Na, Chŏl and the Characteristics of His National Movement

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Introduction

Na, Chŏl was an active participant in the anti-Japanese rebellions who in his time was also involved in several diplomatic activities. Moreover, Na is also well known as the person who created the Taejong religion (Taejonggyo) and for being the mastermind behind the plot to assassinate the 5 government officials who participated in the signing of the 1905 Protectorate Treaty with the Japanese. Taejonggyo, a nationalist religion that worshiped Tan’gun, played a critical role in leading the Korean independence movement during the 1910s and 20s. Its influence was particularly strong in Manchuria where most agitators and groups seeking independence were followers of the Taejonggyo. Famous followers of the Taejonggyo include Kim, Chwa-jin, a famous agitator against Japan in Manchuria, as well as Shin, Chae-ho and Park, Eun-shik. In addition, the Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army, which spearheaded the battle in Chŏngsanli, the Shinminbu, a prominent independence minded organization which operated in Northern Manchuria, as well as the Independence Party of Korea were all established by followers of the Taejonggyo.

Moreover, the Taejong religion created by Na, Chŏl played a

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critical role in forming the ideology of Korea’s nationalist movement, thus making Na, Chŏl a subject of considerable interest for academics. As a result, the importance of Na, Chŏl’s various activities prior to his launching of the Taejonggyo has been studied from a historical, political and religious standpoint. However, there has never been a systematic study of Na, Chŏl’s life in general. More specifically, the historical significance of his activities after the creation of the Taejonggyo has never been studied in depth.

Therefore, this paper intends to analyze Na, Chŏl’s activities within the nationalist movement while also taking a closer look at the main features of his activities. His diplomatic efforts to save the country in the period prior to the advent of the Taejonggyo, as well as his part in the assassination of 5 government officials who participated in the signing of the 1905 Protectorate Treaty, will also be analyzed. Moreover, special attention will be paid to the birth of the Taejonggyo (which is known as Choonggwang in Chinese), its propagation, as well as Na, Chŏl’s forfeiting of his own life for the greater good of his country following his return from exile. In the final section, the historical significance of Na, Chŏl’s role in the nationalist movement will be evaluated.

It is hoped that this paper will lead to an increase in the understanding of the lives of those Koreans who fought Japanese imperialism as well as the changes these people underwent during their life spans.

**Japanese Imperialism and the Establishment of Nationalist Ideology: Birth and Education**

Born into a poor family in Bŏlgyo, Jŏnnam

Na, Chŏl’s Ja (unofficial name given by parents) was Munkyŏng and his Ho (pen name) was Kyŏngchŏn. While during his
childhood Na was known as Du-yŏng he was more widely known by the name he used in official government documents: In-yŏng, and as such came to be widely known as Na, In-yŏng. It was not until he created the Taejŏnggyo in 1909 that Na finally used Chŏl as his first name, in the process also changing his Ho to Hongam and his Dangho to Iljidang.2

Na, Chŏl was born on December 2nd, 1863 during the reign of King Cholchong and had his family roots in the Naju area. This was the period that, as a result of the power plays being made by various factions, saw the beginning of the destruction of the Chosŏn Dynasty. Na, Chŏl, the second son of Na, Yong-jip, was born at 115 Gŭmgok-li Namsan-myŏn Nagan-Gun Jŏnnam (currently known as Gŭmgok village Childong-li Bŏlgyo-ŭp Bosŏng-Gun Jŏnnam). According to the Family History of the Surname Naju Na, one of Na, Chŏl’s direct ancestors was Na, Won, a Koryŏ Dynasty era government official who achieved the level of both Saonsŏ and Chikchangdongchung (government positions). Na, Chŏl was a member of the 21st generation after Na, Won. In addition, one of Na, Chŏl’s ancestors from a different Pa (ancestral root), Na, Hae-ryun, also held an official government position as a Jinsa (someone who has passed the first level of government examinations). Moreover, Na, Chŏl’s ancestor from the 8th generation, Na, Hee, and his ancestor from the 7th generation, Na, Chon-jung, worked as Saengwon (a low level government position) and Jinsa respectively. However, there is no further record of any member of the Na family working as a government official after that, a fact that would indicate that Na, Chŏl was from a poor family.

For the most part, Na, Chŏl’s family only had enough land to maintain a life of subsistence. This was confirmed by Na’s best friend, Jung Kyo, who mentioned in his book, Chronology of Korea (known in Korean as Daehan Kyenyŏnsa) that “In-yŏng was poor from childhood onwards”, and that this poverty had forced him to
help his father with the farming.$^3$
Na's study of the Chinese classics and of the poems of Gurye, Jŏnnam
Wang, Sŏk-bo

As Na, Chŏl was from a poor family, it was very difficult for his family to pay for his studies. Despite this fact, his father, Na, Yong-jip, felt that his son should be provided the opportunity to study. Unfortunately, because of his dire poverty Na, Chŏl was unable to attend school until he was 9 years old. Once Na entered school he demonstrated a strong interest in all traditional Korean customs as well as in the Chinese classics. Na received high praise from his teacher who after only a month of teaching Na referred to him as the Haedongkongja (meaning little Confucius) born in Gŭmgok village.4

After graduation, Na, Chŏl began to look for Wang, Sŏk-bo, who at the time was well known in the Honam region as a Chinese scholar. Wang, who was originally from Gaesŏng and whose Ho was Chŏnssa, was during this period educating future scholars in Jichŏn-li, Gwangui-myŏn, Gurye-Gun, Jŏnnam.5 Faced with the incomprehensible greed and immorality of some of the officials he had met, Wang had returned home from Seoul without having taken the public official test he had studied so long for. Wang decided to forego government service to devote himself to the education of future generations of scholars. Some of his most prominent pupils included Hwang, Hyun, who wrote Maechŏnyarok, and Lee, Ki, a member of the Enlightenment Party during the final throes of the Chosŏn Dynasty. For his part, Wang, Sŏk-bo was known as a poet and was also famous for his skills and books forecasting the future using the Imdun and Taeŭlsŏng methods (traditional fortune-telling methods). In addition, Wang's ancestor from the 7th generation, Wang, Dŭk-in, was one of the leaders who died in the aftermath of the battle against the Japanese in Sŏkjukwan, Gurye during the battle of Jŏngyu (a term which refers to a specific year).6
It is believed that Na, Chŏl learned how to write poems from his teacher, a factor that might have allowed Na, Chŏl to be more confident in his ability to write poems. It appears that Na also learned about geography and that this, combined with his strong interest in geomancy, spurred him to undertake many hiking trips. As such, Na is known to have hiked many mountains such as Mt. Jiri and Mt. Baekun, bringing along geography-related books, paper, a writing brush and an ink stick as well as uncooked rice in his bag.\(^7\)

