung theology intrinsically a quest for the Dao of Minjung?

## VI. Great Convergence of Korean Theology for the Dao of Seontopia: Toward New Civilization of Green Life

Furthermore, Kim Yong-bok's conception of zoegrphy, Zoesophia, and Seontopia extends beyond the sociobiography of Minjung. Likely aware of the potential for a dystopian future propelled by the uncontrolled growth of an ultra-techno-

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18 See *ibid.*, 217-22.

civilization, he envisioned threats posed by the intersection of transhumanism and capitalism. This perspective considers the path to posthuman evolution through the merger with advanced technologies like artificial intelligence (AI), bypassing the essential process of self-cultivation or sanctification. He perceived the potential value of spiritual communities, such as the East Asian utopia of Muryeong-Dowon 무릉도원, as a counterbalance to the dystopia predicted by Western technological advancement.<sup>19</sup>

Prominent transhumanists like Yuval Noah Harari, author of best-sellers like *Homo Sapiens and Homo Deus*,<sup>20</sup> have taken the position that individuals not allied with AI might become a “useless people” who belong to a “useless class.”<sup>21</sup> Harari, revered as a modern prophet at forums like the World Economic Forum, suggests that this marginalized group cannot resist AI-enhanced transhumans, thereby exerting significant influence on the global economy and politics.

Notable among these influencers is Elon Musk, the former richest man on the planet, who advocates for the fusion of human brains with AI through projects like Neuralink. Musk also contributed to the development of the ChatGPT large language AI model. The late physicist Stephen Hawking (1942-2018) also foresaw potential conflicts between ordinary humans and transhumans. Such transformations, largely driven by Big

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19 In the last lecture at Hanil Jangshin University in 2021, Yong-bok hinted that Seontopia be translated as a utopia for Westerners who do not know East Asians' ideally dreaming place like Mureung-Dongwon (무릉도원).

20 See Yuval N. Harari, *Homo Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* (New York, NY: Harper, 2011) and *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow* (New York, NY: Harper, 2016).

21 See <https://www.nationalreview.com/corner/transhumanist-theorist-calls-the-ai-unenhanced-useless-people>.

Tech magnates who have accrued massive wealth from the Fourth Industrial Revolution, are already in motion with the vision of ‘longtermism.’<sup>22</sup>

In the face of this impending era of eugenics and cybernetic totalitarianism brought on by transhumanism and longtermism, minjung theology may need to reinterpret and broaden its concept of Minjung. According to the transhumanists, all unenhanced humans not aligned with AI and human-enhancement technologies, will become marginalized and vulnerable. The rise of techno-mammon marks the advent of these malicious ambitions. It is now a collective responsibility to prevent techno-mammon’s destructive force against humanity and God’s creation. We must prioritize protection for the “cybernetically vulnerable” in this age of AI and advanced technology, as advocated in the Sermon on the Mount.

A “new civilization of green life” aptly encapsulates Kim Yong-bok’s idea of Seontopian Zoesophia. The preservation of global and universal ecology, life, and humanity is paramount to sustaining a life-nurturing utopia rather than a dystopia precipitated by Western technological civilization. As we navigate the so-called “Anthropocene,” this becomes our shared destiny and kairos calling. Theologies across Korea, Asia, Africa, and the rest of the world must collaborate in finding a new Dao, a path to prevent the mechanization and destruction of God’s creation by Western technological civilization and to create a Seontopia capable of preserving and restoring all ecosystems, humanity, and life. This is a divine call to action. We must unite

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22 See <https://www.salon.com/2022/08/20/understanding-longtermism-why-this-suddenly-influential-philosophy-is-so>.

in a monumental struggle for this vision of God's Kingdom within the history of civilization and the broader context of Big History of Universes.

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