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White Heaven Palace and Huh Kyung Young: Political Peacemaker of a New Religion in Contemporary Korea

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Abstract

A common purpose of religious organisations is promoting global or regional peace perspectives through their teachings and practices. Native religious groups in Korea emerged owing to the social transformation of internal security. The ruin of the Joseon dynasty (1392–1910) and the colonial repression by the Japanese Empire (1910–1945) and Korean War (1950–1953) resulted in the growth of new religious movements. Korean contemporary society (post-1980s) also witnesses the emergence of unique religious leaders. Do any groups promote the socio-political policy of a peacemaker? This paper explores the new religious movement of Huh Kyung Young (1947–) and his adherents through the perspectives of military-economic environment, mystical prophecy, popular culture, politics, election, new religion, and suspicion. The paper not only demonstrates the historical process of a pop singer and politician becoming a new religious leader, but also argues that the contemporary group of Haneulgang ('White Heaven Palace') attempts to establish a permanent peace through the sacred-political domination of the so-called, 'the God Man' rather than depending on secular powers.

Keywords: White Heaven Palace, Huh Kyung Young

INTRODUCTION

Modern Korea experienced a radical emergence of various new religious movements (NRMs) in the transformation era of the twentieth century. The religious influence of Shintoism (a major legal foreign religion on the Korean Peninsula) and the colonial environment of the Japanese Empire in the first half-century directly engendered new native (or ethnic) religious groups, including Tonghak (Cheondogyo), Taejonggyo, Wonbulgyo, and the Jeungsan movement. The founders generally held the common characteristics of nationalism and anti-colonialism, and partly expropriated the teachings of traditional religions (Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism). Gaengjeongyudo (更定儒道) is one of the representative sects for Confucianism, while Bongnamgye (奉南系) follows the teachings of Kim Cheongeun (金天根), along with Sambeop Sudogyohwawon (三法修道教化院) and Cheonji Daeando (天地大安道). Gaksedo (覺世道系) was created by Lee Seonpyeong (李仙樺) based on Korean folk religions. They individually gained the attention of local people who were seeking alternative beliefs, enhanced mental health or family stability.

The religious market was continuously developed in the second half of the twentieth century (followed by the Korean War), particularly with the external growth of Christian NRMs. After the impacts of Na Oong Mung (1914–2009), Park Tae Son (1917–1990), and Moon Sun Myung (1920–2020), the 1960s–1990s enjoyed the diversity and prosperity of the new Christian sects, including: Cheongu Kjintongpa (천국진통파), World Work Process Society, Gwiirwon (귀일원, 1965), Saengnyeong Gyohoe (생령교회), and Jibang Gyohoe (지방교회) (Kim 2019, 212). These sects did not come from the same denomination of the foreign religion but were still familiar in the context in which they attracted not only poor people and marginalised groups (women and children) but also professionals, university students, and middle-class citizens in Korea's industrial society. The financial independence was stronger than the ethnic organisations.

Most of the new faiths introduced a mystical foundation with sacred narratives depicting that their god, or the ultimate being, despatched his/her special agency (angel, prophet, teacher, etc) to earth. While the doctrine of

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traditional Christianity is about the incarnation of Jesus, a couple of new religions, including Kang Jeungsan of the Jeungsanism, publicised the teaching that the god of the universe himself descended on earth for judgement, re-establishment of a peaceful earth and joyful life of humans. The new movement of Haneulgung is in the category. What are their basic teachings? Why does the founder, Huh Kyung Young, have a strong political career? Is there any controversy in contemporary society? Since they belong neither to the group of Christianity nor to the figure of traditional religions, this paper analyses the socio-religious nature of the so-called, the (very) new religion in the context of personal ordeals, mystical prophecy, politics, popular culture, new teachings, and social controversy.

MILITARY AND ECONOMICAL ORDEALS IN DEMOCRATICALLY TRANSITION

The second half of the twentieth century was the time of socio-political transformation during which the Korean Peninsula of East Asia witnessed an ideological and military conflict between South Korea and North Korea through the Korean War (1950–1953). The geopolitical tension was based on the international policy of the Cold War superpowers. The Peninsula War caused approximately 3 million war fatalities with a larger proportional civilian death toll than in WWII (1939–1945) or the Vietnam War (1955–1975). The victims included many casualties, orphans, and dispersed families as the result of the social degeneration (Lee 2003, 85–108). Korea's government could not sufficiently offer welfare to its citizens, such as medical aid, education, food, and hygiene. The condition of women and children was worse without appropriate protection; widows and orphans were often adopted as concubines (second wives) or child servants to rich families, respectively. Huh Kyung Young was a child victim of the military antagonism.

