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BODY AND *KI* IN GICHEON:
PRACTICES OF SELF-CULTIVATION IN CONTEMPORARY KOREA

Yeonhwa Jeon

BODY AND *KI* IN GICHEON:
PRACTICES OF SELF-CULTIVATION IN CONTEMPORARY KOREA

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Table of Contents

Preface....1

Chapter One: Introduction....4

1.1 *Ki suryŏn* as a contemporary phenomenon....4

1.2 Immortality and nationalism in contemporary Korea....9

1.3 Existing studies on *ki suryŏn* in general and on GiCheon in particular....14

1.4 Approaches to practices similar to *ki suryon*....15

1.5 *Ki suryŏn* as "technologies of the self"....21

1.6 Two vectors model....26

1.7 The body and the self as the crossroads of the vectors....30

1.8 Experiential modalities as a framework to analyse GiCheon experience....34

1.9 *Ki suryŏn* as self-craft....39

1.10 *Ki suryŏn* in the context of the East Asian crafting of the self....40

1.11 Autoethnography as method....43

1.12 The structure of the dissertation....48

Chapter Two: GiCheon Basics....50

2.1 A short history of GiCheon....50

2.2 The setting for practice: what, where, how....59

2.3 The practitioners....63

Chapter Three: *Ki* in the narrations of the practitioners....71

3.1 Introduction to the concept of *ki*....71

3.2 *Ki* as waves coming from the vibrations in the body....77

3.3 *Ki* as help....80

3.4 Ki as explained through modern Western science, Oriental thought, and Christianity....91

Chapter Four: *Suryŏn* in the narrations of the practitioners....95

4.1 GiCheon as *suryŏn*....95

4.2 *Suryŏn* as self-knowledge passed on to others....97

4.3 *Suryŏn* as a voluntarily chosen, special path....104

4.4 *Suryŏn* as endurance of hardship....111

4.5 *Suryŏn* as purification....115

4.6 *Suryŏn* as cultivating the social body....116

4.7 Applying the two vectors model....118

4.8 Applying Foucault's technologies of self....119

4.9 Attitudes toward *suryŏn* as personally colored experiential modalities....122
Chapter Five: Personally colored experiential modalities....124
5.1 Supporters of *suryŏn*: their personally colored experiential modalities....124
5.2 Kim Pohŭi: experiential modality of "hardship and boredom"....127
5.3 Sin Hyŏnju: the modalities of experiencing "softness and warmth", and "smooth and effortless passage"....130
5.4 Kim Wŏn'gyu: the experiential modality of "lack and disappointment"....142
5.5 Pain as a common denominator of different experiential modalities....151
Chapter Six: Pain in the narrations of the practitioners....153
6.1 Pain as experience....153
6.2 Pain as transforming....155
6.3 Pain as a characteristic of ascetic practice....158
6.4 Body as text....163
6.5 Pain is akin to death....164
6.6 Benefits of pain....165
6.7 Greater pain brings higher efficiency....169
6.8 Pain as restoring *ki* flow and as healing....171
6.9 Pain in the narration of Ms. Sin....176
6.10 Conclusion: is GiCheon an ascetic experience?....180
Chapter Seven: image of the mountain in the narrations of the practitioners....186
7.1 Mountains in East Asian and Korean culture....186
7.2 Mountain routes as *ki* channels in the human body....188
7.3 Mountain routes as paths of religious or spiritual progress leading to the summit....191
7.4 Mountains as *innŭn kŏt* (있는 것)....197
7.5 Mountains as a hiking space....201
7.6 Mountains as a space of immortality....211
7.7 Conclusion to Chapter Seven....222
Chapter Eight: Conclusions....227
8.1 Striving for upward mobility and self-improvement....229
8.2 Reactions to Westernization and modernization....235
8.3 Social pressure and *ki suryŏn* as a mechanism of survival and method of self-improvement....239
Bibliography....245

Index 270
Summary in Dutch 273
Curriculum Vitae 279

Preface

In early 2001 I had been living in South Korea for three months. Growing up as a child in Soviet Russia, I had heard a lot about East Asian *ki* ("breath energy") practices from my older brother. When I was thirteen, at the outbreak of *perestroika*, I learned Chinese kung-fu from some Chinese masters who were visiting Russia. Now I was in South Korea for the first time in my life. Although ethnically partially Korean, I knew very little about the country of my grandfather, but I wanted to learn more. I waited for a chance to experience Korean *ki* practices.

In March 2001 when I saw an ad in the Korea Herald, an English Internet newspaper inviting foreigners to try "GiCheon, a Korean mind-body discipline for lifelong mental and spiritual health", I realised that my wish was coming true. This GiCheon (Kich'ŏn) ad mentioned regular retreats in a mountain center, as well as training in a downtown Seoul studio. I contacted the instructor, Lee Kit'ae (Yi Kit'ae), by phone and came to the studio.

I had expected to meet a white-bearded old master like those you see in the movies. Instead, a young man of about my age greeted me. We started by watching a couple of videos on GiCheon in the office and then went to the studio. The studio was really big. On the cream-colored walls a few panels showed six basic GiCheon positions. The floor was covered with square green plastic mats, connected like a puzzle. The movements were unusual and hard to remember. As I kept practicing, I learned that the movements it took me so long to master are actually different variations of one circular movement called *wŏnbanjang* (원반장). The main position, "*naegasinjang*, the heart of GiCheon practice" was a static one. It was difficult and painful to sustain. When I stood in the *naegasinjang* position, the instructor Lee Kit'ae told me that an old lady who was eighty years old performed it for forty minutes during her first training session. My first *naegasinjang* experience lasted only five

minutes, but I immediately felt how effective it was. After completing the position I felt satisfied, calm and balanced. I instantly realized that this was the practice I had been seeking for years.

The instructor explained that there are regular training sessions, usually three times a day. Later I sometimes participated in the evening sessions, together with about twenty or thirty other practitioners, both experienced trainees and novices. However, any student could also attend outside of scheduled training hours and practice under the guidance of the instructor, or by her or himself. At least one of the three or four instructors were always present in the studio. The monthly fee was one hundred thousand Korean Won (equivalent to about a hundred dollars), but discounts were available for those in tight economic circumstances.

I started to come to practice about three or four times a week. Within a few months I was already teaching GiCheon to beginners. First I talked to other students and to teachers in English, but as my Korean improved I switched to Korean. Though verbal communication was difficult in the beginning due to the language barrier, I was unquestionably accepted as a member of GiCheon community. Together with other practitioners, we often went to the Munmak GiCheon Mountain Center, to practice GiCheon in the forest, to hike, to plant vegetables, to cook, to drink and to talk.

In the year 2007 the Korean artist and a neo-shaman Mu Sejung told me “go study, and write about GiCheon.” Mu Sejung used to give similar guidance to younger people, and I followed his advice. However, while I was studying for an MA degree in Korean philosophy, I almost forgot this advice. I remembered it again when contemplating a subject for a PhD and so in 2010 I started writing a dissertation on GiCheon at Leiden University. It was ten years since I had started the practice.

Interviewing practitioners for the purpose of writing a PhD helped me to connect to the sensations of my own body. After these sensations were verbalized and articulated by others, I "recognized" them – these were my feelings as well. However, I had not been capable of registering and expressing them myself, a fact which might be connected to my Russian-European upbringing. Korean culture and the Korean language encourage openness to a precise and meticulous awareness of the body, as my informants demonstrated to me in the interviews. I would like my study to contribute to the development of this awareness inside and outside of academia, as we continue to enrich and develop our awareness of bodily experience.