Meanwhile, it is also highly likely, considering the fact that his teacher also educated Hwang, Hyun and Lee, Ki, two figures broadly recognized as patriots, that Na formed his anti-Japanese ideology as a result of his mentor’s instruction. It is also highly probable that Na was influenced by the death of seven people who died for the nation while fighting against Japanese aggression during the battle of Jŏngyu. Moreover, it is believed that Na’s anti-Japanese ideology was further developed during his visit to Sŏkjukwan, which is surrounded by the river Sŏmjin in Mt. Baekun, as part of his effort to pay his respects to the aforementioned seven who had been laid to rest in Chilŭigak (a memorial burial ground). Na, Chŏl, who had been deeply influenced by his teacher Wang, Sŏk-bo, would certainly have wanted to join the bigger world in order to exert his energy and potential.\(^8\)

Kim, Yun-shik’s education of Na, Chŏl on the subject of enlightenment and on the self-strengthening theory

The most critical point in Na, Chŏl’s life occurred during a trip to Seoul during which he met the then minister of foreign affairs, Kim, Yun-shik. As a result of this meeting it is thought that in 1883 or 84, at the age of 21 or 22, Na became one of Kim, Yun-shik’s pupils.\(^9\) Furthermore, it is highly probable that Na may have
expected that with Kim, Yun-shik’s help he could become a politician. Moreover, it is also highly likely that during this period Na accepted the enlightenment and self-strengthening ideologies as being the best suited for the crumbling Chosŏn Dynasty.

First and foremost, there is a need to analyze Na, Chŏl’s political success story. Given his poor financial and family background it is easy to assume that Na relied heavily on Kim, Yun-shik for his political success. However, Na was unable to do so as a result of Kim’s loss of his political position in the aftermath of a political power struggle.\(^{10}\) As such, Na, Chŏl undertook to pass the government test for himself, which he eventually did in 1891, 6-7 years after his arrival in Seoul. On the 25\(^{th}\) of November of that same year Na supported and accompanied King Kojong as a gajusō (a government position) in the Sŭngjŏngwon (an organization that carried out the king’s orders). Although Na is known to have worked as a byŏngjosajŏng (another government position) on the 19\(^{th}\) of March 1893 and then transferred to the position bujongja (another government position in the Sŏngmunwon, a department which was concerned with the protection of documents) on October 7\(^{th}\) of that same year, his life as a government official was short lived. Indeed, Na decided on October 24\(^{th}\) 1893 to give up his position as a tax collector and go back to his hometown. All in all, in light of the fact that Na even declined a government position following Kim, Yun-shik’s reappointment as minister of foreign affairs in the aftermath of the Kabo reforms in 1894, it becomes evident that Na did not have any interest in becoming a government official.

In 1897 Na, Chŏl accompanied his banished mentor Kim, Yun-shik to Jeju Island, taking care of his teacher until the latter’s wife died in 1901. This time spent with an ex-diplomat appears to have helped inculcate Na, Chŏl with a plentitude of knowledge on the subject of diplomacy.\(^{11}\) During Na’s stay on Jeju there occurred two riots, one led by Bang, Sŏng-chil in 1898 and the other by Lee,
Jae-su in 1901. These riots served as a catalyst for Na, Chŏl to gain awareness of the difficulties faced by farmers as well as more knowledge about foreign powers such as France. Moreover, Na, witnessing their resistance to foreign powers, must have been deeply impressed by the independent spirit of the Jeju people.12

Na, Chŏl left Jeju Island in May 1901 and went to Seoul in order to achieve his own goals. Once there he formed an underground organization, called the “Yushinhoe”; whose overarching goal was the promotion of the save-the-nation movement, with other notables from the Honam area, which included Lee, Ki (from Mangyŏng, Jŏnbuk), Oh, Ki-ho (from Gangjin, Jŏnnam) and Choi, Chŏn (from Yŏsu, Jŏnnam).13

**Save-the-Nation Movement through Diplomacy and the Ŭiyŏl Struggle**

Diplomatic activities based on the Theory of the Eastern Peace

From 1901-1905, when the Protectorate Treaty was signed, Na, Chŏl was an active promoter of nongovernmental diplomatic initiatives. His diplomatic initiatives are thought to have been influenced by his teacher, Kim, Yun-shik, and by his interest in the prevailing international situation at the time.

Na, Chŏl was convinced that Chosŏn’s independence could be achieved through an appeal to international law and by the treaty Korea had signed with Japan. He remained convinced of this fact up until the conclusion of the Russo-Japanese War in the latter’s favor in 1905, mistakenly believing that Japan would support Chosŏn’s independence as Japan had promised by maintaining that “we are fighting for the complete independence of Chosŏn”. It was against this backdrop that Na planned to go to the U.S. in June 1905 to witness the signing of the Treaty of Portsmouth officially ending the Russo-Japanese War; a trip he was prevented from
taking as a result of the efforts of Hayashi kinnoske, a Japanese envoy in Korea.\textsuperscript{14}

Nonetheless, Na, Chŏl’s continued his diplomatic efforts to get Japan to recognize Chosŏn’s independence and in this vein in August 1905, along with Lee, Ki and Oh, Ki-ho, he presented such an appeal to the Japanese emperor. The *Daehan Daily Newspaper* published full text of Na’s appeal to the Japanese government as well as the emperor on November 14\textsuperscript{th}, 1905. In this article, he urged them to keep their word on Chosŏn’s independence through remembering Royal Letters on August 1\textsuperscript{st}, 1895 and on February 10\textsuperscript{th}, 1904.