The 1960s–1970s society was ruled by Major General Park Chung-hee (1917–1979) who took over the newfound democratic nation of Korea through the 16 May 1961 coup (Seo 1998, 605–618). Although Park's autocracy continued until 1979, the poor nation was challenged by his innovative idea, so-called 'Five-Year Economic Development Plan', an export-oriented industrialisation policy. The promotion of a self-reliant economy and modernisation had the interest of citizens. The recovery of the relationship with Japan brought the growth of trade and investment (See, Kim and Vogel (2011, 79–92). The detachments of approximately 320,000 South Korean troops to the Vietnam War (1965) and of miners and nurses to Germany (1960–1970) were the financial sources of national growth. As a result, the military state was able to own the POSCO (Pohang Iron and Steel (manufacturing) Company) to provide cheap steel for local automobile factories and shipyards (Hwang 2010, 128–164). Many young people were given job opportunities (Gemici 2013, 175–192). The various major family conglomerates, such as Hyundai, Samsung, SK Group, and LG Corporation, emerged as commercial spheres of the contemporary Korean society. In particular, the campaign of 'The Saemaul Undong' (also known as 'the New Community Movement') intended to modernise the rural life and economy in 1970 (Hong et al. 2022), even though the national movement gradually lost its momentum when the military dictator was assassinated. The teenage Hur witnessed such an authoritarian statism and rapid industrialisation in which new religious leaders reasonably introduced creative teachings and practices (Bennett 2022).

The voices of local citizens were raised in the process of Korea's democratisation in the 1980s–1990s. The Gwangju Democratisation Struggle (1980) and the June Democratic Struggle (June, 1987) represented how much the Korean society was in political conflicts and socio-religious panic (Pak 2007, 45–73; Na 2001, 477–491; Lee and Kim 2016, 68–74). Many Christian NRMs prophesied the perspective of eschatology or the coming of the apocalyptic messiah, including the Dami Mission (Lee Jang Rim), Christian Gospel Mission (Jung Myung-seok), Manmin Central Church (Lee Jae-rock), and the Victory Altar (Cho Hee-Seung) (Han 2016, 129–202; Ibid 2017, 37–73). Meanwhile, the Korean wave of the last two decays (2000s–2020s) impacted the global digital generation through the media of K-cultures (drama, pop music, food, beauty, language, and military forces). The influence of the Korean new religions is, likewise, measured in the global phenomenon in which the membership of the movements is not limited but have more international followers. Some of these religions even have more foreigners than locals, such as Guwonpa (Good New Mission) and Shincheonji (Introvigne 2021, 5–13), and World Mission Society Church of God. Like the case of the Unification church, the non-Korean followers regularly visited their sacred sites in Korea for either pilgrimages of personal reflection or international meetings.

MYSTICAL PROPHECY

The social transformation directly or indirectly affected the religious landscape of the ethnic community (Fields 2019, 125–163). The new organisation of the Chojonggyo Haneulgung (so-called, ‘초종교 하늘궁, the transcended religion, Heaven Palace’) is one of them, not from the previous NRMs either from native or foreign ones. The mythological genesis of the ‘Haneulgung’ movement is promoted as an incarnation formation that the god of the ‘White Heaven Palace (Baek Gung)’ in an apocalyptic perspective descended into the earth, which was in the condition of social chaos and conflicts, in order to establish a new earthly paradise through the process of judgment and unification of the world. For them, the world religions and Dao principles were powerless in the age of degeneration.