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 *Ki suryŏn* as a contemporary phenomenon

In this dissertation I study the social phenomenon of *ki suryŏn* (氣修練 training related to *ki* – which I shall provisionally define as "life energy") as an invented tradition and examine how it functions within contemporary Korean society. Approaching *ki suryŏn* as a form of "self-craft", where the body as a subject applies a set of skills and techniques on the body as an object, I review how *ki suryŏn* trainees conceptualize their practice, asking what meaning and content this practice carries for them, with the larger aim of gaining a better understanding of present-day Korea. I argue that practitioners perceive *ki suryŏn* as a process of self-formation, where the self is simultaneously a subject of the desires, thoughts and actions of oneself, as well as an object of the desires, thoughts and actions of others. This approach emphasizes the relevance of *ki suryŏn* to the formation and development of contemporary subjectivity. As my point of departure I take Michel Foucault's concepts of "technologies of self" (1988, 2001) and "subjectivation" (1994a: 223).

I suggest approaching Korean *ki suryŏn* within a context of similar Korean and East Asian re-constructed traditions, understanding them through "subjectivation" – the construction of a subject – occurring in response to and within the space of modernity. I am studying *ki suryŏn* as a living tradition that is currently in the process of formation in present-day Korea. The terms "reconstructed tradition" and "living tradition" echo of course the famous study *The Invention of Tradition* by E. J. Hobsbawm and T. O. Ranger *(*1992 [1983]), but Adam Chau notes that any tradition is invented and constructed. Because of this, he suggests, it is necessary to adopt a dynamic, processual and site-specific understanding of tradition within an actual social context (Chau 2001a: 3). This is precisely the ethnographical approach I intend to apply in this study.

My investigation was carried out through a case study of GiCheon (氣天 McCune-Reischauer: *Kich'ŏn*), one of the *ki suryŏn* practices developed in Korea in the 1970s. As a set of exercises intended to transform the body and mind-heart, GiCheon belongs to a group of practices which have been characterized as internal alchemy (*naedan* 內丹) and nourishing life (*yangsaeng* 養生).[1] In my research, I use a series of interviews conducted with sixty one GiCheon practitioners between September 2010 and April 2011 in South Korea.[2] Additionally, as a scholar-practitioner myself, I utilize my own sixteen years long GiCheon experience as an adept and an instructor, and the knowledge acquired therein. I also make use of GiCheon books and texts, written and oral legends and lore, and visual imagery, such as book covers, flyers and DVD images.

East Asian practices of internal alchemy and nourishing life come from ancient times and are techniques related to *ki.* These techniques are grounded in physiological, psychological and behavioural principles. They include gymnastics, massage, breathing, sexual hygiene, diet, healing, meditation and visualization, as well as rules of daily behaviour (Despeux 2008a).[3] Mapping the geo-temporal cultural space within which the practices of internal alchemy and nourishing life have arisen and existed, I focus on the re-inventing or re-discovering of these traditions for today's purposes. Nowadays, their contemporary Korean avatar *ki suryŏn* is one of the methods of dealing with the pressures of modernity. In contemporary South Korea, practices of *ki suryŏn* such as those taught by GiCheon and Dahn World (단월드 *tanwŏldŭ*, U Hyeran 2006a) have been integrated into the routine of urban

[1] The word *yangsaeng* (Chinese *yangsheng*) though referring to ancient East Asian alchemical and medical practices of immortality and nourishing life, also indicates a contemporary phenomenon in China.

[2] I use the terms "adherents", "adepts", "practitioners", "trainees" and "students" interchangeably.

[3] A particular practice of GiCheon on which I focus includes gymnastic, massage, breathing, healing, and meditation, but not sexual hygiene, diet, visualization or rules of daily behaviour.

daily life; thus to study *ki suryŏn* culture involves investigating the way urbanites live and relate to each other.[4] Studios and other training sites where practitioners come together create opportunities for social net-working and improving social status by getting to know people of higher standing – a striving for status that is encouraged by the competitive demands of modern society (Lett 2002). While social standing is not, of course, the sole motivation for practice, the "confirmation" of status, usually maintained and reproduced by social practices, is an important a matter of concern. Other reasons that attract men and women to practice include health concerns, seeking relief from stress, a longing for spiritual enlightenment, and the desire to leave the dusty city and spend some time in nature at the week-end retreats which are often organized for the adepts of different *ki suryŏn* groups.

Although scholars sometimes include *ki* practices among religious practices (Baker 2007b), the practitioners of *ki suryŏn* of both genders are drawn not only from different social classes and age groups but also from various religious persuasions. Often, individuals engage in more than one kind of *ki suryŏn*, and Christians and Buddhists join in *ki*-related training. Some Christian *ki suryŏn* practitioners believe that *ki* disciplines turn them into "better Christians": after starting the practice they pray more, listen to the priest with greater attention, and visit the church more frequently. Some Christians also pray to God during the training, to ask for forgiveness and express gratitude.[5] Buddhist practitioners state that *ki* exercises in the studio improve their concentration in Buddhist meditation.[6]

[4] Dahn World, or Dahn Yoga has recently changed its name into Noe Hohŭp (뇌호흡) (Brain Breathing) and Noe Kyoyuk (뇌교육) (Brain Education).

[5] Interview with Yi Sŏngdo, 08.12.2010, Pusan, South Korea. Yi Sŏngdo gave me explicit permission to use his real name. Interview with Kim Yŏnghui (not a real name), 05.11.2010, Seoul, South Korea.

[6] Interview with Yi T'aegyŏng, 09.12.2010, Pusan, South Korea. Yi T'aegyŏng gave me explicit permission to use his real name. In Chapter Three I discuss the extract from the interview with Yi T'aegyŏng where he talks about the relationship between Buddhist and GiCheon practices in detail.

But what is *ki suryŏn* more precisely*?* U Hyeran defines it as a *ki*-based practice directed toward moral and physical development of a person. *Ki suryŏn* is supposed to lead to harmonization of the mind-body and actualization of hidden potential of an individual in the context of a union with the universe. *Ki suryŏn* groups focus on bodily practice, while selectively appropriating elements of various Korean religious traditions. In the estimation of U Hyeran, *ki suryŏn* has spread beyond particular *ki suryŏn* groups, becoming a cultural product approachable to the majority of the population. As part of popular culture, the cosmology and values of *ki suryŏn* are interiorized by contemporary South-Korean society, among other things through internet computer games, animation and films. *Ki suryŏn* groups generally seem to be growing – though exact statistics are difficult or even impossible to obtain - and the terms *ki* and *ki suryŏn* are among vital keywords of contemporary Korean culture (U Hyeran 2006b: 71-73). Various *ki suryŏn* organizations inter-penetrate, borrow ideas and practices from each other; they also co-exist with Chinese forms of self-cultivation usually referred to as *qigong* (氣功) and with Indian yoga.

Contemporary adepts of *ki suryŏn* reconstruct this tradition on the basis of an age-old East Asian culture of mind-body cultivation, but the ways in which they experience and articulate this practice are informed by the present, by the concerns and questions of modern Korean society. Within the socio-historical context of *ki suryŏn,* important issues surround its relationship with modern western science. Some adepts consider *ki suryŏn* "anti-scientific" and adopt a partially confrontational attitude in placing it in opposition to modern science.[7] *Ki suryŏn* instructors, however, take pains to assert its scientific and systematic nature. The notion of "my body as my lab for conducting scientific experiments" is important in this

[7] Interview with Ch'oe Hyŏngsu of 10.11.2010, Puch'ŏn, South Korea. Ch'oe Hyŏngsu gave me explicit permission to use his real name.

respect.[8] Here the concept of contemporary science establishes the way *ki suryŏn* is perceived, experienced and narrated. These dynamics mirror similar developments in China (Palmer 2007, Despeux 1997), but on a much smaller scale.