Moreover, Na, Chŏl accepted the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere on the condition that Japan keep its word on Chosŏn independence as promised in a royal proclamation and in the treaty agreed upon between the two countries. When Chosŏn’s fortunes began to seriously decline after 1900, many press organizations and other intellectuals began to believe that given Korea, Japan and China’s close mutual survival relationship, Korea would perish if Japan were defeated by Russia. Therefore, there was much support for the theory of peace for the Eastern; a theory that insisted that Asia could only protect its land and its people once all Asian countries had united against the West and the white race. This theory was strongly popular with Seoul intellectuals who wanted something to latch on to as the relationship between Japan and Russia deteriorated and in the process Korea’s future became more and more uncertain. Moreover, the Japanese emperor in official proclamations promised to assure Korea’s independence, as long as Japan was victorious in its confrontation with Russia\textsuperscript{15}

Na, Chŏl was one of the intellectuals who firmly believed in this theory. When a Japanese envoy, Ito Hirobumi, came to Korea to oversee the Japanese annexation of Korea in November 1905 Na, Chŏl, along with Oh, Ki-ho and Lee, Ki, sent a letter to the envoy in which he asserted that Japan would eventually harm the Asian
peace if it interfered with Korea’s independence.\textsuperscript{16}

For the most part, those who took part in nongovernmental diplomatic activities to promote the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere did so without any understanding of its true nature; that is that this theory in essence served as a basis for the Japanese to achieve their goal of invading the Chinese continent as well as the Korean peninsula and Manchuria.\textsuperscript{17} This fact is confirmed in the actions of the Japanese pacifist, Matzmura onoshin, who pretended to support Chosŏn’s independence at first, but then turned around and persuaded Na, Chŏl and his colleagues to obey Japan’s authority by introducing him to Uchida Yoshihira, an advisor to the Resident-General.\textsuperscript{18}

Efforts to construct a new society through the organization of Jashinhoe

As a result of the Protectorate Treaty signed in 1905, Na, Chŏl became opposed to the search for peaceful or diplomatic means to bring about the implementation of the agreements that had been signed between the two countries. Rather he became interested in direct action to bring about the required results; a development that culminated in his forming of a plot to assassinate the 5 government officials who participated in the signing of the 1905 Protectorate Treaty.\textsuperscript{19}

In order to implement this plan, Na, Chŏl established a group, called the Chashinhoi in February 1907, a group that had in excess of 200 members\textsuperscript{20} and a total following of 670 when local merchants were included.\textsuperscript{21}

The leaders of this group included Na, Chŏl · Oh, Ki-ho (previously a junior official) and Lee, Ki (who was then an instructor at the school of education), all of which had been born into poor families in Jŏlla province and had previous or current experience working for the government. In addition other leaders from relatively wealthy economic backgrounds such as Kim,
In-shik (previously a junior official from Namwon Jŏnbuk), Lee, Yŏng-tae (the then head of the army, Seoul), Chŏng, In-kuk (previously a county governor also from Seoul), Yun, Ju-chan (a then junior official in the Ministry of agriculture, commerce & industry, Gangjin Jŏnnam), Lee, Gwang-su (a Ph.D. from Sungkyunkwan Univ. who was from Damyang, Jŏnnam), and Choi, Ik-jin (a then member of the governmental security staff), also either had prior experience as government officials or were still actively engaged in government positions. Furthermore, all of the leaders of this group were from either Jŏlla province or from Seoul; a fact made possible by Na, Chŏl’s Jŏlla roots and his former role as a government official in Seoul.

Meanwhile as there was a need for military experience in order to carry out the assassination plot, the group’s leaders, including Na, Chŏl, organized an army composed of volunteers from the Jŏlla, Kyŏngsang and Chungchŏng provinces.22

On one occasion, Na, Chŏl and 30 of his colleagues who helped him establish the Chanshinhoi presented themselves in front of the courthouse fully armed and claiming to be representatives of the Korean people. On that occasion Na brought a national anthem, a letter of alliance and the Chamkanjang, all of which he had himself written, the Chashinhoi manifesto written by Lee, Ki, a declaration of his groups’ intentions as well as a list of the domestic & foreign embassies he wished to address which had been written by Yun, Chu-chan and Lee, Gwang-su.23

The manifesto written by Lee, Ki, which argued that a country would perish unless it continuously tried to accept new things and that the same held true for people, clearly demonstrated the reasons for the establishment of the Chashinhoi. However, according to their explanation it was the 500-years of corrupted politics that had devastated the entire country and turned 20 million people into slaves, which had forced the establishment of a group such as the Chashinhoei. Moreover, the manifesto introduced
the group’s concept of “Shin”; a concept which encompassed the development of a new ideology using fresh ideas, the implementation of new atmosphere using people’s hearts and minds to establish a new world in which all the basic human rights were preserved.24

In other words, the Chashinhoi as organized by Na, Chŏl and his colleagues aimed to remove the 5 government officials who had participated in the signing of the 1905 Protectorate Treaty so as to establish an independent Chosŏn that would exemplify a new world free of corruption while also promoting a new world with new ideologies as well as a new atmosphere.25 Na, Chŏl’s demands during this period were in many ways comparable to those of the enlightenment movement, a factor demonstrated by the fact that Na, Chŏl joined the Honam conference along with Lee, Ki · Yun, Ju-chan · Lee, Gwang-su · Kim, In-shik and Choi, Dong-shik.26

