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**A SOCIO-RELIGIOUS SURVEY OF SINDONAE**

**By Choi Jai-Sok**

This paper is a report on my survey of the community called Sindonae, near Kyeryong-san in South Ch’ungch’ong province, and concentrates on the peculiarly religious nature of the community, ignoring those sociological aspects that can be studied more easily in other rural Korean communities. I am well aware that my study is not exhaustive, but I hope it will serve as a stimulus for further work in the same field.

The survey was conducted on two occasions: August 8-22 1955, using a prepared questionnaire to survey the general social and economic background; and September 30 to October 6, 1955 for an investigation of the various religious groups in the area.

The questionnaire prepared for the first phase contained enquiries on: name of householder, position in family, sex, age, place of birth, occupation, previous occupation, previous domicile, amount of arable and forest land owned, date of immigration to Sindonae, and religious adherence. One copy was distributed to each household.

The first six days were spent visiting the village headmen and schools to gain their sympathy and support. The headmen were often very reluctant to give any information, and required several hours’ persuasion; but the forty-two students of Kyeryong Middle School were most helpful. They were given a briefing on survey methods, then divided into groups of three and assigned to their home hamlets. They were told to fill in the questionnaires first from the tong and pan registers, then by personal visits to each household. I believed that the enthusiasm of the students would ensure accuracy, and errors resulting from lack of survey technique would be compensated for by their conscientiousness.

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I myself took Ujokkol, the remotest and least known village. It consists of thirty-six houses, set apart in a mid-slope valley of the mountain. Because of the villagers’ suspicious reactions, the survey of this small place took a day and a half.

The second phase of the survey was much more difficult, because the villagers keep the details of their faiths secret, and do not attempt to proselytize. Often the only way for a stranger to persuade them to talk was to pretend to believe in their religion.

General Description of the Community.

Alighting at Tugye railroad station after fifty minutes in a slow train from Taejon, one sees the rugged peaks of Kyeryong-san some four kilometers away to the northwest, where the three prefectures of Taedok, Kongju and Nonsan converge. Sindonae or Sindon is a group of fourteen administrative villages (nu) at the southern foot of the mountain. The name of the area is derived from the original plan of the first Yi dynasty king to build his new capital (*sindo*) here at the end of the fourteenth century, before he decided to use the site of Seoul. Even today a few large foundation-stones from early Yi times lie about the villages.

Apart from the four villages (*ku*) of Namson-ni, which belong to Chinjam township of Taedok prefecture, the area belongs administratively to Tuma township of Nonsan prefecture. It is sheltered between ridges of the Kyeryong range to east, north, and west, but open towards the south in the direction of Tugye. The whole area is about two kilometers from east to west, and three kilometers from north to south. Into this small space are packed some thirty temples and ten religious groups. The soil is poor, yet there has for many years been a constant flow of immigrants, drawn by the religious attraction of the place.

Dr. Yi Pyongdo describes its historical background as follows:

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Kyeryong-san his been famous since ancient times. Chang Chang Ch’u-chin of T’ang mentions ‘the east mountain Kye-san’ in the Paekche section of his *Han yuan*, and ‘Kyeram-san, east of the capital’ appears in the list of place names in the same book. These references are to Kyeryong-san, which is east of the then Paekche capital of Puyo, and was evidently already known in China. (The name Kyeram-san is also found in Korean records.) ... *Samguk sagi* records in the mongraph on sacrifices that Kyeryong-san was one of the five sacred mountains of Silla. The Ten Precepts of T’aejo of Koryo mention ‘the mountains south of the Ch’ahyon range beyond the Kongju river’ in terms that do not suggest Kyeryong was of great geomantic importance, ... but after the first Yi king thought of building his new capital there, many curious fables and prophecies relating to the area appeared and flourished. Especially during the latter half of the Yi dynasty the arcane book *Chonggam-nok* described how the Yi would be replaced by a Chong dynasty with its capital at Kyeryong-san. This prophecy has attracted many people to live in the area, Geomancers described the conformation of the mountain as ‘a coiled dragon looking back to its ancestors’ or ‘a *t’aeguk* of mountain and water’. (*Koryo sidae-ui yon’gu*, Seoul, 1954, pp 397-8)

The population of the area as of August 22, 1955 was 5,682 in 1,086 households, including temporary absentees such as military servicemen, students and itinerant merchants. There was an average of 5-2 persons per household. The largest village was the market place center of Taegwol-t’o, with 150 households. Four other villages had over 100 houses; only two had les than thirty.

The survey of educational background revealed that 70% of the heads of households had no formal education—though this does not necessarily mean that they could not read some Chinese characters. 22% had primary education, 7% had middle school education and 1 % some college or university training.

Only 4% of households subscribed to a daily newspaper, and 4% had dry battery radio or other receivers. This fact, however, [page 70**]** is of doubtful significance, because the people have a strong tendency to interpret outside news and world events quite arbitrarily to fit their religious convictions. No serious magazines were taken, and only twenty copies of fiction magazines were found in the whole district.

Sindonae has a branch office of Tuma township and a police station. There are five township employees, fourteen *tong* headmen and the usual quota of pan headmen. Youth organizations and a fire brigade exist, but appear to be inactive. There were no signs of spontaneous community action. Apart from religion, the residents do only what is demanded of them by the government. They have never used the *tong* and *pan* organizations to improve their villages, and many of them only attend public meetings when harried into doing so by local government officials. The peak of their communal achievement is road maintenance under local government direction.