Huh Kyung Young (1947–), called himself as ‘God Man’ teaches his followers that he emerged to manage the cosmic peace. His almighty energy and infinite power are interpreted to have originated from the universe core. The founder is also depicted as ‘the original mind’ and ‘the original sun’. They promote that the God Man was born in a shed under Joongrang bridge, in Seoul on 1 January 1950. For the purpose of a humanitarian withdrawal from the cycle destiny of reincarnation, the God Man had to be born in a human body. The mystical birth of the founder is argued as the fulfilment of prophecy mentioned in the historical documents of the East and West. Along with the Classic of the Seal of Heaven (天符經) (Kim 2016, 148–172), the Preserved Records of Gyeongam (格庵遺錄) written by Nam Sago (1509–1571) is maintained by them in terms of Huh’s prophetic birth in which the surname (Huh) is particularly indicated.

言語道斷 海印時代 天許權來 身言書判 何姓不知 無父之子 空錢滅兵
 天神下降 牛聲在野 人類審判 世界統一 制度改編 地上樂園 白宮昇天

When words and speeches are to no avail	The era of the sea of seals emerge
Heaven permits <i>Huh</i> to descend	Well-built; talented in speech, writing and judgment
His family name is unknown	He is a son sired by no father
His name <i>Huh</i> clandestinely revealed	Thus God Man descends on earth
Cow sound is heard in the wildness	Humanity is to be judged
The world is to be unified	The policies to be overhauled
The paradise on earth be accomplished	He will then return to White Heaven Palace

Figure 1: Preserved Records of Gyeongam

The Korean classic text mentions the same surname who is seen as a perfect God without father (Figure 1). The secret mission of Huh is depicted as a peacekeeper of the world but he will eventually return to ‘White Heaven Palace’ where he came. Nam Sago’s prophetic book has been adopted in the emergence narrative of Huh Kyung Young as part of the Eastern prophecy. Kang Jeungsan (Gang Il-sun: 1871–1909), the founder of the Jeungsan movement, is introduced in the Haneulgung movement in which Huh would be the ‘re’-incarnation of Kang who was taught as the incarnation of the Supreme God of the Universe, Sangje.ⁱ The main Christian teaching code of the coming of the Messiah was additionally adopted by the new Korean group as the prophecy of the Western world: “...there are some standing here, which shall not taste death, till they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom” (Matt. 16:28).ⁱⁱ Yet, unlike the teaching of Christianity, the Haneulgung movement does not distinguish the characteristics of the trinity God. No individual role exists for God, the Son and Holy Spirit.

Huh’s followers argue that their God Man is the spiritual-cum-political leader in this post-modern digital era, and that the salvation and deliverance process of about 10 million people to ‘White Heaven Palace (= Sky Palace)’ will be implemented by their saviour who will stay on earth for 362 years and 88 days.ⁱⁱⁱ The place of

the Chojonggyo Haneulung (‘Heaven Palace’) is an imagined space but has been physically located in Yangju, in a suburb of Seoul. The sacred place is claimed to be the earthly headquarters of ‘White Heaven Palace’ where their master dwells. The five elements of Korean fengshui theory has been applied as there are the main mountain (Mt. Goryeong) in the back (north) of the location and the frontal mountain (Mt. Ireong) to the south. The white tiger group (implying a symbolic landscape) is on the west, while the blue dragon group is on its east side. The abundant water is another significant element of the Korean and East Asian folk tradition in the principle of yin and yang (Paton 2013, 128–234).

POLITICS, POPULAR CULTURE, AND ELECTION

The life and career of Huh Kyung Young are related to the social transformation of modern Korea. In this regard, His childhood was not in an ordinary case, being without both parents from an early stage (Huh 2000). His father (Huh Nam Kwon) was a victim of the political transition between Korea’s colonial independence (1945) and ideological conflicts (1950), while his mother passed away from illness a few years after he was born.^{iv} The orphan Huh became a child servant in a farmer’s household in Jinju, southside of Korea. However, his passion for self-development was the key strength not only to be a diligent elementary school level boy but also to master himself for the Chinese texts of the *Four Books and Fiver Classics* (四書五經).^v

The personal decision to leave the countryside for Seoul was a turning point through the strives of being a stuntman, slipper seller, and shoeshine.^{vi} The young man met a Buddhist monk (Lee Haeng Won). The opportunity to attend a night middle school and to learn *Eighty Thousand Tripitake* was provided by his foster father. The religious background would not deny the indirect influence of Buddhist teachings. However, this was not all the stories about his extended family. The personal impact of his second stepfather created another dimension of his religious character. Rev. Hong Geun Seob introduced the Bible to Huh who was also interested in the new Western principles of hope, redemption and salvation.^{vii} During the high school period, the leader of the Haneulung movement could be trained in the knowledge and wisdom of the East and West under the support of two professional stepfathers.