Among all the documents written by Na, Chŏl, an alliance letter, the Chamkanjang and a letter of support stand out as the most important documents in understanding his attitude toward government officials. In the alliance letter, Na, Chŏl expressed his belief that independence would be lost as a result of the government officials’ threatening of military authorities, misleading of the people, selling out of their historic land as well as their destruction of the people. These government officials, he assured, were the enemies of the 20 million people who inhabited Korea as well as of the Chosŏn Dynasty itself, and were responsible for the situation in which the people now found themselves: victimized by foreigners. It was this attitude that drove him to insist that in order to bless the Chosŏn Dynasty and its kings, and avenge 20 million people these traitors should be destroyed.27 Meanwhile, in the Chamkanjang, Na stressed that Lee, Wan-yong · Kwan, Chung-hyŏn · Park Jei-sun · Lee, Ji-yong · Lee, Kŭn-taek · Lee, Ha-yŏng should be killed for their crimes against the country.28
Following the establishment of the Chashinhoi and the necessary preparations, Na, Chŏl began on February 13th, 1907 to put the assassination plot into action. However at this time the plot was delayed as a result of the difficulties associated with the rounding up of other members needed for its execution. The plot to kill the 5 government officials who had participated in the signing of the 1905 Protectorate Treaty was finally carried out, after several delays, at 10am on March 25th of that same year. Na, Chŏl sent the following words of encouragement to his colleagues:

“My colleagues! My colleagues! What we do today is for Korea’s independence and for 20 million Koreans. Do you really love freedom? Hopefully with our strong will to protect our descendants as well as ourselves—a factor heavily dependent on our present actions—we will kill these 5 enemies and wipe out evil throughout Korea. I cannot help but shed a tear as I tell you of these duties that we must carry out. Despite my wretched mind, I dare announce this righteous task to you with knowledge and bravery.

My colleagues! In order to let the world know of Korea’s independence, let us demonstrate our pure patriotism and destroy these brutal traitors as soon as possible. Once we have carried out this task neither hell nor severe torture will separate me from my happiness.”⁴⁹

By speaking in such a fashion Na was able to appeal to the people’s latent sense of patriotism and desire for the country’s independence and freedom. Nevertheless, as a result of the lack of preparation and of the inexperience of the volunteers, the plot failed in the end. Despite its failure, rumor of the attempt spread throughout the country providing hope to a nation who had been in despair.
The government for its part declared the plot to be an attempted coup against the government and sent those captured in the aftermath of the failure of the plot to the Pyŏngniwon (a prison). Moreover, the security office pursued a thorough investigation of the incident in order to gain as much information as possible on its perpetrators. Na, Chŏl was unyielding in his desire to bring about change and immediately began to ferment another big uprising by dispatching Park, Dae-ha to another city with the task of amassing new members. The security office, after having arrested Sŏ, Chang-bo, eventually caught wind of this scheme forcing Na, Chŏl to ask Lee, Gwang-su to takeover the leading role in the planned uprising while he along with Oh, Ki-ho and Kim, In-shik surrendered to the Pyŏngniwon; which he eventually did on the 1st of April 1907.30

The judgment rendered against Na, Chŏl and 18 of his colleagues in June of that same year called for their 10-year exile to Jido.31 Their sentencing occurred after King Kojong had forcibly abdicated his throne, which resulted in Na, Chŏl and his colleagues being taken to their place of exile surrounded by the Japanese navy and police. Na, Chŏl and Oh, Ki-ho were released on the 7th of December 1907 following a pardon issued by the Japanese emperor.32

Despite the brevity of his exile, Na, Chŏl is thought to have become deeply worried about saving the country and about establishing a new world. There is widespread belief that during his visit to Japan Na witnessed the Japanese form of worship known as Amateras-omikami a spectacle which may have caused him to dwell on Tan’gun’s description in historic books.

**Discovery of the Nation and Construction of a Nation**

**State Based on the Taejong Religion**

Background of the Taejong religion’s birth—discovery of the nation
Na, Chŏl was released as a result of the amnesty granted by the Japanese emperor on December 7th, 1907, at a time when Japan had just engineered King Kojong abdication of the throne in favor of King Sunjong following the unveiling of the secret envoy scheme to The Hague. His release also occurred after the signing of the Jŏngmichil Treaty: a treaty which brought about the forcible dismissal of the Korean army. Upon his release, Na, Chŏl embarked on a new plan to recover the country’s rights, a plan which could be achieved by all the people and not simply by a few individuals. Na also developed a strong belief that the miserable state Korea found itself in was a result of the country’s distorted education system that emphasized such concepts as Mohwa (imitating China) and Sadae (serving the great), while allowing any sense of national consciousness to fade away. Na thus came to believe that the people should be motivated to recover their national sovereignty and that they should also be inspired to regain their national consciousness.\textsuperscript{33} This belief was partly formed as a result of Na having witnessed firsthand during his visit to Japan the Japanese worship of Amateras omikami. In other words, while witnessing this Amateras omikami worship in Japan Na, Chŏl may have been reminded of the Tan’gun religion in Korea.\textsuperscript{34}

As a result, Na, Chŏl came to realize that the restoration of the Tan’gun religion would serve as an efficient means of unifying the people and reinstalling nationalism. This was a remarkable change in the awareness of Koreans who trapped in their Sino-centric perception of the world had previously worshipped Kija.

Around midnight on January 15\textsuperscript{th}, 1909 (according to the Chinese calendar), Na, Chŏl along with Oh, Ki-ho・Kang, Woo\textsuperscript{35}・Yu, Kŭn・Jŏng, Hun-mo・Lee, Ki・Kim, Yun-shik・Kim In-shik・Kim, Chun-shik and Choi, Jŏn\textsuperscript{36} proceeded to revive (Chungkwang in Chinese) the Tan’gun religion as a national religion by enshrining “Tan’gun’s” ancestral tablet into the
northern wall, located at 8/10 Jae-dong under Chuiunjŏng in Northern Seoul. The term Chungkwang refers to the revival of the Tan’gun religion, a religion that had been discontinued for 700 years following the Mongol invasion of Korea, promising to uphold the religion in the name of the future of the nation. Most people who joined this newly revived Tan’gun religion were in fact from the Chashinhoi.