The population of Sindsnae has been swollen by immigration. The survey showed marked fluctuations in the number of families entering the area each year, with well defined peaks at limes of political crisis. Immigration was high during World War I; at the time of the 1919 Independence Movement; in 1921, when the Sich’on-gyo sect split and a group came to Sindonae; and again in 192b when this group took the name Sangje-gyo. There followed a lull until the mid 1930s, when East Asia was disturbed by Japanese imperialism. The rate of immigration to Sindonae rose again, to increase still further during 1947. The figure remained between 30 and 40 annually during the disturbed period before and during the Korean war of 1950-53, but has tailed ofl since.

Investigation of the place of origin of family heads shows that only 19% were born in Sindonae. 21% were from other places in South Ch’ungch’ong, 14% hailed from Hwanghae, 11% from South Cholla, 8% from North Kyongsang, 4% each from Kyonggi and Kangwon, 3% each from South Kyongsang, North Ch’ungch’ong and North P’yongan, 2% each from South P’yongan and Seoul, and less than 1 % from Hamygyong. Thus the majority were from agricultural areas in South Ch’ungch’ong [page 71**]** and North Kyongsang (both near to Sindonae), Hwang- hae and South Cholla—all areas where Tonghak was once very active. Immigration from South Ch’ungch’ong started about 1914, but reached a peak in 1945-47; from Hwanghae there was a peak in 1921, related to the Sangje-gyo affair, and another at the time of the Korean war of 1950; the rate from South Cholla was highest 1945-47 and 1951; while there was no significant influx from North Kyongsang before the liberation. But it should be remembered that our survey was unable to reckon the number who had immigrated to Sindonae, then left again.

Farmers are normally reluctant to leave their homes because of their emotional, as well as economic, dependence on the land, their attachment to it as a heritage and as the site of their ancestral graves. This fact, added to the difficulty of obtaining fresh farmland, limits the number of Korean transferring from one rural area to another to 3% of the total rural population (although 20% of the urban population and 50% of city population are immigrants from rural areas). Sindonae, as a rural area with nearly 60% immigrant population, is therefore abnormal, and in this respect resembles the larger cities.

Investigation of the previous occupations and social standing of Sindonae’s immigrants showed that 81% were farming families before they came here. Of the remainder, 7% were retailers of food and miscellsnaeous goods; 3% were furniture-makers or lacquer-workers; 4% were herb doctors, village headmen and religious or professional workers; 4% were unemployed or physically handicapped.

Thirty of the families that had farmed before immigrating were questioned about the size of their previous land holdings. Eight were landless tenants, 3 had up to five *tanbo* (half a *chongbo*), 6 had up to one *chongbo*, 7 had up to two *chongbo*, 3 had up to three *chongbo*, 3 had more than three *chongbo*. Since 65% of all the farmers in Sindonae now own less than five *tanbo*, it is clear that most of them now own less land than they did before coming here. It is also evident that both wealthy and impoverished farmers have immigrated. Only two of the thirty questioned had bought their new land before moving to sindonae; the other [page 72**]** twenty-eight had simply moved in without previously securing a livelihood here, trusting to the providence of their gods or spirits. Five of the twenty-two families which had been landowners befors immigrating are still landless, while the other seventeen waited anything from two to ten years before purchasing their present holdings. It is hard for the immigrant farmers all to obtain land in this restricted area.

Most of them live on the money they received from the sale of their former holdings. Even after acquiring land in Sindonae they rarely find that the new farm is productive enough to give them a living. This is the chief cause of immigrant families leaving Sindonae again. Many of these who stay, including some landowners, supplement their income by hiring themselves out as part-time agricultural workers. 65% of all households own farm land; 14% live by casual farm labor (supplementing their income by wood-cuttings toffee-making and liquor-distilling―sometimes temporarily going as far as Kangwon for wood-cutting; or for a few months to Taejon for city labor; or tramping the roads to Seoul as toffee-sellers, sleeping hard); 11% are retailers of food, rubber shoes, matches, soap, dried fish, and other necessities, often itinerating a circuit of five-day markets; 3% are carpenters, blacksmiths, bamboo-workers, spinners, and other craftsmen; 45% are local government employees, herb doctors, teachers, religious workers or otherwise self-employed; and the remaining 3% are the handicapped, unemployed, and those who are dependent on charity.

As for their present land-holdings, of the 707 landowners, 65% own five *tanbo* or less (for the whole of South Korea the figure is only 43%) and 60 of these have less than three *tanbo* each. They are among the very poor. In fact five *tanbo* is the average landholding per household in Sindonae (as opposed to 8.7 *tanbo* for the whole country) and only 80% of the cultivated land is owned by the farmer who works it.

82 % of Sindonae farmers have no subsidiary employments; 12% have subsidiary work that produces less income than their farming; and 6% derive the greater part of their livelihood from work other than farming.

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The staple cereal eaten by a family also provides an indication of its economic status. In Sindonae only 20% are in the highest class, eating rice mixed with an equal or smaller quantity of other cereal; 50% eat barley or other cereal instead of rice 30% eat potatoes, flour, or dried pumpkin instead of cereal. On my arrival in the area I noticed that one in three households had grinding stones making flour for cruel; and in Ujokkel even at the autumn moon festival three of the five families were eating barley or millet, while the other two made do with potatoes and kimch’i as on ordinary days.