Figure 2: Young Huh with president Park and Vietnam War dispatchment (Source: Heaven Palace 2023)

The social experiences of working at various jobs made him more independent in finance and adulthood. Ironically, selling his own blood was one of the strategies in the industrialised society of 1970s Korea. After the young man participated in the Vietnam War as military personnel of the Marine Corps (Figure 2), he operated a disabled care center, along with the graduation of Dongguk University (a private Buddhism higher education, Seoul). Huh then encountered the founder and CEO of Samsung, Lee Byung Chul (1910–1989), and has been thirdly adopted by this Korean businessperson. Further, the Haneulung followers are instructed about the story in which President Park Chung Hee (1917–1979) accepted the young man as one of his (unofficial) policy

advisors (or a secret secretary) (Figure 2) (Huh 2000, 292–239; Han, 2021). The new religious group insists that some key political proposals Huh suggested for the national strategy included three ideas of establishing distance education system (national correspondence college), Saemaoul Undong (New Community Movement), and a nuclear plant purchase from the Soviet Union.^{viii} However, he was sentenced for one year and six months based on the argument of being Lee’s adopted son and Park’s policy advisor.

As a Pop Singer

Meanwhile, one of Huh’s unique careers is that he became not only the founder of ‘Bonjwa Entertainment company’ but also a pop singer in 2009. The songs of “Call Me” (2009), “Huh Bonjwa” (2009), Huh Kyung Young version of Christmas Carol (2009), “Rwainnau (Right Now)” (2010), “Red Angels” (2010), “Sad Man (2015),” and “Good World” (2017) were popular among young people. He used to perform at campus festivals. Yet, the melody of “Call Me” which contains the meaning of promoting his magical powers or prophetic movement, was controversial in social media:

Yeoboseyo (Hello)...	Moring, day and evening Call my name three times a day
Look in my eyes, you will become happier	You will naturally smile Come on, call right now
Look in my eyes, you will become healthier	Call me, touch with me everybody
Call Huh Kyung Young, you will start to laugh	Call me, touch with me everybody
Call Huh Kyung Young, you will pass an exam	I want you. Call me right now
Sing along with me, you will become slim	Don’t be afraid. Call my name
Sing along with me, you will become taller	Some excitement will be there
Call Huh Kyung Young, you will become prettier	Some joy will be there
Call Huh Kyung Young, you will become handsomer	Some happiness will be there
	Some surprise will be there...

Figure 3: a pop-song, “Call Me”

Huh made a strange claim before the release of the first music that “the spirit of none other than Michael Jackson had visited him” (Waqar 2022). The attractive music lines reflect the mystical energy of the leader who is mighty to deliver (young) people from their internal and external worry or troubles, such as unhappiness, ill health, weeping, study burden, weight, height, beauty, and good-looking (Figure 3). The methods of the solution were informed as calling his name (Huh Kyung Young) three times a day (morning, noon, and evening). The impulsive song also encouraged touching his body without fear. The end of the song implies those who apply such actions will be blessed with excitement, joy, happiness and positive surprise in life. The melody of “Call Me” is adopted in the speeches when he meet his followers. Kang Seonglyul criticised the re-appearance of Huh Kyung Young following his imprisonment and the mystical pattern of his music melody as a distorted societal icon. His figure, always wearing red neckties, was depicted as a comedian by the social critic Kang (Kang 2009, 148–149). However, the four major YouTube accounts have over 600,000 followers. For such a social phenomenon, Joo-an Kang, a journalist of the *JoongAng* newspapers, evaluated Huh as popular among Generation Z, referring to young people born between the mid-1990s and early 2000s (Kang 2021).

As a Politician for Presidential Election

As the political assistant experience to President Park Chung Hee inspired him to be a politician at the age of 40, Huh Kyung Young became the Minjung Party candidate for the Seoul City Council in 1991. He, at 50 years old, then was selected as the presidential candidate for the office of the 15th Democratic-Republican Party of Korea in 1997.^{ix} Although Huh was not known as a religious leader at that time, the aspiration of becoming the president of South Korea matched with his argument of the God Man to be the ruler of the earth (from Korea to the world).