Any discussion on the background of the Taejonggyo’s rebirth must include a description of the atmosphere that prevailed during the period, at the end of the first decade of the 20th century, in which the Taejonggyo began to be considered as an important source of inspiration for the development of national consciousness. During this period schools began to focus their attention on the education of the Korean language and the study of Korean history; a factor that, as it dealt with the opening of the country by Tan’gun, helped propagate the spirit of independence. Na, Chŏl, for his part, had always had a strong interest in Tan’gun.

Second, some of Na, Chŏl’s best friends such as Jung Kyo and Lee, Ki also had profound knowledge of Tan’gun and as such it is highly probable that Na’s knowledge of Tan’gun may have expanded as a result of his exchanges on the subject with these friends.

Third, Na, Chŏl met many Japanese, both in Japan and here in Korea, with connections to the Hŭkryonghoi (black dragon society). These individuals insisted that Korea and Manchuria should be brought into a Pan-Asia empire with the Japanese emperor as the head. Na felt threatened by these assertions believing them to be threats to the people’s independence. As a result he became deeply aware of the importance of Koreans’ independence and of their need to recognize themselves as direct descendants of Tan’gun; a fact made clear by his comment on p.47 of Hanki, HaeDongChunChu, a book written by Park, Chang-hyŏn, a historian of the 1930’s:
“The Japanese, in their efforts to develop good orderly relations between themselves and the Koreans, asserted that in ancient times Chonjodaeshin had become a brother of Tan’gun. To foster this claim the Japanese selected Yun, Taek-yŏng and Lee, Jae-kun to design ancestral shrines in which people could worship both gods.”

During Japan’s colonization of Korea, the former distorted Korean history by insisting on the veracity of the DongjoDongkūn theory; a theory that claimed that both peoples were in fact from the same ancestors and the same root. Moreover, the Haedongchunchu claims that Na, Chŏl and his colleagues, as they saw this as a threat to the very existence of the country, became incensed by Japan’s worshipping of both Tan’gun and Chonjodaeshin. Thus, in order to make the country’s real father known to all and unify the people, Na created the Tan’gun religion in Seoul.

Purposes of constructing a nation-state based on the Taejonggyo

Na, Chŏl, who created the Taejonggyo in 1909, penned the “Letter to Tan’gun’s people”,41 in which he clarified the doctrine of the religion, the background to the creation of the religion as well as its characteristics. As such, the letter is important in understanding Na, Chŏl and his colleagues’ frame of mind at the time of the creation of the Taejonggyo.

The “Letter to Tan’gun’s people” asserted that anyone who believed in the Tan’gun religion would find themselves, their homes, and country blessed with lifelong welfare. As an example, Na indicated that Kija from Eun, King Dong-myŏng from the Koguryŏ and the Ŭljamundŏk brothers as well as the Baekje and Shilla Dynasties had all believed in Tan’gun and that this was the decisive factor in explaining the flourishing times in which they lived in. Moreover, the main reason why the Koguryŏ and Baekje
Dynasties perished in the end was because they had forsaken the native religion and turned to Buddhism. In his letter Na also mentioned the Balhae, Koryŏ and Chosŏn Dynasties. In the case of Chosŏn, while King Taejong had rejected Buddhism in favor of the Tan’gun religion, Confucianism eventually became popular among the learned, who while being aware of the Tan’gun religion, did not study it well enough, which resulted in the Dynasty becoming Confucian oriented, a development which Na argued led to the destruction of Chosŏn.

This letter of declaration outlined the history of the Korean people from Tan’gun to the Chosŏn Dynasty, pointing out along the way that those kings or kingdoms which had believed in the Tan’gun religion had flourished while those who didn’t had met disastrous ends. Thus, in Na’s mind believing in the Tan’gun religion, the national religion, was the first step toward bringing about the restoration of the Chosŏn Dynasty. As such, Na, Chŏl tried to construct a nation state based on the Taejonggyo, a religion which Na was convinced could achieve Chosŏn’s independence and lead to the establishment of a new world as outlined in Na, Chŏl’s Chashinhoi manifesto.

Na, Chŏl’s original intention was to concentrate on missionary work in order to achieve the construction of a nation-state based on the Taejong religion. However, he was faced with many difficulties as a result of the opposition of the Japanese who persistently attempted to disrupt his activities and forced him to move the head temple to different sites in Seoul on several occasions. In addition to his group’s economic difficulties, Na was also faced with the prospect of trying to overturn “foreign philosophies” such as Buddhism and Confucianism that had gained a strong foothold throughout the country.

Despite these internal and external difficulties, Na, Chŏl continued to propagate the Taejonggyo to the people of Chosŏn with the aim of inspiring the reawakening of the national
consciousness and recovering Chosŏn’s fortunes. He did so by preparing the formal rules new recruits were to follow as well as the outlining what constituted proper etiquette for Taejonggyo believers. Furthermore, on the 1st of December 1909 Na attempted to systemize the 5 action principles Taejonggyo believers were supposed to uphold.44

Meanwhile, Na, Chŏl changed the name of the Tan’gun religion to the Taejonggyo45 for the simple reason that the name Tan’gun religion, due to its particularity as an exclusive national religion, in itself sounded too anti-Japanese, a factor that Na felt could prevent the people from efficiently resisting the Japanese.