The Religion of Sindonae

Of 1,086 households in the area, 272 adhere to Sangje-gyo, 72 to Buddhism, 31 to Christianity, 9 to Confucianism, 5 to Chongdo-gyo, 10 to T’aeul-gyo, 7 to Kwansong-gyo, 1 to Tan’gun-gyo, 7 to Ilsim-gyo. The remaining 672 belong to no organized sect, but believe in the prophecy that Sindonae will become the national capital. The impression I had before making the survey (that most of the villagers belonged to organized groups) proved wrong. It was difficult to find accurate criteria for identifying the adherents of the sects, partly because of the excessive secrecy of the villagers, partly because at the time of the survey the Sangje-gyo leader was involved in a court case, and some Sangje-gyo followers were disclaiming their connection with him. Nevertheless, I believe my figures give a reliable impression of the facts, especially in showing the dominance of Sangje-gyo. (A few villagers who show little or no interest in the Sindonae capital prophecies have been included among those who do, but the statistical effect of this is insignificant.)

There were once other groups, such as Yonggamu-gyo, ‘reciting, singing, and dancing doctrine’, and Ch’ilsong-gyo, ‘seven stars doctrine’, but they no longer exist. The Ch’ilsong- gyo temple is now a dwelling-house. The great festivals of Kwan-song-gyo and Chongdo-gyo are said to attract believers from outside Sindonae, who bring large offerings. Possibly these two groups have larger memberships outside the area, consisting of people who find it impracticable to move into Sindonae to live.

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Faith in the sects is strongest among the old and ignorant, but generally claims the allegiance of complete families. Christianity appeals chiefly to younger people. Believers in the local prophecies advocate many eccentric beliefs and ideas of their own.

Sangje-gyo, ‘religion of the Supreme Ruler (Chinese Shang- ti)’, the largest of the groups in Sindonae, has distinct orders of ‘ministry’ and laity. The name of the group dates from 1925 when Kim Yon’guk, a disciple of Ch’oe Sihyong, second head of Tonghak, moved the headquarters of Sich’on-gyo to Sindonae.

Sangje-gyo has two kinds of rites: daily and occasional. Every family has either a stone construction two or three feet high set up in the yard, or a small altar table indoors, at which the daily rites are conducted. The rite is simple: at the third and fifth hours (approximately dawn and mid-morning) of the twelve-hour day, the whole family attends as the head of the household offers a bowl of pure water, reciting seven times a thirteen-character mantra meaning, ‘Serve the Lord of Heaven, creation stabilized, never forgetting, knowing all;’ after which specific petitions are presented- Though they worship Shang-ti, some families of this group have above the altar portraits of the first three Tonghak leaders (Ch’oe Cheu, Ch’oe Sihyong, and Kim Yon’guk) and of the present leader. At every meal, and on leaving home or returning, they offer *Koch’on*, ‘address to heaven’.

They assemble at their temple for the occasional rite on Sundays; on the anniversaries of the birth, death, and enlightenment of the three founder-leaders just referred to; the birthday of the present leader; and twice of year for spring and autumn celebrations. The order of the occasional rite, according to Kim Chingong, nephew of the present leader, is as follows:

1. On entry the worshippers reverence the altar, then sit attentively;

2. The conductor of the service bows before the altar, withdraws the curtain, uncovers the bowl of clean water, and burns incense; [page 75**]**

3. Facing the altar, the leader of the religion bows his head to the ground, prays in silence, then bows again four times. The worshippers do the same.

4. The conductor leads the assembly in the sevenfold repetition of the mantra used at daily prayers.

5. The leader faces the altar, bows, then squats on his heels. The reader (*taedok*) reads prayers before the altar and the congregation responds ‘Won-wi-dae- gang’ (‘Let there be the great descent’) four times.

6. Money offerings are presented by all present in order of seniority, each one praying and bowing four times before the altar.

7. The leader bows before the altar, and burns incense. All bow their heads and pray in silence (*simch’uk*).

8. The mantra is recited as in (4) above.

9. Closing silent prayer is offered as in (3) above.

10. The conductor bows to the altar, covers the water bowl and closes the curtain.

11. The worshippers bow to the altar and file out.

Tan’gun-gyo, ‘religion of Tan’gun’, keeps a picture of Tan’gun only, but worships him together with Confucius and the mythical Yellow Emperor of Chinese pre-history. Only one family of Tan’gun-gyo remains in Sindonae, and they have forgotten the ritual prayers. They offer a bowl of clean water before the picture of Tan’eun at sunrise and sunset, bowing repeatedly as they present their petitiions. They are sometimes attended by Confucians when they observe Tan’gun festivals on the 15th of the 3rd moon and 3rd and 15th of the 10th moon. It is essentially an ancestor-cult, different from the other Sindonae groups, yet attracted like them to Kyeryong-san.

I have never found any reference to Ilsim-gyo, ‘one heart religion’, though I met it here. Its followers grow their hair long, and the adults wear topknots. Their children do not attend school, but learn Chinese characters at home. Their headquarters is to the south at Iri, and the cult is losing ground in Sindonae, only seven families remaining. Their ritual centers on a diagram pasted on the wall indoors bearing inscriptions in Chinese. The family assembles before this at daybreak to offer [page 76**]** a bowl of clean water, recite the Haein-gyong, ‘sea impression sutra’, three times, make petitions, and kotow three times. They use a pecuilar gesture, raising their hands slowly sideways to join palms over the head, then reversing their palms to lower and fold their hands before sitting on their heels.