Figure 4: Huh's meeting with Donald Trump (Source: Heaven Palace 2023)

While he was representing the Democratic-Republican Party for the 17th general parliamentary election, the 2007 presidential election was his second time of party candidature, which caused him to be imprisoned again. The adherents claimed social media fabrications and false news. The result of his political imprisonment banned him not running another national election for ten years. Afterward, the religious promotion was launched in 2018, asserting that Huh himself would unify the insecure world as the political peacemaker and then eventually return to the throne of the world's emperor at the White Heaven Palace. The Korean religio-political leader established a new political party, the National Revolutionary Party (NRP), which at one time was called the National Revolutionary Dividends Party (NRDP).^x For the 21st National Assemble election (2020), his party had 1,020 reserved candidates, 235 district candidates and 21 proportional representation candidates. Huh himself was one of the proportional representation candidates. The political aspiration continued in the following year of the Seoul City Major election. He gained the 3rd highest number of votes—52,107 (1.07%). The party announced a political song during the national campaign that praises the coming of Huh Kyung Young as the world's trouble-shooter. This song symbolically implies his religious mission on earth. The political scene was creative in comparison with the appearance of Kang Jeungsan for whom Huh himself argues as Kang's reincarnation for world unification:

Time has come to wake up Wake up!
World's core Deahae Minguk
Manchuria there Abandoned
Jeolla Gyeongsang What d'you say for?
Huh Kyung Young on a white horse

....

For World Unification

As being over 70 years old, the latest involvement of his political campaign was the 2022 presidential election, presenting his own NRP party. According to *The Korean National Flower Mugunghwa is not yet withered* (autobiography, 2000), Huh desired to be the second Park Chung-hee in politics and national leadership (Huh 2000, 282-329). Of course, he was not elected but his popularity increased through social media activity, including Facebook views. Because his concern related to the unnatural dying population and the near-future consequences the nation (indicating the world) would face, the '33 policy system' he promoted for the election brought a good portion of people's attention.^{xi} Huh's supporters maintained the perspective that the '33 policy system' would be the touchstone of the coming era for a peaceful coexistence, harmony, co-prosperity, world (=universal) unification, and the completion of theocracy.

The election strategy was divided into the categories of politics, family, welfare, education, world, and finance.^{xii} Among them, finance was the most concerned policy of the new religio-political party, including the issues and solutions of debt, dividends, income, fees/ tax, loan, and penalty.^{xiii} Family and social welfare were the second important policy, which handles the details of birth, weddings, aging, unemployment, farmers, pesticides, and

private protection.^{xiv} Huh promoted less political issue except the suggestion of MP's number from 300 to 100 for cost reduction as well as the abolition of provincial elections.^{xv} He did not support the national party system, which he considered to frequently cause political quarrels. To decrease internal tensions, a reduction from eight to four provinces of Korea has been also suggested. While these policies were extreme ideas beyond the general understanding of the people, the conscription of the military service was welcomed by young men.^{xvi}



Figure 5: followers of Huh at Haneulgung (Source: Heaven Palace 2023)

Thus, Huh's political involvement was seen as part of gaining the earthly reign to fulfil his mission. The music career was elucidated to culturally interact with digital generations. The completion of the "Heaven Palace (their sacred site)" in Seoul in 2016 facilitated more public events for curious people (Figure 5). Meanwhile, his supporters, mainly Koreans, have been spread over ten different nations, in North America (USA and Canada), Europe (Germany), Latin America (Brazil, Mexico, and Argentina), East Asia (China and Japan), and Southeast Asia (Malaysia, Myanmar and Thailand). The headquarters of the World Pilgrimage manages global supporting (approx. 34) groups as well as about 50 Korean diaspora leaders.^{xvii}

NEW TEACHINGS

Then, what do they teach? The Haneulgung movement attests that the energy of Huh Kyung Young is generally for the humanitarian aid purposes in which the mystical power functions for the recovery of people's health. The presence of energy that is manifested as special light penetrates obstacles regardless of the distance. As Huh's energy is superior than the scientific characteristics of light, the new religious leader, with the popular music and political jobs, testifies that his energy is passed onto people through the commercial mediums of blessing, nameplates, angels and Holy Spirit. The transmission of Huh's energy also exists in his names written on paper or in his photos. Further, they encourage followers to call his name one hundred times (Baekhoe) through which the door of the channel to cosmic energy may be open.^{xviii} When performers receive cosmic energy they become influential over other people and mentally and physically stronger. In this regard, one cannot suppose that the pop song of "Call Me" (2009) is not relevant with such a purpose of local outreach.