Exact numbers of *ki suryŏn* trainees are difficult to ascertain.[9] When I asked official representatives of Kouksundo (*Kuksŏndo* 國仙道), one of the earliest *ki suryŏn* organizations, for the estimation of the number of their practitioners within South Korea, they reacted with suspicion and were unwilling to donate information.[10] GiCheon representatives, on the other hand, provided diverging estimations, ranging from a few hundreds to tens of thousands. These types of reaction might be related to the fact that the numbers are indeed difficult to calculate. In a dynamically changing South Korean society new forms of *ki suryŏn* appear almost daily, new leaders arise combining or shifting their diffuse organizational affiliations. New mythologies, contemporary legends and "histories of the movement" are produced for mass-consumption, both orally and in print. In such circumstances, whom should the headquarters count as "their" practitioners? How about new masters who proclaimed their independence and gave their own groups new names? How about the "rogue" sub-groups who challenge the authority of the headquarters claiming theirs is the "real" legacy? When this is the situation on the ground, caution and suspicion on behalf of the actors involved is understandable. I do not know exactly why the number of the practitioners is not made public, though it seems that the factors in play are complex and contradictory. On one hand, inclusion of the rogue sub-groups would heighten the numbers, thus contributing to the

[8] GiCheon teacher Kim Hŭisang has written a number of letters to me on this subject in the years 2010 and 2011.

[9] U Hyeran in her research published in 2006 states that at a time Dahn World had three hundred training centers in South-Korea and two hundred centers abroad (one hundred seventy centers in the US only), with totally around one million of practitioners in the world. This information was taken from the official site of Dahn World (2006a: 4). However, since then the information on the number of the practitioners was removed from the website.

[10] GiCheon and Kouksundo, as originating in 1970s, are among the first South Korean *ki suryŏn* groups (U Hyeran 2006b: 77 on Kouksundo).

prestige of the movement, on the other hand that might give those rogue sub-groups legitimation. Besides, the official representatives of the movement might worry that the numerical information they donate could be used against them by their competitors. Alternatively, tax concerns might be involved, as the numbers of the practitioners have a direct connection to the estimated income.

The teachers of *ki suryŏn* in South Korea face the same dilemma as their colleagues in India and China when they try to reconcile the image of a "disinterested teacher of a true way" with the social relevance of *ki suryŏn* – and undertake its marketing and commodification in a capitalistic contemporary society (Van der Veer 2007). Naturally, financial issues are central for the instructors who make a living out of it, and prompting the students to pay their fees is included in a subtle manner into the "explanations" accompanying the training.

Many *ki suryŏn* groups locate their origin in ancient, mythic times, connecting their legacy to East Asian beliefs in divine immortals (*sinsŏn* 神仙, Chinese: *shenxian*), Korean mountain cults, and Tan'gun, the legendary father of the Korean nation. I clarify these connections in the next section and in greater detail in Chapter Seven. Some scholars find the source of theoretic conceptualization of *ki suryŏn* groups in the teachings of the followers of Daoist practices in Chosŏn Korea (1392-1897) (U Hyeran 2006b: 74-75). This dissertation, however, approaches Korean *ki suryŏn* as a contemporary urban practice, which, similarly to Chinese *qigong* (Palmer 2007) and Indian yoga (Van der Veer 2007), is reinvented in modernity on the basis of ancient Asian traditions.

1.2 Immortality and nationalism in contemporary Korea

In their narrations, GiCheon adepts of the older generation mention such concepts as *sinsŏn* (神仙, Chinese: *shenxian*, divine immortal), *sŏngin* (聖人, Chinese: *shengren*, sage) and

chinin (眞人, Chinese: *zhenren*, perfected person). These terms are repeated numerous times in GiCheon books and texts. The *sinsŏn,* an important figure in East Asian practices of inner alchemy and nourishing life, is a category within a hierarchy of celestial beings. A *sŏngin* is a model of complete humanity, her or his divine powers result from her or his practices, she or he actively and mystically participating in the natural workings of life. A *chinin* denotes one of the highest states in the spiritual hierarchy. *Sinsŏn, sŏngin* and *chinin* embody immortality, often a goal of practices of internal alchemy (內丹, Korean: *naedan,* Chinese: *neidan*), and nourishing life (養生, Korean: *yangsaeng,* Chinese: *yangsheng*).[11] Immortality, in this context, indicates a process of personal purification and enhanced perception of reality, resulting from physical, moral-spiritual and cognitive development (Miura 2008a, Miura 2008b, Robinet 2008b, Kirkland 2008).

I will now briefly outline how the notions of immortality in GiCheon relate to nationalistic discourse in contemporary Korea, and to Korean mountain cults. This will help to situate *ki suryŏn* in general and GiCheon in particular within its cultural and historical context. I will start with introducing the concepts of *sansin* (山神 mountain gods) and *sinsŏn*.

The cult of *sansin* worship existed in Korea since ancient times. In the Three Kingdoms period, when Daoism came to Korea from China, Chinese concepts of immortals (*sinsŏn* 神仙) connected to the notion of Korean *sansin*. Today the depictions of male and female *sansin* and *sinsŏn* are found in shrines dedicated to mountain gods which are parts of

[11] This type of practices is often associated with Daoism. However, referring to grandiose, overarching traditions such as Buddhism and Daoism, which exist mainly as abstractions or fetishes, is not very useful for understanding the concrete practices. As I have mentioned in the beginning to this Introduction, Adam Chau suggests site-specific understanding of practices, looking at their unfolding elements and how they relate to each other in a concrete setting (Chau 2001a: 3), the approach I adopt in this dissertation.

Buddhist temple complexes, usually called *sansingak* (山神閣), or *samsŏnggak* (三聖閣).[12] They are also worshiped in separate shrines called *sansindang* (山神堂), which are not parts of Buddhist temples (Mason 1999: 97).[13]

Despite the fact that *sansin* and *sinsŏn* sometimes coexist and merge on the paintings in Buddhist temples and in other cultural spaces such as *sŏndo* culture discussed below or the GiCheon legends discussed in Chapter Seven, they are parts of different systems. The cult of *sansin* is widespread in Korea and manifests in many forms, as I elaborate in Chapter Seven. Korean shamans pray to *sansin,* as they are included in the shamanic pantheon of gods and spirits, with separate ceremonies held for *sansin*. While *sansin* is a very old and deeply rooted Korean folk culture, the *sinsŏn* tradition, usually identified as Daoist, was mostly favourite with upper classes, particularly during its introduction in Paekche and Silla. In Koryŏ and Chosŏn *sinsŏn* culture got gradually popularized, manifesting in the 19th century in such new religions as Ch'ŏndogyŏ (Na Kwŏnsu 2012).

The Chinese character *sŏn* (仙 Chinese: *xian*, immortality, immortals) is traditionally associated with East Asian Daoism. Early descriptions of the immortals are found in the *Shiji* (史記 Records of the Historian), produced around the first century BC (Miura 2008b: 1092). Yet, in contemporary South Korea the character *sŏn* has acquired a new nationalistic meaning. In modern times references have emerged to old Korean cults of mountain worship under the

[12] Sansin, Toksŏng (獨聖 Lonely Saint) and Ch'ilsŏng (七聖 Seven Stars God) are usually enshrined together in *samsŏnggak* (三聖閣 three saints shrine).

[13] Most of *sansin* are male, but there are also depictions of female *sansin*. See for example female *sansin* images in Ssanggyesa (雙磎寺) and Taewŏnsa (大源寺) Buddhist temples at Chiri mountain. *Sinsŏn* are often painted on outer walls of Buddhist temples, or as accompanying *sansin. Sinsŏn* are sometimes called *pisŏn* (飛仙 flying immortals) or *sŏnnyŏ* (仙女 immortal women) (Mason 1999: 37-38, 55, 81).

name of *sŏndo* (仙道 the way of immortality). *Sŏndo* constitutes a merger of *sansin* and *sinsŏn* cultures, a merging embodied, for example, in the figure of Tan'gun. Contemporary s*ŏndo* writings posit Tan'gun as central to *sŏndo* (Sondŏ munhwa yŏnguwŏn ed. 2006; Yi Sŭngho 2015), despite the fact that the *locus classicus*, the *Samguk Yusa* (三國遺事 Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms) calls him *sansin*, and not a *sinsŏn*.[14]

Sŏndo culture has grown and developed since the 1980s, and it is postulated to be an ancient and original Korean religion. New books on *sŏndo* are continuously published in South Korea, as for example *Han'guk sŏndo wa hyŏndae tanhak* (한국 선도와 현대 단학) (Korean *sŏndo* and contemporary *tanhak*) by Yi Sŭngho published in 2015, or *Han'guk sŏndo ŭi yŏksa wa munhwa* (History and culture of Korean *sŏndo*) by Sondŏ munhwa yŏnguwŏn (Research institute of *sŏndo* culture) published in 2006. They perpetuate and develop ideas of *sŏn* and *sinsŏn,* supporting their presence in the public consciousness. The proponents of *sŏndo* view *ki suryŏn* as one manifestation of *sŏndo*, and they usually refer to it as *sŏndo suryŏn* (仙道修練 learning the way of immortality) (Sondŏ munhwa yŏnguwŏn ed. 2006: 741, Yi Sŭngho 2015: 262). The importance of Tan'gun and notions of immortality in GiCheon reviewed in the next chapter should be understood in the context of this *sŏndo* culture.