Following the religion’s renaming, Na, Chŏl began in August 1910 to erect branches of the new church both in the South and the North of Seoul. Na also concentrated his activities on the propagation of the new faith appointing Oh, Ki-ho (Oh, Hyŏk) and Jŏng, Hun-mo as leaders of the propagation effort. And finally on September 27th, Na, Chŏl announced the formal rituals and rules of the faith, thus finally allowing the Taejonggyo to be equipped with all the necessary religious rituals and provisions.46

The believers met every Sunday to pray, to sing and to teach scriptures. As part of their efforts to awaken national consciousness Kim, Kyo-hŏn and Oh, Hyŏk attempted to persuade Park, Il-byŏng and Choi, Nam-sŏn to participate in the Taejonggyo. As a result of their efforts many students from government, public and private schools joined this religious group.47

Japan’s Occupation of Chosŏn and Na, Chŏl’s exile to Manchuria

When Chosŏn was conquered by Japan in August 1910, Na, Chŏl decided, given the region’s close geographical proximity to the Yalu and Tumen rivers, to move his base of operations to Manchuria near Mt. Baekdu. Na favored the region because it had yet to be invaded by the Japanese, and as such it was easier to
move around and conduct activities than in Korea proper. Moreover, as the Chosŏn Dynasty drew to an end a significant number of people began to settle in the region, thus the region became a fertile breeding ground for the propagation of the Taejong religion. Above all, the region was chosen because Mt. Baekdu was the place where Hwan-ung (桓雄) had come down to earth to create a nation based on the principle of Hongjeinse (弘濟人世), a concept which served as the main reason behind the establishment of a nation-state based on the Taejonggyo.48

Na, Chŏl described his feelings about Mt. Baekdu during a ceremony for the Heavens held in 1914:

“Mt. Baekdu is the biggest mountain in the world. It is our ancestral mountain, which holds the god known as, Sangsan (higher mountain), Jeisŏksan (king of the mountains) and Samshinsan (mountain with three gods). This mountain god is the king who opened the heavens to allow our ancestors to come and live in this mountain. We the descendents, originate from this mountain, as does our religion. How can we forsake this mountain? If we forget it, then we are also forgetting our people and our history. Let us conduct this ceremony honoring our mountain from the bottom of our hearts.”49

Na maintained that Mt. Baekdu was the place our ancestors had first settled and the place from which our people and the Taejonggyo originated. As such, he emphasized the national and religious essence of Mt. Baekdu stating that the heavens had also been constructed in the mountain.

Therefore, on the 25th of October, 1910 Na, Chŏl established a branch of the Taejonggyo in Samdo-gu, Hwarong-hyŏn, Bukgan-do; a place from which Mt. Baekdu could clearly be seen. Subsequently, Na, Chŏl dispatched Park, Chang-ik, to Chŏngsanli,
to set up a propagation office designed to spread the word of the Taejonggyo. Baek, Sun · Park, Chan-ik · Sŏ, Il · Kei, Hwa · Hyŏn, Chŏn-muk and Kim, Byŏng-duk, all of whom had been exiled to the region as punishment for their roles in the independence movement, became believers in the Taejonggyo. Eventually in March 1911, the independence minded group known as the Chungkwangdan, whose name meant shedding the light (Chungkwang) on the Tan’gun religion, was created in Wangchŏng-hyŏn. 50

Na, Chŏl, after having decided to propagate the Taejonggyo in Manchuria, finally reached Chŏngpa lake on July 21st, 1911 after a trek that took him to Seoul, Ganghwado, Mt. Mani in Chŏmsŏngdan, Pyŏngyang and Sungryungchun before finally reaching the Chŏngpa lake region. Na undertook this trek so that he could see for himself all the places which had been associated with Tan’gun or which had other historical significance. 51 Following this amazing trek Na, Chŏl began propagating the Taejonggyo in earnest.

In order to facilitate propagation, Na, Chŏl expended large amounts of energy assuring that the new religion’s scriptures were published. As part of these efforts on the 3rd of March 1912, Na published Shingo, and in February 1913 wrote a book promoting of Korean literature. Moreover, in order to put more emphasis on the propagation of the Tan’gun religion, Na requested that Kim, Kyo-hŏn, who was the 2nd successor of the Taejonggyo, write the Shindansilki. 52

Additionally, Na, Chŏl along with Sŏ, Il · Baek, Sun · Kei, Hwa and Park, Chan-ik, who were all members of Chungkwang, directly participated in propagation efforts in the Hwaryŏngchŏn and Chŏngpa lake regions. 53 Furthermore, Mu Song-hyŏn, Hon Chun-hyŏn and Mil San-hyŏn also participated in such activities throughout Manchuria. 54

During a memorial service held for Na in Samsŏngsa, Mt. Kuwol
in August 1926 following his death, Kang Woo, who had founded Taejonggyo along with Na, Chŏl, recapped Na, Chŏl’s propagation efforts as follows:55

“From Chunghojisa, the first chapel established in Samdoku. Baeksan temple, our church has now expanded to 4 provinces. He experienced all kinds of difficulties and hard times during those first austere 4 to 5 years. He demonstrated his great morality by traveling to places tens of thousands of ri away. On one occasion, he cried tears of blood for an entire night as he prayed in a small village after having recovered the bodies of 41 dead persons, an event that led him to fast for 8 days. He borrowed rain from the Heavenly Palace to restore buds that had been damaged by a drought back to life.”56

As mentioned above, Na, Chŏl often put his life on the line to promote his religion, a determination that drew many people to follow the Taejonggyo. On May 13th, 1914 Na finally moved the head temple from Seoul to Chŏngpa lake, Manchuria. Meanwhile, many temples were established around Mt. Baekdu and the number of believers grew to number in the thousands.57

As expected, once Taejonggyo began to spread throughout Manchuria, Japan attempted to destroy the group by forcing the government office in Killimsŏng, China to put an end to the group’s activities. As a result of this Japanese pressure in November 1914 the government representative from Hwaryong-hyŏn ordered that the Taejonggyo be dismantled itself. For the most part however, China did not enforce this decree. A prominent example of this occurred when Park, Chan-ik, who had been sentenced to death, was released after having been introduced to Chang, Chak-sang, a military general, by the Chinese superintendent of education to whom Park had explained
that the Taejonggyo movement’s goal was independence. After this, the Taejonggyo did not face any difficulties in conducting their activities in the Northern Kando area.