Twice a month they have a more eleborate service, burning candles and incense and making further triple kotows.

The text of the sutra reads (each line repeated):

Bull nature in the field;

Heaven and earth, father and mother;

The bow ana the bird combine their force;

When the calf cries grace is aroused;

One heart cooperation;

The world stands fast;

Our lord stands fast.

On the 8th of the 4th moon, 16th of the 8th, and 8th of the 10th there is a ceremony at Iri when the sutra is recited twelve times. A delegate from Sindonae attends.

T’aeul-gyo is a sect of Chungsan-gyo, otherwise called Humch’i-gyo. In Sindonae it exists only at Ujokkol hamlet. Like the other native syncretic religions described here it has no use for modern formal education, but relies on enlightenment through the repetition of the T’aeul mantra, and hopes for an earthly paradise.

Kwansong-gyo, ‘religion of the sage Kuan Yu’, worships that worthy (otherwise known as the Chinese God of War), and his companions in *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, Chu-ko Liang, Liu Pei, and Chang Fei. The group has a fine statue of Kuan Yu and two-story building containing a picture of a heavenly King and a goddess of the earth on the lower floor and pictures of a male god of heaven and four female spirits of the Great Bear constellation on the upper floor. Worshippers make four bows before the picture of Kuan Yu and six before each of the others. Most families in this group have a stone altar in the [page 77**]** houseyard where a bowl of clean water is offered before sunrise and after sunset. After their initial prayer they bow twelve times to the northeast, silently salute the spirits they worship, then make nine bows to each of the cardinal points of the compass, concluding by praying while facing south. They have four mantras, each repeated 21, 28, or 36 times. There have been many groups devoted to Kuan Yu. In 1920 Pak Kihong and Yongsik organized a Kwanu-gyo in Seoul, but the organization now called Sindonae dates only from 1945 and is quite different. Greater festivals are held on the 3rd of the 3rd moon and the 9th of the 9th moon, when co-religionists come from other places, bringing offerings of rice and cash.

Chongdo-gyo, ‘right way religion’, is a name that was used by Yi Sonp’yong when he started a new religious group in Koyang, Kyonggi province, in 1922; but the Chongdo-gyo now at Sindonaae is said to have been founded by an illiterate old woman, now dead for some years. She claimed to have learned her doctrine by heavenly revelation, and dictated it to her followers. They are now divided into two sects, one led by an illiterate woman in her sixties, the other by a man in his forties called Sim. She claims that the two of them were the foundress’s principal disciples, but separated because of Sim’s arrogation of superiority. The woman’s temple has an altar with three diagrams over it, embroidered in green on a white ground and framed. In the middle is a swastika; on the right a circle segmented by vertical and horizontal crossed diameters; on the left a rectangular version of the character *Kung*, ‘a bow’, with its mirror image to the right (producing the effect of the character a, ‘second place,’ with the top and bottom strokes blank at the center). On a corner of the altar is a framed vertical inscription in Korean script: ‘Holy Spirit of Kyeryong-san.’

On ordinary days clean water is offered and incense burned, with six bows, at morning, midday, and night. The 9th, 19th and 29th of every lunar month are equivalent to Sundays for Christians and all local believers attend the temple, where the ritual just described is performed with the following prayers.

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Heavenly Father, grant us protection and love. (Once) Heavenly Father, Heavenly Father, descend and make an earthly paradise here on Kyeryong-san. Forgive your children’s sin; give food for our bodies, protect us from temptation; give us all good things, give us water of life to drink to prepare us for the earthly paradise, to enjoy wealth and bliss in thy glory. (Thrice)

Heavenly Father, Heavenly Father, Heavenly Father, give us, the descendents of Tan’gun in the fair land of Korea, unity and strength; give us wisdom, knowledge, competence, courage, to save mankind and give a salutary example. (Thrice)

Heavenly Father, Heavenly Father, Heavenly Father, forgive the sins of all maknind and bring our present trials to an end.

Give us a united country, unity, strength, and devotion.

Give us all good things. Give us long life, immortality, eternal lite. Give us water of life to drink, to prepare us for the earthly paradise, to enjoy wealth and bliss in thy glory. (Thrice).

After these prayers they again bow six times. Then the leader offers petitions and bows six times; and after all have drunk the water from the altar, they all exchange preetings and blessings.

On the 9th of the 3rd moon, 29th of the 6th moon, and 9th of the 9th moon, co-religionists from other places come with offerings to more elaborate ceremonies, at which the local mountain spirit is also worshipped and the number of bows is increased from six to nine. The same diagrams are enshrined in each household and pure water is offered before them three times a day, with mantras and prayers. At every meal thanks are offered to *Kungul pumo-nim* ‘Kungul father and mother’. The cult also uses hymns with such titles as ‘Welcome to Kungul father and mother’, ‘Song of peace’, ‘Green cross song’, ‘New fortune song’, ‘Five virtues song’, ‘Imprisonment song’, ‘Song of Korea’, and ‘Song of Kyeryong, the sea or religious discipline’.

Beyond these organized cults, I learned from a woman adherent [page 79**]** of Chongdo-gyo that there used to be a man who went to their temple and other places, repeatedly chanting ‘Sinjang, sinjang’ and giving a shrill whistle, claiming that he alone could teach how to realize heaven on earth. Kim Chinhong also told me that a self-professed clairvoyant in Ant’ogol chose eight of his women followers as ‘immortals’; but he has now gone to Ch’onan. Then at Taegwolt’o there is a Maitreya temple with a nun who also tells fortunes; and in another place a shrine with Tan’gun alone in it.