Korean mountain worship is indeed ancient. Therefore *sŏndo* might be defined as a newly coined name for an already existing cultural and historical phenomenon. Alternatively, it can be argued that *sŏndo* is a newly invented tradition, growing out of ancient cults but taken up and developed in modernity. In its contemporary nationalistic meaning, *sŏndo* is a relatively new term. But the proponents of *sŏndo* in South Korea today project it backwards

[14] Tan'gun, a founder of a first Korean state, is recorded in the *Samguk Yusa* as a son of a bear who transformed into a woman, and Hwanung, a god who descended on Mt. T'aebaek from Heaven. Upon retirement Tan'gun became a *sansin* (Pak Chunhyŏng 2004: 88-89).

to Silla, Koguryŏ and Paekche (Sondŏ munhwa yŏnguwŏn 2006). They also view new Korean religions originating in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, such as Ch'ŏndogyŏ, Chŭngsan'gyŏ and Wŏn Buddhism, as expressions of *sŏndo* (Na Kwŏnsu 2012).

When discussing the history of *sŏndo* as a term, its propagators point out its connection to what the historians Sin Ch'aeho (申采浩 1880-1936), Chŏng Inbo (鄭寅普 1893-1950) and An Chaehong (安在鴻 1891-1965) called *sŏn'gyŏ* (仙教 the teaching of immortality). Hyŏn Sangyun (玄相允 1893-?) called it *sindo* (神道 the way of spirits), Yi Nŭnghwa (李能和 1869-1943) called it *sin'gyŏ* (神教 the teaching of spirits), and Ch'oe Namsŏn (崔南善 1890-1957) called it *kosindo* (古神道 old way of spirits) (Na Kwŏnsu 2012: 411, note 2).

Sŏndo culture has a direct connection to the cultural and social phenomenon of *chaeya sahak* (在野史學 oppositional history). The views of *chaeya sahak* are widely spread by its defenders, populist nationalist historians, and are accepted by many citizens of South Korea. *Chaeya* historians propagate and perpetuate the interpretation of Tan'gun which came up early in the 20th century, when Tan'gun was redefined as the ancestor of the Korean people rather than the founder of the first Korean state. The conflict between the advocates of *chaeya sahak,* who were at the time outside the academia, and the defenders of *kangdan sahak* (講壇史學 academic history), professional historians, escalated in the 1978, round the subject of depicting Tan'gun and Kojosŏn (古朝鮮) in children's history books for school. The proponents of *chaeya sahak* accused *kangdan sahak* scholars of promoting a colonial view of Korean history, instilled by Japanese scholars during the occupation. *Kangdan sahak*

scholars called *chaeya sahak* followers non-professional and accused them of falsifying historical records. The main points of disagreements between the two groups relate to Tan'gun, the sphere of his operations in historical/mythological time and geographical space, and reliability of various sources related to Tan'gun. *Chaeya sahak* see Tan'gun as a real historical figure, while the academic historians regard him as a mythological figure (Chŏng Kyŏnghŭi 2015: 155).

Some contemporary scholars appreciate *chaeya sahak* as a new mythology, which attempts to strengthen Korean national identity. Kang Tongu sees history and mythology as two sides of the same coin. He notes that in recent decades the conflict between *chaeya sahak* and *kangdan sahak* has lost some of its acuteness. Some claims of *chaeya sahak* were incorporated into the official version of Korean history, as demonstrated in contemporary history textbooks for schoolchildren (Kang Tongu 2000: 14). *Chaeya sahak* has been equally popularised through *sŏndo* culture and *ki suryŏn,* of which GiCheon is one example.

1.3 Existing studies on *ki suryŏn* in general and on GiCheon in particular

Don Baker calls GiCheon a school of internal alchemy (Baker 2007b: 508). Besides Baker, previous research on GiCheon includes a number of articles by Kim Euiyeon, who conducted an experimental medical / psychological study of GiCheon by applying this training method in a hospital environment (Euiyeon Kim 2008a, 2008b). As to *ki suryŏn* in general, it is gradually receiving more attention in Korean academia, its psychological and social implications gaining greater recognition. South Korean scholars examine *ki suryŏn* within various frames of reference. For example, studies focusing on meditation and the martial art of Kouksundo address issues of quality of life (Yang Ch'unho 2000), Korean dance and philosophy (Ch'oe Miyŏn 2008), and sports and modern history (Yi Kwangho 2013). *Ki suryŏn* is approached in the context of stress management (Pak Misuk 2003), nationalistic

discourse and globalization (U Hyeran 2006a about Dahn World [단월드 *tanwŏldŭ*]). Personalities from the Chosŏn period such as Pukch'ang Chŏng Yŏm (北窓 鄭濂 1506-1549), the founder of a Tanhakp'a (丹學派 Tanhak school), are also evoked to construct the tradition of *ki suryŏn* (Chŏng Chesŭng 2001, Yi Hyŏnsu 2006) and of *ki.*[15] An article by Sin Hyesuk and Kwŏn Hyosuk examines how the experience of *ki suryŏn* acquires meaning within the context of the lives of concrete practitioners (Sin Hyesuk 2008). Similarly to my own study, it is based on the interviews. However, I utilize the narratives of my interviewees as a resource allowing access to this experience, while Sin and Kwon focus also on the process of construction of the narrative itself. [16] Study of *ki suryŏn* in South-Korean academia usually focuses on specifically Korean aspects, and does not place it within a broader framework of academic research focused on the "body".

1.4 Approaches to practices similar to *ki suryon*

The East Asian cultural realm is home to long traditions of the self-cultivation practices, in Chinese context commonly referred to as *qigong* and *taijiquan*, which have now spread globally. Extensive scholarship exists focusing on Chinese practices (Farquhar and Zhang

[15] The term *tanhak* (丹學 *tan* study) indicates internal alchemy also referred to as *naedan* (內丹, Chinese: *neidan*). The character *tan* (丹 Chinese: *dan*) meaning read color or cinnabar, became a generic term for elixirs or immortality (Daeyeol Kim 2000: 150) achieved externally or internally. The term *tan* (丹) is a part of a word *tanjŏn* (丹田 Chinese *dantian*, cinnabar field) located in a human body. Korean *ki suryŏn* practitioners widely use this terminology as discussed in Chapter Two. They also connect *ki* concepts to Confucian thinkers such as Hwadam Sŏ Kyŏngdŏk (花潭 徐敬德 1489-1546), whose work is regarded one of the cornerstones in the development of *ki* philosophy in Korea (Ten 2011a).

[16] This article strongly supports Brain Education and is written from the point of view of its ideology. It is published in *Noekyoyuk yŏn'gu* (뇌교육연구) (Journal of Brain Education), printed by Kukche noekyoyuk chonghap taehagwŏn taehakkyŏ (국제뇌교육종합대학원대학교) (University of Brain Education). Yi Sŭnghŏn, better known as Ilchi Lee, is a leader of Dahn World (Brain Education) and a president of this university and a number of related organizations (see note 4).