Japan’s oppression of the Taejonggyo and Na, Chŏl’s death for Korea

After Chosŏn was conquered by Japan in 1910, the latter began to implement its plan to oppress the religion. This objective was well illustrated in paragraph 30 of the “Government-general of Chosŏn’s municipal report” published in 1911, which dealt with the need to control religions for security purposes:

“As far as religious control is concerned, from 1906 onwards there has been a regular process to register native religions as outlined in the 45th agenda of the residency-general command. However, as there is no regulation in place dealing with religions adhered to by both Chosŏn people and foreigners, propagation places are randomly established, leading to huge damages. More specifically, religions related to Korean organizations such as the Chŏndokyo, Dajongkyo, Daedongkyo, Taekŭkkko, Wonjongjongmuwon, Kongjakyo, Taejonggyo, Kyŏngchŏnkyo, Daesŭngjongkyo and others, without any clear distinction between politics and religion in conducting their activities only confuse society, which makes it hard to accept them as religions. Therefore, there is a need to implement a mechanism to control religions.”

As seen above, the government-general of Chosŏn tried to rationalize its plan to control the Taejonggyo on political grounds.

In August 1915, the government-general of Chosŏn announced its rules, and legislated in the 2nd clause that any person who wished to undertake propagation activities should clarify their religion, denomination, the name of their religion, and the methods of propagation as well as submit any documents or
papers required by the government general of Chosŏn to prove the desiring propagator’s qualifications to the latter.60

The 1st clause of the propagation rule limited religions to Shindo, Buddhism and Protestantism. In the 4th clause, the government-general of Chosŏn institutionalized the rules regarding propagation methods, the rights of the propagation leaders as well as the means available to carry out the supervision of the propagators. Also, the government-general reserved the right to give orders to religions groups as well as the right to change any propagator whom it considered to be improper. More to the point:

In the 15th clause, the government-general of Chosŏn reserves the right to control pseudo-religious groups whenever necessary.

As illustrated above, the Japanese intended to eradicate all religions native to Chosŏn.

Therefore, the Taejonggyo, whose head temple was located in Northern Kando was forced get the authorization from the government-general by submitting the documents required to promote their religious activities, a development that greatly embarrassed the Taejonggyo. Na, Chŏl, who had arrived in Seoul on the 14th of January 1915 to investigate the religious situation in Korea, eventually submitted the documents required by the Government-general of Chosŏn only to be rejected by the latter.61 To add insult to injury, the government-general threatened to arrest Na, Chŏl and prevent him from propagating his religion.62

As a result, to demonstrate to the Taejonggyo believers and the entire Korean population suffering under the Japanese yoke that the national consciousness of Chosŏn still burned bright, Na, Chŏl took his own life for his country, a selfless act which encouraged the people of Korea to resist the Japanese to the end. He died for

**Conclusion—Na, Chŏl’s National Movement and Its Contributions**

The historic contributions of Na, Chŏl’s national movement can be summarized as follows.

First, by creating the Taejonggyo, Na became the first person to suggest a theoretical basis for fighting against Japanese imperialism by combining the religious and national aspect to create a national religion that became, until the 1920s, the ideological background for nationalists conducting activities both within Korea and abroad. In addition, the Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army (known as the Buknokunjŏngsŏ) and the Korean Independence Army, both of which were mainly composed of Taejonggyo followers, made a great contribution to driving the Japanese out in such battles as the battles of Chŏngsanli and Daejŏnjaryŏng.

Second, Na was adamant in his insistence that the new nation-state be established based on the Taejonggyo. Na, Chŏl’s goal was to usher in a new world through the advent of new ideologies and atmosphere, which might lead to the creation of a country founded on the descendants of Tan’gun who had descended from Mt. Baekdu. Following the emergence of socialist ideology in the 1920s the followers of the Taejonggyo merged Na, Chŏl’s theory of national construction with such concepts as republicanism and anarchism.

Third, Na was the person who awoke the spirit of independence among the general public. Aware of the seemingly unbreakable hold Confucianism and the Sino-centric worldview held over Chosŏn, Na came to believe that national sovereignty could only
be rehabilitated by emphasizing the national consciousness. As such, he tried to replace Confucianism, which had taken root among the intellectuals, with a modernized religion that worshipped Tan’gun, the mythical father of the nation to which the common people had always felt a strong affinity to, through which he hoped to recover the national consciousness as well as national sovereignty. While some scholars have tended to view Na, Chŏl as an outdated person who advocated the worship of Tan’gun rather than western religions such as Protestantism or Catholicism, it is this author’s belief that this perception of the man may be flawed.

Fourth and closely related to the last point, Na was modernized enough to perfectly grasp the international situation that prevailed during his lifetime. In addition, Na was a man of his times. He was a civilized person, a pupil of former minister of foreign affairs Kim, Yun-shik, and an active participant in such enlightenment movement groups as the Honam academy and the Korean Self-strengthening Society (known as the Daehanjakanghoi). In addition, as made clear in the Chashinhoi manifesto, he was a person who sought to create a new ideology, new atmosphere and a new world.

Fifth, Na, Chŏl was a person who during his lifetime promoted various means of recovering national sovereignty, firstly through diplomacy then as a member of the Ŭiyŏl struggle and through religious activities and finally by giving up his own life for the good of the country. In order to recover national sovereignty Na adjusted his approach as the situation demanded. After the 1910’s, Na’s various means of opposition were handed down to the followers of the Taejonggyo. The reason why the followers of the Taejonggyo were able to promote a variety of struggle approaches without any major contradiction stems from Na’s own activities. Of special note, Na, Chŏl’s role in the Ŭiyŏl struggle allowed his followers to take up arms for themselves and play a significant role
Sixth, Na combined enlightenment thought and a call to arms. More specifically, while as a member of the Chashinhoi he emphasized the need for a new ideology, new business and a new world, he also as a member of groups associated with the enlightenment movement actively used his association with patriotic groups to promote a strategy of violence that included such acts as the plot to assassinate the 5 government officials who had participated in the signing of the 1905 Protectorate Treaty. In other words, Na was aware of the need to punish traitors through armed force if necessary in order to usher in a modernized new world.

