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*Religious and Philosophical Traditions of Korea* by Kevin N.  
Cawley (review)

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## Book Reviews

*Religious and Philosophical Traditions of Korea*, by Kevin N. Cawley,  
London and New York: Routledge, 2019, xxiii + 197 pp.

This volume is a comprehensive intellectual guide to the religio-philosophical landscape of Korean history in the context of East Asian cultural transmission. The six chapters of this text for courses on the history of Korean religion, philosophy, or culture demonstrate the transformation and glocalization of both transnational and local religions, such as Buddhism, Confucianism, Daoism, Catholicism, Protestantism, Shamanism, and native new religious movements. What are the religious traditions of East Asia? How did they interact with Korean intellectual traditions? What geopolitical affect did these regional philosophical movements have on Korean kingdoms and dynasties? How were Korean religions unique? What were the identities of Korea's "new religions" and how did they emerge in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries? The Irish scholar Kevin Cawley explores the cultural and political roles of various religions as the key ideology of given eras of Korean history, from the Three Kingdoms to contemporary times. The author argues not only that Korea's religious and philosophical traditions will continue to shape its future, but also that perceiving the combination of those traditions is a way of understanding "how Koreans think, live, and practice religions, which in the Korean context is inseparable from a long philosophical tradition" (xvi).

First, in terms of definition, the author regards religion and philosophy as "pathways" towards self-transformation in a Korean/East Asian context. He warns that insofar as its etymological meaning, the Western word "religion" should not to be applied to East Asia. Rather, it is argued, the ideological traditions of Korea should be understood as cultural ideas (the "three teachings" in the form of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism) from ancient China,

with shamanism an indigenous concept of the people of the Korean Peninsula. Philosophy in the East Asian context is understood as the set of teachings by morally cultivated scholars, wherein wisdom is seen as a realistic and achievable goal, and “which emphasizes that learning should transform how one thinks” (p. 19). Chapter 2 points out the process of cultural adoption and interaction whereby Chinese traditions were transmitted to the Korean Peninsula in what the author calls unique “Korean ways.” according to the *Legends and History of the Three Kingdoms (Samguk yusa 三國遺事, ca. 1280)* that first details the myth of Tan’gun, who is known as the progenitor of the Korean ethnic group, Buddhism and Confucianism were introduced to the peninsula during the Three Kingdoms period (trad. 57 CE–668). Cawley makes particular mention of the Silla military tradition of the Hwarang (“Flowering Youth” knights), who “followed Buddhist precepts and morality in order” to enhance the prestige of the royal family (p. 29). The author explores the Korean monks Wŏnhyo and Ŭisang as Buddhist pioneers. The *il-sim* (one-mind) teaching of Wŏnhyo is reflected as “*t’ong pulgyo*” 通佛敎 (being with others), or “integrated Buddhism,” in Silla (617–686), while Ŭisang (625–702) is examined as the founding patriarch of the Hwaŏm 華嚴 lineage (a tradition of Mahayana Buddhist philosophy based on the Avatamsaka Sutra [K. *Hwaŏmgyŏng* 華嚴經]).

Chapter 3 provides evidence on the emergence of Sŏn (Ch. Chan, J. Zen) Buddhism (with its focus on meditation) during the Unified Silla (668–935) period. The transformative feature of Sŏn Buddhism tradition became integrated with other Buddhist traditions. The works of Ŭichŏn (1055–1101), with their emphasis on *kyo* (doctrine), and Chinul (1158–1210), who taught *kanhwa Sŏn* (a method of meditation through studying or examining), brought about a consolidation in Sŏn thought. The Koryŏ dynasty (918–1392) witnessed the further development of Sŏn Buddhism as it transformed into “*hoguk pulgyo*” (state-protecting Buddhism). The completion of the *Koryŏ Taejanggyŏng* 高麗大藏經 (Great Buddhist Scriptures, or Tripitaka Koreana), comprising 81,000 print blocks, demonstrated this close relationship between the state and religion. In the following Chosŏn dynasty (1392–1897), state ideology transitioned away from Buddhism to Neo-Confucianism. Cawley maintains that Kihwa’s “way of humanity” (*injido* 仁之道) was one of the main rejoinders to socio-religious critiques of Buddhism and Shamanism. Chapter 4 introduces the *Ten Diagrams*