2012; Farquhar 2005; Utiraruto 2009; Palmer 2007; Torchinov 2007, 1998; Kerr 2002; Despeux 1997, 1981; Ots 1990, 1991; Abayev 1983, 1982). However, similar phenomena in Korea have hardly been studied.

When examining *ki suryŏn* and similar East Asian practices in academia we encounter a problem of how we tackle, study and classify them. What are they? And how do we acquire knowledge about them? Russian sinologist Abayev has introduced a new term, "psycho-physical culture" (Abayev 1983: 1). In his opinion, psycho-physical culture is an essential element of East Asian civilization. Psycho-physical training aims at cultivating, at "forming" a person toward a culturally defined "ideal" (Ibid). In Chapter Four of the present dissertation I discuss the notion of *suryŏn* (修練), which for contemporary South Korean practitioners carries precisely this meaning of "formation" or "cultivation". As I show in that chapter, the "ideal" toward which the formation is directed is different for each trainee. In psycho-physical culture, this process of formation includes different methods of the conscious, goal-oriented and systematic regulation of psychic processes, involving corporeal practices. These systems may include breathing and meditation, as well as martial arts, sexual techniques and medical practices, and serve (psycho-) therapeutic, prophylactic, moral and religious purposes. They are connected to various religious and philosophical teachings, most significantly Daoism, Buddhism (Abayev 1982: 244), Confucianism, and in the Korean context also to Christianity, shamanism and local mountain cults. Local mountain cults are particularly important for Korean *ki suryŏn*, as I elaborate in Chapter Seven.

In English language scholarship psycho-physical training systems have been approached under the separate rubrics of religious studies, traditional medicine, martial arts and folklore. Abayev, however, takes a comprehensive view of psycho-physical culture as a research subject of its own, and calls for its establishment as a separate field of study (1983). Recently the American anthropologist Judith Farquhar and the Chinese philosopher Qicheng

Zhang have conducted research on similar practices in contemporary China, referring to them as "life-cultivating arts" or "the art of nourishing life" (Farquhar and Zhang 2012, Farquhar 2005), as I recount in greater detail in section 1.9 below.

Catherine Despeux calls similar practices martial arts, techniques prolonging life, and gymnastics (1997: 267, 273-276). Her research on Chinese *qigong* demonstrates the invention of this practice as a contemporary tradition, which became popular in the 1980s. At the same period *sŏngin undong* (成人運動 sports for adults) and *ki suryŏn* became popular in South Korea, coinciding in time with the rise of middle class as I explain in Chapter Two and in greater detail in the Conclusion. Nevertheless Catherine Despeux traces the usage of the word *qigong* to Tang China (618-910) at least, testifying to the fact that this modern phenomenon is rooted in ancient practices. During the last few decades of 20th century, Chinese *qigong* was deliberately married to modern western science and attempts were made to match it to Russian research on parapsychology, with an emphasis on the possible deployment of the powers of *qigong* masters for military purposes. In the political discourse *qigong* is also utilized for the formation of modern Chinese identity (Despeux 1997: 267, 273-276). Similar developments and desires can be traced also in relation to Korean *ki suryŏn* as evidenced by contemporary Korean literature, see for example the national bestseller *Tan* (丹) by Kim Chŏngbin (1996 [1984]) which recounts a mythic history of Kouksundo, one of the earliest Korean *ki suryŏn* practices.[17]

Otehode Utiraruto in his article "The Creation and Re-emergence of Qigong in China" briefly summarizes how various scholars approached contemporary East Asian psycho-physical culture. For example, Hishida Masaharu (2000, referenced in Utiraruto 2009: 241) sees *qigong* as part of the broader emergence of new religions as communist ideology

[17] See note 15 on the meaning of the character *tan* (丹).

weakens and the value system diversifies. For Jian Xu, *qigong*'s re-emergence signifies the appearance of private spaces in urban China, the declining power of politics and growth of individual power. Besides, Jian Xu outlines a brief history of the body in East Asian tradition and its connection with modern western medicine and Maoist politics (1999). Utiraruto himself carries out a historical investigation of *qigong*, showing how its initial formation and modification have been intertwined with the state since its very founding. This scholar refers to *qigong* as originating from "traditional body cultivation practices", without any further elucidation. Utiraruto mentions though that after 1949 the names and interpretations of "indigenous body cultivation practices" were reformed and legitimized as methods of medical treatment and physical training (Utiraruto 2009: 241-242, 244). Nancy Chen enquires into the relationship between *qigong* and psychiatry, viewing the body as a site for resistance against political order (2003). These scholars mostly emphasise the role *qigong* played in Chinese society since the late 1970s. The ground-breaking *Qigong Fever* by David Palmer provides a comprehensive study on *qigong*, which is mainly historical (2007). Although these studies touch on the inner, individual significance of *qigong* as such, it is not at the focus of their interest nor do they directly inquire into the experiences of the practitioners. My study, however, investigates the modes of experiencing psycho-physical culture in immediate connection with individual perception and articulation, utilising the notion of "experiential modalities" introduced later in the text of this Introduction.

Thomas Ots names psycho-physical practices "techniques of health preservation and exercises prolonging life" (Ots 1994: 120) and calls on researchers to personally engage and analyse the concrete experiences and perceptions of their "lived-bodies" (Ots 1994: 134), hoping this empirical work might support the overcoming of long-lasting subject-object and mind-body dichotomies (1991: 43). The "lived-body", a new term Ots introduces into anthropological and phenomenological discourse (1991: 43), must be experienced before it

can be thought and talked of. Ots himself entered a qigong group as a follower rather than as anthropologist *(*Ots 1994: 134). For Merleau-Ponty, whose work provided inspiration for the analysis of Ots, it is this lived-body that constitutes our "being in the world", as the body is a "setting in relation to the world." Merleau-Ponty views consciousness as the projection of the body into the lived world; the world becomes an extension of the body. For Merleau-Ponty perceptions are "pre-objective", they start in the body and "end in objects". Thus perceptions are the preconditions for cognition and reflective thought (Ots 1990: 21-22, Merleau-Ponty 1945). Following Merleau-Ponty, and based on his study of Chinese *qigong* and traditional Chinese medicine, Ots calls on researchers to investigate the way mind and culture, as emergent objectifications of bodily experience, are shaped and constituted by the lived-body (1991: 48).

Following the example of Thomas Ots, authors such as Haruhiko Murakawa, Jaida Kim Samudra and Alberto Chiesa have engaged in the anthropological, psychological and philosophical analysis of the "lived body" in respectively *qigong* (Murakawa 2002), White Crane Silat (Samudra 2008), and mindfulness meditation (Chiesa 2010). They attempt to challenge old stereotypes and develop innovative attitudes. Csordas and Samudra call for employing the lived-bodies of researchers as tools for knowledge acquisition. When a researcher engages in the practice, her or his own body becomes a source of knowledge, accessible through registration of the bodily sensations (Csordas 2002: 251-253; Samudra 2008: 665).

However developing a holistic terminology for addressing these cultural phenomena remains a problem, and contemporary researchers often leave it unsolved, referring to the objects of their research as "bodily practices" (Samudra 2008) or "mindfulness meditation" (Chiesa 2010). Peter Van der Veer defines Chinese psycho-physical practices as "qi [ki] exercises, connected to cosmological concepts, bodily health, concentration of the mind,

meditation and quietness". He mentions that *qi* [*ki*] exercises were practiced in the name of a religion, a school of medicine, or martial arts, and often passed on by religious specialists organized in networks of training and socialization, such as monasteries and other institutions. While relating to these practices as *"*disciplines of the self", Peter Van der Veer connects them to "techniques of the body" by Mauss (*1966 [1934])* and "technologies of self" as articulated by Foucault (1988, 2001) *(*Van der Veer 2007). As to the analysis of the living psycho-physical practices of today, scholars such as David Palmer and Nashima Selim also mention the relevance of Foucauldian technologies of the self, but do not themselves actively apply his concepts in their analysis of qigong (Palmer 2007) or vipassana meditation (Selim 2011).