BLESSING

The people of Haneulgung considers the term 'Blessing' as a sacred gift from their God Man. The blessing is the special grace of unconditional redemption for humans who are either the living or dead ones. The method of receiving the blessing does not require a great commitment, but through making a phone call, or someone can represent the other person's name in order to receive their blessing. The benefit of blessing covers the forgiveness of sins from current and previous lives.^{xix} With the concept of redemption, they advertise another blessing in relation to her/his parents' tomb, such that the land where ancestors are buried will be blessed because of the sincerity of the blessing's receiver. The Korean new religion interprets that the blessing of the God Man Huh can not be achieved but a gift depending on the works of their previous life.^{xx} The White

Heaven Palace, according to them, manages the details of personal data for the person's blessing during the lifetime:

Testimony 1: "my son is a doctor. He received a blessing from Huh Kyung Young. Afterwards many patients started to visit my son's hospital while other hospitals were still finally struggling without regular patients," delivered by Hong _ Buck.^{xxi}

The followers accept the precept that the nameplates are the certificates of assurance for the admission of the White Heaven Palace. The nameplate of either dead or living people is promoted to be so powerful. For this, they refer to the early modern teachings of the *Preserved Records of Gyeongam Yurok* (격암유록) that prophesied the concept of resurrection. The text also covers the various historical events of the Imjin War (1592–1598), the Donghak Peasant Revolution (1894), the Korea-Japan Consolidation Treaty (1910), the liberation and division of the Korean Peninsula (1945), the Korean War (1950–53), the 4·19 Revolution (1960) and the 5·16 military coup d'état (1961) (Lee 1977). Huh especially foresaw the destiny of the Joseon (Korean) people in that ten million humans on earth will be delivered to Heaven. The principle of future destiny applied either for members or their relatives is similar with the *Choballye* teaching of the International Moral Association (Chinese-Korean New Religion: Yiguandao 一貫道). The symbolic ritual offers a chance in that the soul of a dead person can be delivered through the efforts of a living person (Kim, 2020, 174–175).

ANGELS AND HOLY SPIRIT

The Haneulung movement mentions the Christian figure of the Holy Spirit with assistant angels even though their roles are different. The Holy Spirit among them consists of five functional groups of angels, such as skin angels, body angels, intestine angels, muscle angels and basic angels. The Haneulung angels are comprehended as practical agents of human health and daily affairs. The role of the angels is to communicate with the operational agency or server of the White Heaven Palace. The angels' report would be eventually informed to God Man Huh. The new religion launched another group of angels, the 'Complete-mission Angels' in the 2020s.^{xxii} The newly commissioned angel group is responsible for the condition of economic crises, which they regard as secular benefits for leaders of conglomerates and stock companies.^{xxiii} The function of the 'Complete-mission Angels' is additionally sustained as the touchstone for the rules of the forthcoming Theocracy.

LECTURES AND HEALING

They do not receive religious offerings, but Huh conducts daily counselling or consulting at noon through face-to-face talks. The personal lectures have been conducted to the public on weekends (Saturdays and Sundays) at 3:00 pm during the last two decades of the 2000s–2020s.^{xxiv} His sharing covers socio-political issues about the future of Korea and humanity. The health of earth and the safe environment are important points. For the private and public lecturers, he uses the *Classic of Cheonbu Gyung* (*the Seal of Heaven*, 天符經). Here, the concept of the universe is seen as perfect. However, the formation of the universe has been interpreted in a mystical way that our galaxy has 720 starts where humans dwell among 1.2 billion starts.^{xxv} They also presume the existence of 3,628,800 earth-like stars in our galactic cluster. These starts are asserted as the final destination to which the dead people would be relocated. The Haneulung prophecy includes the ultimate mission that Huh will eventually become the united emperor in 2030.