The groups I have described have no very clearly developed doctrines, and show many similarities among themselves, with numerous syncretistic features. Believers in the Chonggam-nok prophecies have vigorous fatith, but no allied religious practices.

We now turn to my investigation of the religious convictions and practices of lay members. For this purpose I distributed a questionnaire to twenty Sangje-gyo believers and ten Methodists, chosen at random in the administrative area of Yondong, Second Ward.

The first question was ‘Why do you believe your religion?’ Of the Sangje-gyo followers seventeen said they hoped for an earthly paradise, three that they wanted to be good. Seven of the Methodists hoped for heaven after death, two hoped to avoid bad health, and one wanted the birth of a son.

The next question was ‘Do you know the names of your religion and its leader?’ All twenty Sangje-gyo followers knew both names; but nine of them were unable to answer ‘What is the doctrine of your religion?’ They all said that religious faith was necessary and that Sangje-gyo was the best religion. It transpired that only ten of them had domestic altars; that five of them did not carry the prescribed amulets; four of them never attended temple ceremonies; and one of them read prayers at home only once a day. Two of twenty made no offerings at all, but twelve of them made ten or more offerings a year, ten of them offering 2,000 *hwan* or more each time. In view of their very small landholdings, these offerings are lavish.

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The questions about names and doctrine were put to five ardent Sangje-gyo followers who lived on or near the temple premises. None of them knew anything about doctrines, but all said they had been converted by belief in the coming paradise on earth and in hope of personal success. One old woman from Chinju had given her land away to Come and join Sangje-gyo, but when she discovered she would not be given a ranking position in the group, she changed over to chongdo-gyo. Ilsim-gyo and T’aeul-gyo followers believed their faith would improve their hard life. They attach great importance to religious practices.

Most of those who belong to the above groups also believe in the Chonggam-nok prophecy, and weave it into their religious life. Except for Tan’gun-gyo, however, they believe not in a man named Chong Toryong, but in Ghongdo-ryong, ‘commandment of the right way,’ i.e. their own religious system as the sole means of establishing the earthly paradise at Sindonae. The following passage from Chongdo-gyo teachings shows one way in which Chonggam-nok is adapted by these groups.

The divine father (ruler of heaven), divine mother (ruler of earth) and divine son (ruler of makind), conspired to build a new heaven on earth and establish the world in corrected order. The divine father said, ‘This world is a decaying world. The decay is sin’.

It decayed until 1947, but from this year, 1948, the world’s destiny is renewed. Hoist the banner of the green cross, and the banner of the T’aeguk and eight trigrams. These are the signs of paradise on earth. Otherwise the world will be destroyed within three years.

Divine prosperity will flourish for 90,000 years. After the creation of heaven and earth, in the beginning, when man was made the noblest of all creatures, first the three Budd- has, the rulers of heaven and earth and mankind, were unable to complete their creative work, because the ruler of mankind sinned and the world became sinful. Therefore the three Buddhas too suffered, and the people suffered the tribulations of humger, disease, drought, and nakedness. [page 81**]** After 90,000 years of this world of sin I will come to the purest, most sinless, most upright of men with orders of the right way (chohgdo) for establishing the earthly paradise.

The disastrous order of things lasted till 1947, but from this year 1948 the blessed new order will begin. While sin holds sway, and the principles of heaven and mankind―the five duties and three bonds―are not observed, the earthly paradise cannot be established. The three Buddhas will come with heavenly hosts and myriads of soldiers to give judgment and send sinners to hell. This judgment will extend to mountains and streams, trees and plants, birds and animals, reptiles and insects. Therefore, o evil hearts, repent! Confuciansim, Buddhism, taoism, Christianity―none have the true way all strive for greed and desire; therefore the world is judged and to be destroyed, but I (Chongdoryong) will come into the world and sit on my throne on Kyeryong Mountain in Korea, to establish the earthly paradise, to unite all nations, laws, and faiths, by issuing the ‘decree of the right way’ (*Chohgdo myohghtohg*). Receive and obey my right laws and right way. Till now women have been bound by the three ways of obedience (to father, husband and son), but henceforth it is the age of equality of the sexes. The old prophocy that after the Yi dynasty had ruled in Seoul for 500 years, Chong Toryong would come and make his capital on Kyeryong, does not refer to a lad (*tyoryohg*) surnamed Chong, but to a man with the right way (*chohgdo* that is to say, my words of life. In paradise there will be neither heat nor cold, nor war, nor famine, nor flood, nor frost, nor typhoons, nor sickness. A man’s years will be un-limited at best, 5000 years on average, and 300 for the short-lived. Men will marry at 30, and women at 28. Man and wife will sleep together on the 9th, 19th and 29th of the moon. More than that will be sinful.

Food and clothing will be abundant; there will be no wealth and poverty; no money, only trade by barter. Korean will be the language of the whole world; within three years all other tongues and languages will disappear. There will be two hours of day and two hours of night. Learned men, [page 82**]** brave men, loyal men and ignorant men of this world will not be discriminated against in the new world because they were born in the world of sin, but will be differentiated according to their degree of spiritual perfection and virtue. A palace will be built of all the world’s gold and silver and precious stones on the central peak of Kyeryong. Paradise will have no taxes. From this autumn pay dues to me. Use neither wine nor tobacco, and do not go to doctors, hospitals or soothsayers. Come to me!