Adam Chau suggests five modalities for analysis of East Asian spiritual practices: relational, immediate-practical, liturgical, personal-cultivational and discursive/scriptural. According to this classification, Chinese psycho-physical practices and Korean *ki suryŏn* belong to the personal-cultivational modality, which Chau himself also calls "technologies of self", connecting them to the "care of the self" discussed by Foucault (Chau 2011b: 67, 72).

No comprehensive research exists in English focusing on the lived-body in contemporary Korean *ki suryŏn.* Attempting to fill in this lacuna, I study the lived body *i*n Korean *ki suryŏn* in the spirit of the work of Thomas Ots and Adam Chau. GiCheon, a part of Korean invented tradition of *ki suryŏn*, should be approached and comprehended on the basis of East Asian vision of the body as feeling and sentient. This vision of the body manifests in East Asian medicine and the arts of alchemy and nourishing life, and also in contemporary *qigong* practices studied by Thomas Ots. The body undergoing self-cultivation in GiCheon can be understood only as a lived-body, the body that includes the mind-heart, feelings and intensions.

1.5 *Ki suryŏn* as "technologies of the self"

Starting with a historical-philosophical analysis of such institutions as madness (Foucault 1961), illness (Foucault 1963) and criminality (Foucault 1975), in his later years Michel Foucault moved toward the questions of self-reflection, self-formation and self-constitution. In terms of subjectivation and objectivation, which mean transformation of a human being into a subject or an object, in his earlier work Foucault analysed contemporary construction of a subject in science and through practices related to the distinction of sick or healthy and the differentiation between sane and insane. His later studies focused on self-construction undertaken by the subject herself, for example through sexuality (1984, 1994b). The work of self-construction is deeply connected to Foucault's conception of the technologies of the self.

Foucault's concern with the technologies of the self began with an investigation into the practices he categorizes as *epimeleia heautou*, translated into English as "the care of the self". These activities, originating in ancient Greece, included practices of purification, concentration of the spirit/breath, techniques of retreat and practices of enduring pain and hardship (Foucault 2001: 46-47).

Foucault notes that self-care usually takes the form of practices in distinct, closed institutional groups that often imply exclusion. There are two poles to self-care. The first pole are popular, religious, cultic, theoretically unsophisticated practices. These practices are visible among less privileged classes. Here self-care is linked to religious congregations organized around a specific cult, often with ritualized procedures and prayers. The second pole are individual, personal practices of self-cultivation, often situated in a more privileged environment. It is constituted by sophisticated, elaborated, cultivated practices, much connected to personal choice, to cultivated leisure and theoretic research. These practices are often articulated as a sectarian phenomenon. The second pole of self-care implies a choice of mode of life, revealing a gap between those who can choose their mode of life and all others

(2001: 109-112). In his examination of the technologies of the self, Foucault focuses on the second pole of these self-transformational practices. The self-transformational practice of GiCheon, the subject of the present dissertation, is also closer to the second pole of the spectrum described by Foucault. As elaborated upon in Chapter Six, the pain of sustaining GiCheon positions serves as a demarcation, a dividing line between those who can be admitted into GiCheon circles and all others. As such, it contributes to the elitist character of GiCheon.

For Foucault, "care of the self" is a basic motif in a historical-philosophical discussion on subjectivity. In a vein similar to Foucault's, Pierre Hadot views care for the self as connecting directly to the care for the city and care for others, foregrounding Hadot's understanding of philosophy as a way of life (2002: 36-38, 279). However, other contemporary scholars view things differently. Charles Taylor, in his inquiry into the history of contemporary identity and subjectivity within the context of morality, notes that care of the self in ancient Greece was radically different from contemporary concerns with subjectivity (1989: 131, 176). Foucault, however, takes the "care of the self" as the starting point in his discussion on subjectivation – the construction of a subject. It connects to the technologies of self, which "permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality" (Foucault 1988: 18). Foucault finds that the concept of the technologies of the self is equally relevant for ancient or modern times. There is no doubt, however, that different technologies of the self vary significantly in the geo-temporal space, creating different outcomes.

Foucault notes that in ancient Greece self-transformation was connected to *gnothi seauton* "know yourself", the third precept of the Delphic temple, where people came to

consult the oracle. Foucault clarifies that in ancient Greece the philosophical principle *gnothi seauton,* "know yourself", was often coupled with *epimeleia heautou* "taking care of yourself", but originally subordinated to "taking care of the self". It is in the context of "taking care of yourself" that you had to "know yourself" (Foucault 2001: 5-6, Xenophon 1966 [371 BC]: 390). You have to know yourself in order to transform yourself. In this context the object of knowledge is the old, "pre-transformed" self, modelled by the factors external to the self, and applied without self-awareness of this process, or contrary to the wishes of the self. Countering this is the intentional effort to realize and modify the self, a conscious process of activated self-modification, with a goal to create a "new self" in the world.[18]

Foucault discusses two approaches to philosophy: philosophy as the ontology of the world, and philosophy as experiencing life, elaborating a certain form and modality of life. In the former, the world is known and measured. In the latter, the world is something through which we experience, know and discover ourselves. It is also something starting from which, through which, and thanks to which we form and transform ourselves, advance towards our own perfection (Foucault 2001: 466-467, 2009: 118-119).[19] The later definition of philosophy connects directly to the technologies of the self.

The task of crafting the self relates to the ontology of the self. What is the "self" for Foucault? Foucault sees a human being as consisting of body and spirit. When an action is performed, it is the body that "does". But who/what operates the body? For Foucault the body cannot be the subject and the object of the action simultaneously. He concludes that the spirit is the subject which operates the body (Foucault 2001: 55). Foucault equates the self with the

[18] Foucault does not explicitly mention the terms "old self" and "new self". It is clear from his narrative, though, that the Delphic precept of "knowing yourself" relates to the "old self", and not to a potential "new self" one aspires to build (Foucault 2001: 5).

[19] I return to this point later in the text of this Introduction, in my discussion on craft and self-craft as experiential encounters between myself and the world.

spirit. This preference for the "spirit" manifests in the title Foucault ascribes to self-techniques of ancient Greece and Rome – he calls them "spiritual" practices.

In his analysis, Foucault does not totally neglect the body. When discussing operation of the body by the spirit, Foucault reviews the Greek word *khresthai* which means "to use", to operate, but also designates an attitude. It might be an attitude towards the gods, or an attitude towards one's horse. In the Foucauldian narrative, the care of the self includes an attitude towards one's body, and towards oneself (Foucault 2001: 55-58). The wide range of Greek and Roman self-techniques recounted by Foucault includes multiple techniques of the body. Yet, in his discussion the primacy is with the spirit, and the body occupies second place. Despite the fact that Foucault describes techniques of the body, he simultaneously disregards the body, calling the bodily practices "spiritual practices". Foucault's focus is on the history of thought and the mind. He asks why we think today the way we do, tracing the patterns of contemporary thought to ancient practices. Differently from Foucault, my focus is on the body, the bodily practices of today. The body I discuss is the feeling body, the thinking body, the acting body, the lived-body that includes within it a mind-heart. In my analysis this living body is both an object and a subject of action and practice. In other words, the subject and object, the mind-heart and body, are not distinguished one from the other, but bound together.

However, the aspect of Foucault's work that serves as a point of departure for my own research is his emphasise on the technologies on the self as undergone willingly by the individual in order to transform herself or himself. This formation of the self occurs on many planes and can be analysed from different perspectives. The scholarly community has approached and developed Foucauldian technologies of self in various ways which I will now outline.

Foucauldian technologies of self pertain to physical and moral cultivation, therefore relating directly to the question of ethics, autonomy and control. Recent research on

Foucault's ideas includes, for example, James Laidlaw's examination of self-formation in relation to freedom and self-discipline in the context of Marxist and psychoanalytic thought. Laidlaw explains that Foucault sees the desire, the self and ethics as historical. Laidlaw views Foucault's discussion on techniques of the self as a conceptual resource utilized within a historical-philosophical project, tracing the time when the self was not given and discovered by examining one's sexual desires, but instead was produced by the subject through active self-crafting. In Laidlaw's interpretation, Foucault saw ethics as consisting of the ways individuals make themselves into objects of reflective action, adopting voluntary practices for shaping and transforming themselves in various ways. The history of such self-transformative practices is the genealogy of ethics (Laidlaw 2014a: 26-30, 2014b).