Seventh, Na united people from all regions in his quest to ward off the Japanese yoke. At the time of the plot to assassinate the 5 government officials who had participated in the signing of the 1905 Protectorate Treaty, he was working with people from Kyŏngsang-do such as Yun, Chung-ha (Kŏchang Kyŏngnam) and Park, Dae-ha (Gŭmsan Kyŏngbuk), from Chungchŏng-do such as Ji, Pal-mun (Okchŏn Chungbuk) and Kim, Kyŏng-sun (Hoidŏk Chungnam). Na also cooperated closely with the third founder of the Taejonggyo, Yun, Sei-bok who was from Milyang Kyŏngnam, in promoting his military-oriented opposition activities. His all-inclusive philosophy became the basis behind efforts to make the Taejonggyo a truly national religion that could take root in every corner of the country.

However, Na, Chŏl’s philosophy is not without its limitations. First, Na never supported the cause of Republicanism and despite his modern oriented ideology he was never able to completely shed Confucianism. Second, how exactly Na planned to establish an ideal country based on the Taejonggyo remains unclear. Third, Na concentrated too much of his efforts on matters related to the nation and religion while not paying enough attention to the need to improve civil rights. All of these shortcomings eventually led to
the Taejonggyo’s decline following the rise of socialism in the 1920s. Fourth, Na’s approach to the diplomatic methods had serious limitation because of base on moral confidence to the Japanese imperialism. Namely, Na, Chŏl failed to fully comprehend the true face of Japanese imperialism that was hidden behind the fuzzy sounding theory of Pan-Asian peace.

Despite all of these weak points, Na, Chŏl was a practical nationalist who sacrificed his entire life in the name of national sovereignty and independence. His philosophy based on Tan’gun eventually contributed to the independent establishment of a new nation-state and to the founding of a unified government.
Notes:


2 Shin, Chol-ho, ibid., p.29; Dongailbo, September 26, 1931, “Origin of Taejonggyo Choonggwang” (1).


5 Gurye Gunsa Compilation Committee, *Gurye Gunsa* (1987), p.914. Wang Suk-bo’s sons, Sakak, Sachun and Sahan were also well known poetic scholars (see p.919 and p.924 for reference).


7 Shin Chol-ho, op. cit., p.31.


9 National History Compilation Committee, *Sok Um Chung Sa* (1960), Dec. 9, the 28th year of King Kojong.

10 Park Hwan, op. cit., p.259.

11 Park Hwan, ibid., pp.260-261.


14 DaehanKyenyunsa, March of the 11th year of Kwangmu.
15 Daehan Daily Newspaper, November 14, 1905.
16 Park, Eun-shik, Korea History, (1922), chapter 34.
20 National History Compilation Committee, DaehanKyenyunsa, Mar. 1907, pp. 227-228.
22 Park, Hwan, op. cit., pp.266-268.
24 Chashinhoi Manifesto, (Kyujangkak Library 17295 Na, In-yŏng’ uprising in Tonghak Documents).
26 Honam Institute Monthly Magazine, issues 1, 3, 4 and 5.
27 Alliance Letter (Kyujangkak Library 17295 Na, In-yŏng’s uprising in Tonghak Documents).
28 Chamkanjang (Kyujangkak Library 17295 Na, In-yŏng’s uprising in Tonghak Documents); Documents relating to the Independence Movement 11, p.32.
29 Documents relating to the Independence Movement 11, pp.31-32.
30 Daehankyenyunsa November 3rd, Kwangmu; Daehan Daily Newspaper April 3rd, 1907.
31 The detailed stories on such subjects as the plot to assassinate the 5 government officials who participated in the signing of the 1905 Protectorate Treaty are described in the decision against Na, In-yŏng (“Judgment Report chapter 19”, pp.541-545, Documents relating to the
Independence Movement 11)

32 Daehankyenyonsa November 3rd, Kwangmu.

33 60 year history of Taejonggyo Chunggwang, pp.77-79.

34 Park, Hwan, previous citation, pp.49-50.

35 As for Kang, Woo (whose real name was Kang, Suk-ki), please refer to HoSŏkMunjip, Dongnip Yugongja Kongjŏksŏ and to Changjungsanin, “A Summary of the Story of Mr. Kang Ho-sŏk” ( please see the 2nd edition of Hanbit, 1928.2).

36 Choi, Jŏn’s real name was Choi, Dong-san, and his hometown was Yŏsu, Jŏnnam. He was originally a monk in the Songkwang temple who, impressed by Na, Chŏl, went on to join the Taejonggyo (60 year history of Taejonggyo Chunggwang, pp.809-810).

37 60 year history of Taejonggyo Chunggwang, p.80 ; Donga-ilbo September 27th, 1931 Origin and Chunggwang of Taejonggyo.

38 He mentioned Chashinhoi relation to the creation of the Taejonggyo. (Shin, Yong-ha, “Manifesto and Alliance Letter of the Chashinhoi at the end of Chosŏn”, Korea Study Magazine 13 (1978), pp.205-209).

39 Park, Hwan, previous citation, pp.269-270.

40 Kang, Chang-il, previous citation, pp.226-227.

41 60 year Taejonggyo Choonggwang, pp.80-92.

42 At that time impressed by Na, Chŏl · Na, Kyŏng-sŏk also became a believer in the Taejonggyo. (Main temple of the Taejonggyo, “Reason for joining the great religion”, Kyobo Memorial Issue (1946), p. 16).

43 60 year Taejonggyo Choonggwang, p.155.

44 Ibid., pp.97-99, p.152.

45 Ibid., p.156.

46 Ibid. pp.159-165.


48 60 year Taejonggyo Chunggwang, pp.182-183.

49 Ibid., pp.183-184.


51 60 year Taejonggyo Choonggwang, p.165.
52 Ibid., p.166.
55 Detailed analysis of the contents of the memorial address are found in Shin Chol-ho, op. cit., pp. 100-109.
57 *The Independent* January 1st (1920).
60 Ibid., 17th clause, dealing with pseudo-religions.
62 60 year history of Taejonggyo Choonggwang, p.186.
64 Kim, Jwa-jin and Shin, Chae-ho are the main examples.