on *Sage Learning* (*Sōnghak sipto* 聖學十圖) of T'oegye Yi Hwang (1502–1571) and *Essentials of the Learning of the Sages* (*Sōnghak chibyo* 聖學輯要) of Yulgok Yi I (1537–1584) as the canonical texts of the early Neo-Confucian tradition in Korea of the sixteenth century. The metaphysical prosperity of the Chosŏn dynasty then confronted the new thinking called “Western learning” (*sōhak*) when Catholic texts, such as Matteo Ricci’s *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven* (*Ch’ōnju sirūi* 天主實義), arrived in Korea via Beijing. Based on Hwang Sayōng’s *Silk Letter*, Cawley details how early evangelization was extended through the publication of the *han’gūl* (Korean) Catechism and the work of women (a marginalized group in society). Tasan Chōng Yakyong (1762–1836) is also mentioned as one of the Confucian scholars who turned away from the Catholic belief but became a synthesizer of *sirhak* 實學 thought (*sil/sir* meaning “actual” or “practical,” and *hak* “studies” or “learning”), a Confucian social reform movement.

In chapter 5, narratives of Tonghak (Eastern learning) are reviewed by Cawley as reactions to *sōhak* (Western learning). Su-un Ch’oe Cheu (1824–1864), the founder of this anti-Catholic movement, had “a sense of hostility toward Western Learning” (p. 118). The movement’s canonical texts, such as the *Songs of the Dragon Pool* (*Yongdam yusa* 龍潭遺詞) and the *Eastern Scripture* (*Tonggyōng taejōn* 東經大全), expose the key teachings of Korea’s first new religion, including Su-un’s personal experience of encountering God. The practioners of Tonghak, unlike elsewhere in East Asia, used locally generated talismans and incantations that were “initially two very specific features of the new religion” (p. 122). The key Tonghak doctrine of *in nae ch’ōn* 人乃天 (man is heaven) was transmitted into later new religions in a slightly different formation. Cawley’s book addresses the close relationship between Tonghak and the peasant rebellion of 1894 (led by Chōn Pongjun, a Tonghak follower) in terms of the idea of *kaebyōk* 開闢, referring to a new time of “creation.” The Jeungsan (Chūngsan) movement is also explored in case studies of Jeung San Do (better known overseas) and Daesoon Jinrihoe (better known in Korea), but the history of the Jeungsan movement can best be traced in the philosophy of its major leaders, including Kang Jeungsan (1871–1909), Cha Gyeongseok (1880–1936), and Jo Cheol-Je (1895–1958). The myth of Tan’gun is re-reformulated by Na Chōl (1863–1916) in the anti-Japanese new religion of Taejonggyo. Among these new religions, Cawley

also discusses the newly arrived Protestants. The Protestant *chōndo puin* 傳道夫人 (Bible women), with their enlightened education, proved a useful means of proselytizing, but the choice of terminology for the name of God became a controversial issue among both missionaries and locals.

The final chapter focuses on the complex modernity of Korea in the early and mid-twentieth century. The Korean Buddhists tried to protect their own distinctive legacy from Japanese Buddhist groups in Korea, as seen in the independence activities of the monk Manhae Han Yongun (1887–1944) “in the context of conflict vis-à-vis Japanese colonization” (p. 152). The establishment of Sot’aesan (1891–1943)’s Wŏn Buddhism is another illustration of the creative work of Korean Buddhism under the social and legal oppression of Japanese Buddhism on the Korean Peninsula. Cawley investigates the so-called “new post-Christian movements” that emerged during the post-Korean War period, such as Pak T’aesŏn’s (1916–?) Olive Green Church (Ch’ōndogwan) and Moon Sun Myung’s (1920–2012) Unification Church (T’ongilgyo). The *juche* (*chuch’e*) thought of Kim Il-sung, promoting the principles of North Korea’s *chaju* (independence), *charip* (self-sustainability), and *chawi* (self-defense), is also included in this study of Korea’s religious and philosophical traditions. The fact that Korean shamans (*mudang*), numbering over 300,000 in 2007, no longer limit themselves to physical space, but now promote themselves in cyberspace, is also considered a contemporary *pathway* for Korean religion.

Thus, *Religious and Philosophical Traditions of Korea* does not take a political or military perspective on Korean history, rather, it encourages readers to consider the intellectual wisdom and knowledge transmitted from traditional Chinese philosophies. Each generation of the Korean people, who were self-transformative, sublimated these key teachings into their own geopolitical environment as new pathways. This volume contains integral and insightful material for scholars, students, and practitioners in Asian studies, philosophy, sociology, history, anthropology, ethnology, cultural studies, and religious studies.

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