In the Foucauldian view, self-creation or self-transformation is a creative activity of shaping the self, parallel to the way an artist designs and models her oeuvre. Not surprisingly, in a recent scholarly discussion on technologies of self, connections are drawn with contemporary art. Among the various self-altering techniques Foucault addresses, Paul Rabinow singles out the *melete* – "meditation", drawing a parallel between Stoic technologies of self and the work of the artist Gerhard Richter (Rabinow 2014). In similar vein, James Faubion compares the modern poet Constantine Cavafy to the ancient Greek Cynics – Faubion focuses on the practice of *parrhesia* – "speaking the truth", another technique of the self reviewed by Foucault (Faubion 2014).

Foucauldian technologies of self initially incited and continue to stimulate a lively discussion on the formation of the self in the context of subjectivation and religion, involving bodily experiences (Rüpke, ed. 2013; Alter 2013; Gill 2006; Brakke, Satlow, Weitzman ed. 2005; Shulman, Stroumsa ed. 2002), although sometimes Foucault's contribution to this debate goes almost unnoticed (Kohn, Wang ed. 2009). The notion of technologies of self also is engaged and implemented by Sonia Ryang, in a way very different from mine, in her

analysis of practices of "writing and reading novels" in North Korea. She examines reading novels as a technique for cultivating the self, as the novels assist in and direct the process of self-reform and self-discipline required of each citizen by the regime. The act of reading a novel is a technology of self, and additionally the novels suggest to the readers other particular technologies, such as self-reflection, self-exploration, and questioning one's motives (Ryang 2002: 23, 25-26).

1.6 Two vectors model

Foucault's notion of the technologies of the self serves as a point of departure for my analysis of *ki suryŏn* as intentional cultivation of body and mind-heart. However, I also deploy the Confucian schematic from *The Great Learning, sŏngŭi chŏngsim susin ch'ega ch'iguk p'yŏngch'ŏnha* (誠意正心修身齊家治國平天下 "authenticate the intention, rectify the mind-heart, cultivate the body, regulate the family, govern the country, bring peace to the world").[20] This prescription for self-cultivation suggests a wide-ranging approach towards the body, or the self. In East Asian traditions there has been no objectification of the physical body as separated from its mental faculties. The "body" in this sense and context is non-dualistic, encompassing not only breathing, ingesting and digesting, desiring, feeling, thinking and moving (Palmer 2007: 9), but also acts on the familial, social and universal planes. In my application of the Confucian scheme we might portray the self as live, busy, active movement. Like a ray of light, it bursts from the inside towards the outside, towards the world. Following the order of *The Great Learning* we could recount its progress as

[20] *Daxue* (大學 *The Great Learning*) (E-SKQS 1999). One of the four books of the Confucian canon, The Great Learning summarizes the process of self-perfection on the levels of the intention, mind-heart, body, family, country, and the world, then proceeding towards detailed explanation of self-cultivation on each level. Cultivation of the self here includes embodying virtue thus providing a personal example and a role-model for the others.

starting from intentionality and progressing towards emotion and cognition, further coming into actualized being on the personal, familial, social and universal planes. This is how the self unfolds, and how it both realizes itself as well as finds expression as an intentional, emotional, cognitive, bodily, personal, familial, social and universal self.[21] This diagrammatic strategy is repeatedly called for by GiCheon practitioners themselves when describing their experiences.

Active and universal as it is, the self is always already in the world (Merleau-Ponty 1945). The moment we look at the self, we see how it is conditioned to this fact. The social, for example, is defined by the conditions of the universe (like climate and topography), but moulds the familial and the personal, while ways of acting, thinking, feeling and intending are shaped by bodily, familial and social factors. The self as active subject is simultaneously a passive object of external influences. This is the reality the actualized self finds itself in, seized by a dualism of forces and pulled into two opposite directions – one outward, from inside the self toward the outside world, another inward, from the outer world toward the inner self. The first force is subjective, directed outward, it is the projection of myself upon the world (Merleau-Ponty 1945). The second force is the influence of the world upon myself as an object. In my analysis I refer to these two forces as a pair of vectors. The first vector is intentional influence, the unfolding of the self towards the external. The second vector is the un-intentional influence through which the self is formed, from the external towards the

[21] Merleau-Ponty says that the presence and existence of the body in the world is like that of a heart in an organism: it animates and nurtures from inside, forming a single system with it (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 235). I perceive and know the world through my body. Without my body, my world does not exist, like an organism, which cannot exist without a heart. This worldview, adopted and developed by the author of the present dissertation, almost equalizes consciousness with life itself. Deep underlying intention, first and foremost a desire to live, shapes emotion and cognition, which define and direct actions and activities. This desire to live and to survive, which we share with other living beings, conditions our perception of the world and directs our existence in the world. In Confucianism and other spiritual traditions, this desire of life, or of the good life, is equated with a desire to give life, or give the good life, to others. This is how the bodily self extends towards familial and social selves. As to the universal self, *ki suryŏn* practitioners often talk about improved communication with nature, better perception of art, and experience of the "harmony with the universe" as a result of *ki* training. It is to these aspects of self-transformation I refer when talking about the development of the "universal self".

internal. My work investigates the experiences of Korean *ki suryŏn* adepts utilizing this two vectors scheme as a methodological tool. My two vectors scheme is developed on the basis of the Confucian self-cultivational schema and technologies of self elaborated by Michel Foucault.[22]

We can schematically portray the vectors as following:

the first vector:

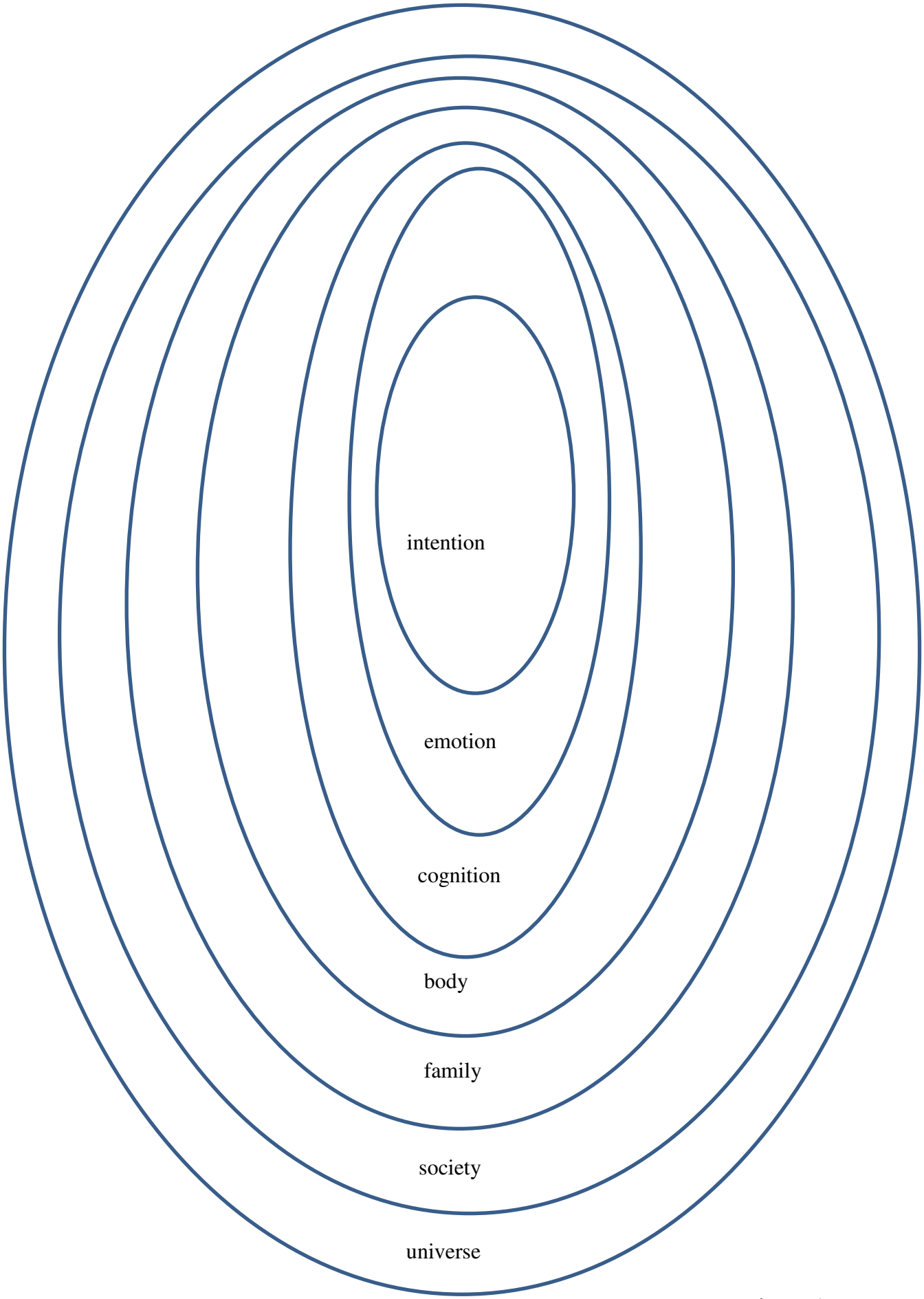
intention→emotion→cognition→body→family→society→universe