Further, the Haneulung group promotes that their master, having an IQ of 430 (Lee 2022), performs for miracles through physical hand touches and eye contact. According to Eun Jee Park (Reuters newspapers), Huh "can change 23 chromosomes and 40,000 DNA in the human body. If someone is diagnosed with uterine cancer, (Huh) can treat the cancer within 0.1 seconds just by looking into the patient's eyes" (Park 2022). The unique styles of healing performance involve pulling hairs, hitting body parts, pinching, embracing patients, touching females' breasts and private areas (like uterus), stroking bodies, and repeating body up and down. The testimonies include the recoveries of a blind man after 45 years and of a stroke-ridden woman after eight years.^{xxvi}

SOCIAL CONTROVERSIES

Such a phenomenon brings two major controversies, especially on the issues of sexual scandals and financial exploitation. Since his performance is related with physical touch and speaking prophetic words, misunderstandings about behaviours or legal lawsuit have often occurred between Huh and his clients. Therefore, those who wish to encounter with the miracle performer, require the completion of a pledge form in which they have to agree that any Huh's performance over the person does not include any medical treatment, sexual harassment, sexual molestation, defamation, and libel and that the accuser have to pay all the costs resulting from the civil lawsuit (Kim 2022):

I agree that Huh Kyung Young has never performed a medical procedure on me. I also agree that he has never sexually harassed or assaulted me...I hereby waive all my rights to file lawsuits against Huh Kyung Young on the charges of medical, sexual, and/or other criminal violations. In the case of such lawsuits, I agree to be counter-sued for defamation and I agree to be responsible for all expenses resulting from the civil lawsuit (Kang 2022, 32).

The audience are required to pay the fee (Saturday: 20,000 won (\$17) and Sunday: 100,000 won (\$90)) as well as voluntary contributions for blessing. The fee includes lunch, rice cake, and water for visitors. The Saturday teaching would include neither a break nor Q&A time, while Sunday has some flexibility for Q&A by video. The Haneulgung leader encourages followers to purchase the nameplate for their place in the White Heaven Palace for 3,000,000 won (\$2,700). The marketing strategy has been expended into the five forms of selling his energy: "personal blessing energy", "business blessing energy", "private great angel energy", and "business great angel energy." The cost of the personal blessing ones is 1,000,000 won (\$836), while the great angel blessing is 100,000,000 won (\$83,600).^{xxvii} Moreover, the new religious group sells various souvenirs, such as Huh's picture, mug cup, T-shirts, hat, bracelets, etc. The commercial items were conceived as having the divine energy of their master. So, one of the main Korean newspapers, *JoongAng Daily*, criticised Huh based on an official source of the National Election Commission that the wealth of the leader has increased by about four times in 2021 from 7.20 billion won (about \$6.02 million) to 26.4 billion won (about \$22.1 million) including the property and land of Heaven Palace (their sacred site in Seoul) (Kang 2022). The suspicion was that Huh would use the money for his presidential campaign (in 2022), which has been one of the political issues as this action is against local law (Kang 2021).

CONCLUSION

The twentieth century was an era of socio-political transformation for the people of the Korean Peninsula. The colonial experience of the first half caused a decline in social prosperity because of which new native religions emerged and offered alternative teachings for the mental health of citizens. The second half was a new era during which the democratic government tried to establish a modernised nation through military authority and power. Economic and industrial development provided more space for the religious market in which the NRMs emerged either from Christianity or traditional religions such as Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism. The native NRMs were less flourished without social attractions of contemporary Koreans. However, this paper demonstrated a new group that originated neither from Western religion nor oriental (East Asian) religions. Haneulgung is a brain new NRM that emerged in around 2016. Huh Kyung Young, the founder, declares that his religion transcends all world religions of the world. He denies any historical relation with previous religions despite his connection to many heroic figures, such as Park Chung-hee, Michael Jackson, Kang Jeongsan, Jesus, King Suro of Geumgwan Gaya, and Queen Heo Hwang-ok. His self-promotion as a peacemaker was launched throughout a political career. His experiences as a Vietnam War veteran, connection with President Park and being a three-time candidate of national presidency were all external evidences that his followers would understand his purpose of coming to earth as a political peacemaker.