Outside the organized cults, the second section in Sindonae comprises those who believe in Chonggam-nok prophecy, expecting Chong Toryong to make his capital here, with attendant peace and prosperity. There are many subsidiary tales, ranging from the heavenly vision that made the first Yi king abandon this site to a story that Chong Toryong is already in the world, but is in hiding till his proper time. A few years ago Sindonae was swept by rumors that the prophecy would be fulfilled in one or two years—but nothing has happened.

Yet the believers in the prophecy are not likely to give up hope. They keep creating new theories and interpretations. Some hold that divine grace will be restricted to oxndonae. After the Korean truce of 1953 on American army signal tower was removed from the top of Kyeryongsan, and this was interpreted as the result of divine interference with the signals. Sindonae is also believed to be the world’s only refuge in a third world war. Their faith is an ambiguous but firm kind of messianic hope.

The third section of the population has no religious interests at all. These are mostly young people who have had modern schooling; but they are sufficienctly under traditional Korean family influence that they do not criticize their parents’ religious attitudes.

The religious groups of Sindonae so far described are typical of recent Korean religious developments in that they are syncretistic. Sangje-gyo, for instance, combines the three bonds and five principles of Confucian ethics, elements of Confucian [page 83**]** ritual, theories of enlightenment and karma from Buddhism, the yin-yang theory of taoism, Sunday observance from Christianity, and the Sindonae prophecies from Korean indigenous tradition. Kwansong-gyo takes the worship of Kuan Yu from Chinese popular religion; and the gods of heaven and earth with the spirits of the Great Bear constellation from taoism. Taeul-gyo has taoist elements; Ilsim-gyo borrows the names of its prayers; Chongdo-gyo has Christian doctrines of creation and original sin, Confucian ethical ideas, mingled Christian and Buddhist eschatology, and various rituals.

Members of the groups I have described resemble those who believe only in the *Chonggam-nok* prophecies in that they all believe Sindonae will become the capital, and they all believe in a messiah. For Sangje-gyo the leader of the group is the messiah and will soon perform a miracle; for Kwansong-gyo and T’aeul-gyo, the messiah will eventually appear from their own ranks; for most of the *Chonggam-nok* believers, the messiah will be Chong Toryong. They all also have beliefs about grave-sites that derive from *feng-shui* geomancy—one of the early strata of taoism.

In general, it appears that the basis of all these religions is native anisism, overlaid with taoist developments and topped by a messianic theory that varies from group to group and person to person. Formal practices, ethical concepts, ana ascetic theories from Buddhism, Confucianism and Christianity in varying degree typify the various organized groups.

All Sindonae religion is characterized by a concentration on bliss in this world, a basically materialistic approach to the objects of faith, paying little attention to life after death or the spiritual perfection of the individual. The earthly paradise theme is paramount, and mantra recitation is emphasized as a means for realizing heavenly life in earthly terms. I believe that this type of religion indicates that its believers have grown up in a society that is economically decadent and politically oppressive.

These people also believe that only certain chosen indi-viduals have the spiritual power necessary for enlightenment and [page 84**]** clairvoyance. Belief in a single messiah is an extension of this attitude.

Similar religious attitudes are widespread in Korea, outside Sindonae, and even in urban society. The external manifestations of religion may be Buddhist prayers to obtain a son, strictly observed ancestral rites, Christian churchgoing for deliverance from ill-health, or resorting to soothsayers for predictions— but the fundamental reason for religious faith is the same as in Sindonae.

To test this theory I conducted a survey of thirty-two high- school teachers in Seoul, after my visits to Sindonae. Such a limited survey, I realized, could at best reveal a tendency, and could establish no firm conclusions; but, considering that all the people concerned were university graduates between 30 and 40 years of age, working in the capital, the results have a particular interest. Five of the teachers had at least once consulted a soothsayer, though none had ever employed a sorceress. Seventeen of them (half the total) had consulted the fortunes of the coming year by the *T’ojong pigyol* system; eleven of them (a third of the total) had used physiognomic readings; and eleven had sought readings of their horoscopes by the ‘eight characters’ method. Eight (a quarter of the total) had used cheirognomy. Two of them half-believed in the *Chomgam-nok* prophecy; nine believed to some extent in the *feng-suhi* of grave-sites, and eleven others were inclined towards such belief―meaning that two thirds of the total were sympathetic to *feng-shui*. All this indicates that the teachers are not interested in shamanism, but show some interest in cheirognomy, physiognomy, and eight-character horoscopes, while more than half of them have used *T’ojong pigyol*, and a significant proportion pay attention to the *feng-shui* of grave sites.

When we turn to the families of the same high-school teachers, we learn that 75% have visited fortune-tellers, or used *T’ojong pigyol* or eight-character horoscopes. If these are the figures for families of the well educated, we can guess what they would be in lower education groups. It is noteworthy that the schoolteachers, families are more concerned about their own personal well-being than the people of Sindonae, who believe in [page 85**]** a whole new society or nation, or even a new creation. Yi Pyongdo has asserted that *feng-shui* is deeply entrenched in Korea; and most of the Sindonae residents doubtless brought these theories from other rural areas where they are vigorous.

Next, twenty Sangje-gyo followers and twenty non-religionists in Hallim-gol were chosen at random and asked ‘How does your standard of living in Sindonae compare with what you had before coming here?’ About half of each group said they were now worse off, and 30% that they were much the same as before. Very few claimed any improvement. (The smallness of the sample was due to the evasiveness of the residents and shortage of time.)