The performance as a pop culture singer aimed to be a secular method of having a social engagement, especially toward young generations. The melody of the song, "Call Me" is catchy and curious for the pop song lovers. The musical impact in the 2000s and 2010s indirectly affected his political campaigns for the 2022 presidential election. The supporters were interested in the new religious movement in which the mystical energy and power

were illustrated as evidence of his holiness. The terms of angels and the Holy Spirit seem to be derived from Christianity but the interpretation of each terminology is unique in the perspective that angels help parts of the human body and that the Holy Spirit is in charge of those angels. The Christian role of guardian angels may be familiar but the role of the Holy Spirit is not the same as in Christianity (as one of the Trinity) but functions as a sacred agency of God Man Huh. The financial accumulation behaviours are applied in the teaching of 'Blessing', selling 'nameplate,' and performing of healing and lecturers. The outcome of those activities is critical among media and outsiders. Huh's movement is still a new religious movement of less than ten years in Korea. Yet, they have specific outreach activities in different regions of Korea or overseas (though mainly Korean Diasporas). As the Haneulung movement gradually grows, Huh's argument that he has come from the 'White Heaven Palace' for the peace of the world is likely to demonstrate him as a political peacemaker. For this reason, one cannot deny his potential presidential candidacy for the 2026 national election (fourth instance of candidacy), even though chance of his election remains very low.

NOTES

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ⁱ This is still a controversial subject among readers and its practitioners. The followers of the Daesoon Jinrihoe also deny the historical view of its connection between Kang Jeungsan (Gang Il-sun) and Huh Kyung Young.

ⁱⁱ Matthew 6: 3 was also quoted by the Haneulgung movement in relation to the teaching of compassion in humanity: "But if you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what the right one is doing."

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- iii “What would be the Food Secret of Huh Kyung Young who would live for 362 Years?, last modified on 12 September 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=brAihVB8UO0>
- iv His father, a son of a wealthy family, was condemned by North Korea communist party and eventually imprisoned by receiving a death sentence. “National Revolutionary Dividends Party (NRDP),” last modified on 9 September 2022, <https://hkypresident.org/en/huh-kyung-young/about/>
- v Ibid.
- vi Ibid.
- vii “Aren’t You be interesting to know the Reason Huh became an adopted son of Pastor Hong?”, last modified on 12 September 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PHndJGkod1M>
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- ix He tried to succeed the spirit of Saemaoul Undong implanted by President Park but was defeated. “National Revolutionary Dividends Party (NRDP),” last modified on 9 September 2022, <https://hkypresident.org/en/huh-kyung-young/about/>
- x Ibid.
- xi “Yoon wins by 0.74% Point; Huh Kyung-young gets 0.83% of Votes,” *The Korea Herald*, 10 March 2022, <https://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20220310000518>
- xii “33 Commitments,” last modified 9 September 2022, <https://hkypresident.org/en/party/33-commitments/>
- xiii assets, employment, economic, bribes, bonds, fines, and E-cash.
- xiv veterans, workers, organ donation, moral care, disabled people, housing, and water preservation.
- xv Ibid.
- xvi Meanwhile the spheres of education and world issues were minor political spheres of interest to the NRP.
- xvii Yet, the new religious movement, though many overseas branches, is still limited by language and cultural barriers with fewer foreign members directly involved.
- xviii “This South Korean Presidential Candidate Has Been Leading A Whole Cult From Home And Exploiting His Followers,” last modified on 9 September 2022, <https://www.koreaboo.com/news/south-korean-presidential-candidate-huh-kyung-young-leading-cult-sexually-exploiting-followers/>.
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- xx See “The Words of the God Man: # 60,” last modified on 2 September 2022, https://www.huh-heavenpalace.com/modules/catalogue_history_huh/cg_list.html?cc=10.
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- xxiii The CEOs of investment and development companies are also significant objects in consulting for important decision-making processes.
- xxiv “Headquarters of the World Pilgrimage of Huh Kyung Young Sky Palace,” last modified on 07 September 2022, <https://www.huhkyungyoungworld.org/>
- xxv “We need to light the candle of Huh Kyung Young,” last modified on 9 September 2022, <https://www.ktown1st.com/blog/flashlight/14924>
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