‘What do you think determines the course of this world, men or God?’ showed that nineteen of the respondents said ‘God’and sixteen said ‘men and God combined’, while only two answered ‘men alone’. (Three did not answer.)

‘Is the *Chonggam-nok* prophecy true?’ was answered affirma-tively by five only. Twenty-five said it was partly right, six said it was wrong, and four gave no answer. This result suggests rather weak faith in the prophecy. Non-religionists were noticeably less confident than Sangje-gyo believers.

‘When will Sindonae become the capital?’ Three said within five years, ten said within ten years, sixteen said in the distant future. Only four said never. (7 gave no answer.)

When asked what they most hoped for in life, ten of the religionists and fourteen of the non-religionists said an improved economic situation; seven of the former and five of the latter said a good education for their children; the remaining four said domestic peace. All forty of them would like to send their children to school, the object of twenty-seven of them being to get their children into salaried posts as policemen, teachers, government officers and so forth. Seven wanted their children to be in business. Only three of the forty wanted their children to be farmers. The reasons given by the twenty-seven who looked for salaried jobs for their children were freedom from interference [page86**]** by others (9), money (3), a better life (3), and power (11). These reasons suggest motivations which in themselves deserve further study.

A survey of obedience among the twenty Sangje-gyo members showed that 10 gave unconditional obedience to parents, 8 gave deference to parents, and 2 made their own jedgment. Only three would give unconditional obedience to uncles. On the other hand 13 of them thought parents should choose their children’s spouses and only four thought the sect leader should make the choice. The leader’s authority is nearly as strong as parents’, but does not penetrate into intimate personal affairs.

Group Relations

The members of the organized religions in Sindonae show the solidarity that would be expected within each group. They accept the fortunes of the group as personal to each member—a vivid instance can be seen in the efforts of Sangje-gyo followers to release their leader when he was under trial.

The closeness of the bond within the group is demonstrated by the Chongdo-gyo custom by which believers call their co-religionaries ‘brother’ or ‘sister’. Illiterate old women are normally extremely conservative and reserved in talking with strange men, yet such a woman, on learning that I had joined her religion, addressed me as ‘brother’, and prayed for ‘our brothers and sisters’. Sangje-gyo believers address their fellows as *Yongu* (spiritual friend), in the third person. They give free hospitality to travelling brethren; help each other in weddings, funerals, ancestral rites, and farm work; and visit sick brethren. They address fellow-helievers over the age of thirty as *am*, a title derived from Kuam, ‘tortoise hermitage’, which was the literary style of the third head of Sangje-gyo; and younger ones as *tang*, ‘hall’; but the *am* or *tang* is preceded by a name given by the leader of the group. (This is reminiscent of the Korean practice by which clan patriarchs name new-born babies.) Such religious names, known only to the members of the group, strengthen their ‘we-consciousness’. At Sindonae each group lives in distinctive villages: Sangje-gyo in Sangwon and [page 87**]** Ch’ongsok-tong, round the chief temple; Ilsim-gyo in Korgun; Chongdo-gyo in Paegam-dong and Ujokkol; T’aeul-gyo in Ujokkol; Kwansong-gyo in Paegam-dong. Yet there are significant elements of inequality within these group despite their general sense of friendship and equality.

Sangje-gyo has the longest history and strongest organization among the religious groups of Sindonae. The smaller groups each have three officials or fewer, but Sangje-gyo has a systematic organization on a political model. Under the leader (*Kyoju*) there is a Religious Affairs Bureau (*Chongmu-won*) administering all religious matters under his direction. This bureau has branches in other parts of Korea. The leader is assisted by an Advisory Council (*Myongdo-gwan Hoeui*). The Bureau is administrative and the Council policy-making, but this distinction is often blurred in practice, and the leader by-passes the Council in directing the Bureau’s administrative work. The Bureau has five departmental officers (*Kwanjang*): Doctrine (*Ch’olli*); Religious Affairs (*Chongmu*); Legal Aftairs (*Pommu*); Financial Affairs (*Chaemu*); and General Affairs (*Somu*).

The workers or ‘ministers’ are or six ranks: *popsa* ‘law teacher’, *toju* ‘tao master’, *yugim* ‘sixfold charge’, *taeryong* ‘colonel’, *chungnyong* ‘lieutenant-colonel’ and *sorong* ‘major’, which depend on religious progress and the amount contributed in offerings. The leader is regarded as speaking the will of God, or symbolizing God. Since the organization has the earthly ideal of creating a material paradise with similar advantages, it is potentially political. Hence the leader takes his title in a coronation ceremony, *tungguk-sik*.

The superhuman role of the leader is evidenced by the honors he receives, and the practice of observing his birthday and anniversary of enlightenment. It is not difficult to imagine the relationship between followers, whose hopes are strictly for earthly blessings, and their leader, whom they regard as divine. Their constitution, *Sangje-gyo taehon*, also lays down that believers must pay reverence to officials in the group, giving implicit obedience to immediate superiors, in a chain culminating with the leader. Hence they address all officials as *Kwanjangnim* [page 88**]**, which also indicates the authority they attribute to their officials. It is a relationship that Max Weber would classify as ‘charismatic’.

They also respect seniority in age. This is illustrated by the honorific titles already mentioned, *tang* and *am*; but also by the fact that in a country where legitimacy of birth is highly regarded, the present leader of Sangje-gyo, who is illegitimate, was chosen in preference to his legitimately born brother simply because he was very slightly his senior in age. One must record, however, that Sangje-gyo followers are very much at ease with their authority and seniority structures.

Relations between the various religious groups of Sindonae are based on the conviction of each group that it holds the sole true religion. Nevertheless, Sangje-gyo and Chongdo-gyo are benevolent towards Buddhism, which they regard as deviant only in its preoccupation with a transcendental world. All groups, however, hate Christianity. The Protestant church in Sindonae was founded eight years ago with thirty members. It has never grown at all since. It is attended by individuals, mostly young people, whereas the other religions are followed by whole households. The Presbyterian minister said it is extremely difficult for the church to grow in a community where another religion is predominant and deeply rooted. Other groups refer to Christians by the contemptuous name *Yesujangi*. It is easy to explain this extreme attitude by the contempt in which Christians holds the religious practices of others, but more important is Christianity’s refusal to adopt into itself the traditional practices of Korean popular religion. Buddhism, Confucianism, and taoism during their long history in Korea have assimilated various Korean religious elements, but Christianity has a brief history here and rejects, for instance, any kind of ancestor worship. It is natural that those who hold traditional popular practices in high regard should resist such a faith.

Those who believe in the *Chonggam-nok* prophecy about Sindonae, but belong to none of the groups I have described, have no common practices or attitudes. They fail to see the need [page 89**]** for organization, because they regard the Chong Toryong prophecy as a natural aspect of developing creation.

Factors Contributing to Religious Decline.

The religions of Sindonae are concerned with the betterment of this world. Improvements in our society may satisfy them. Certainly their zeal is declining. The two chief reasons for this are the growth of modern education and increased mobility of population.

I am well aware that educational level is not a realistic index of religious consciousness, but modern education produces logical and scientific attitudes. In Sangje-gyo it is the educated people who want to replace hereditary succession to the leadership by election; and the younger people are less firm in the faith than the older ones. There is an undeniable connection between education and lack of fervor. Sindo Primary School, found in 1939, has graduated 900 students, and the independent school set up in 1949, subsequently developed into a Middle School, has graduated about 100 students and now has an enrolment of 200. Thirty-five of its graduates are now at high schools elsewhere; and five students from Sindonae (not graduates of the Sindonae middle school) are now at college in Taejon. I am sure that the more young people learn scientific methods of thought, the faster will Sindonae religion decline. More than 50% of Sindonae males between the ages of 20 and 30 now live outside these hermit villages, many of them in touch with progressive ideas in towns and cities. Their religious zeal naturally declines.

Economic hardship as a factor causing religious decline is peculiar to Sindonae, where disillusionment about the standard of living and the unlikelihood of the prophecy ever being fulfilled combine to destroy the immigrant’s faith. There are too many people in this small area living off the capital derived from the sale of their former holdings while they struggle to find new holdings in Sindonae. By the time their resources are exhausted they realize that their religious leader shows no signs of supernatural power and that Sindonae will not become the capital. The [page 90**]** leader’s charismatic role fails, and many people leave. In the period 1918-1924, of 1,247 immigrant households, 1,142 left Sindonae. The annual average number of departing households was 87% of the number arriving.

Yet this loss of population will continue to be made good by further immigrants so long as the whole country’s living standards and social stability do not improve. Only if Korean society offers reasonable expectation of material satisfaction as a reward for effort will the Kyeryong area lose its attraction.

This survey was inadequate, and crude in its method: a quantitative approach to problems that required qualitative as-sessment. Even one more visit to Sindonae might greatly have improved my findings. Nevertheless, there are some firm conclusions which can be drawn. The majority of Sindonae residents are poor uneducated farmers who moved to the area in times of social crisis, hoping for improvement of their living standard when Sindonae becomes the capital city. Their faith is an amalgam of taoism, Confucianism, Buddhism and more primitive forms of indigenous religion, but their faith is directed solely at satisfactions in this world. Such faith is sincerely held, but unrealistic, and its doctrinal amalgam is expressed in religious practices drawn from various sources, characterized by mantra recitation, unsociability between groups but religious solidarity within households. Beliefs are very unsophisticated, and both doctrine and ritual are subject to reformation from time to time. Hence schisms develop into new faiths, like Sangje-gyo and Ilsim-gyo; new groups emerge, like Kwansong-gyo and Chongdo-gyo.

Four main types of syncretism are found: (1) simple credence in the *Chonggam-nok* prophecies, without adherence to any religious group—numerically the strongest of the four; (2) syncretism of folk belief with other elements, as in Chongdo-gyo; (3) a basis of folk beliefs and elements of established religions, on which are superimposed features of modern folk religion, as in Sangje-go, T’aeul-gyo, Ilsim-gyo and Kwansong-gyo (especially Sangje-gyo, which has had features of Chonggamnok theory superimposed since it broke with Sich’on-gyo and moved to Sindonae [page 91**]**); (4) an established religion which adopts aspects of folk belief after coming to Sindonae, as in the case of the Methodist who was converted in hope of having a son born.

Sindonae has no community-wide organization, but consists of a number of groups, each internally loyal, but all mutually exclusive. Sangje-gyo, the largest group, has a para-poutical organization, and a charismatic bond between leader and believers.

The growth of modern education erodes Sindonae popular religion. Nevertheless, unless social and economic conditions are much improved by other means, these religions will linger for many years.