the second vector:

universe→society→family→body→cognition→emotion→ intention

(see picture 1)

[22] The connection between the Confucian prescript for self-cultivation and Foucauldian technologies of self has been noticed and insisted upon also by Hahm Chaibong. He dwells on the common points between Confucian practices trying for an ideal moral self expanding towards the universe and practices of "care of the self" originating in ancient Greece and Rome as described by Foucault. But Hahm's analysis as based on the texts of Confucian canon is purely theoretical: he does not investigate Confucian practices as applied in actuality (Chaibong Hahm 2001).


intention
emotion
cognition
body
family
society
universe

picture 1

The definition of the "self" in this schema is relational. Depending on the context, the self can shrink and swell, sometimes limiting itself to the intention or the physical body only, other times stretching toward the whole universe. The notion of "external" here exists mainly along the second vector. "External" are the forces applied on the self from outside, without an awareness or against the wish of the self. Alongside the first vector the "external" shifts. What is the perimeter of the willingly expanding self? If my self is my body, then my family is "external". If my family is my self, then the society is external. If I define my "social self" as "real me" – then other societies are outside it. But my self can also embrace the universe.

Within this framework of thought such terms as "external" and "internal" are relative, not absolute, and so are the terms the "core" and the "space" of the self. The core of the self on each level becomes the space, or the sphere of action of the self at the next level. If the intention, the emotion or the thought constitute the core of the self, then the body is the space of the self. If the body is the core of the self, then the family, society and the universe are the space of the self.

Examination of the technologies of self which operate along the vectors is essentially the study of self-crafting by the self. But as the self is always already in the world, already existent, this self-crafting becomes a question of re-making and re-modeling the "old" self, in order to achieve a "new" self in the world.[23] Within *ki suryŏn* this process starts in the body.

1.7 The body and the self as the crossroads of the vectors

In the early years of social and cultural anthropology, the body was considered an implicit, taken-for-granted background feature of social life. But since the 1970s it has become an

[23] Among many questions relating to self-narration addressed in autoethnography, the volume edited by Rhett pays particular attention to the question of transformation from an old self towards a new one (Rhett 1997).

explicit topic of ethnographic concern, requiring attention because of its cultural and historical mutability. Presently in anthropology and the humanities the body is seen as an opportunity for rethinking various aspects of culture and self (Csordas 1999: 172). It is no more considered as a natural self-contained entity with mechanically functioning internal organs, but as a contingent formation of space, time and materiality, to be comprehended as an assemblage of practices, discourses and images (Lock 2007: 1, 4).

In traditional western thought often the superiority has been assumed of the intentional mind over the intentionless body (Ots 1991: 43). Although the validity of such a mind-body dichotomy has been questioned, as embedded in spoken language this dichotomy continues to inform our ways of thinking. It alienates "us" from our bodies: it is the mind thinking of the body rather than the body perceiving itself. However, East Asian psycho-physical practices imply a different bodily sensibility and train adepts to "listen" within their bodies (Ots 1990: 22, 26). One of the manifestations of this bodily awareness lies in concepts of *ki*, which simultaneously embrace moral, emotional, intellectual, physical, social, and universal planes of being. In Chapter Three of the present dissertation I review different meanings infused by the contemporary GiCheon practitioners into the term *ki* (氣).

The body we discuss here is a body with feelings and perceptions, or *Leib* in German, a word etymologically connected to the English word "life" (Ots 1994: 116). Thomas Csordas emphasizes this in his theory of embodiment, stating that human cultural experience is always bodily. Starting from the methodological postulate that the body is not just an object to be studied in relation to culture, but also a subject of culture, or the existential ground of culture, Csordas follows Merleau-Ponty, for whom the body serves as the origin of perception and intentionality (Csordas 2002: 2, 58-62; Merleau-Ponty 1945).

Recognition of the body as comprehending more inclusive dynamics by the anthropologists and sociologists of the 20th century can be identified as starting with the

terminology and conceptual framing of "techniques of the body, transmitted through imitation and education", introduced in 1934 by Marcel Mauss as a part of his discourse on *habitus*. *Habitus* is an acquired habit; and techniques of the body in his view are those ways in which people in different societies use their bodies, bodily attitudes varying across types of education, social status, decorum and fashion (Mauss 1966 [1934]: 365-369). When we look at it from the vectors perspective, Mauss concentrates on the point of the social shaping the physical of the second vector. But Mauss evokes also subjectivity and intentionality by stating that the body is the first instrument of the human being and the first object of techniques of the body (Mauss 1966 [1934]: 372). This is the first vector, the intentional self employing the bodily-self as both means and object. But only later in the history of social science the body itself was upgraded to the status of "object and subject simultaneously" (Csordas 2002: 241).

Marcel Mauss was aware of the importance of diverse techniques of the body varying across cultures, such as techniques of birth, sexual techniques, techniques of child-rearing, walking, dancing, sleeping or eating. He called on the researchers to study them as complex psycho-physical-sociological acts, a research that should be very concrete and site-specific. In particular, Marcel Mauss emphasized the significance of self-cultivational techniques of the body in East Asia and India. He called them "biological means of entering into the contact with the Divine" (Marcel Mauss 1966 [1934]).

Following Mauss, Pierre Bourdieu further developed the concept of *habitus,* in which practical sense and social necessity having become one's nature are transformed into motor schemes of corporeal automatism. For Bourdieu *habitus* consists of unconscious individual and collective habits and modes of behaviour, produced by conditioning associated with particular classes or groups (Bourdieu 1980: 87-91, 116). Bourdieu states that the social order prescribes thoughts and instills sentiments through organized practices and regulated

dispositions of the body. He suggests writing a list of values that became bodily, operating through implicit pedagogy, infusing a whole cosmology, ethics, metaphysics, and politics through such minor regulations as "sit straight" or "do not hold the knife with your left hand". In his opinion corporeal disposition is a realized, incorporated political mythology which has become permanent, durable manner to hold oneself, to talk, to walk, and thus - to *feel* and *think* (Bourdieu 1980: 116-117). The analysis of Bourdieu here unfolds along the second vector: society → body → cognition and emotion.

Also the earlier work of Michel Foucault mainly followed the second vector. He studied how society forms subjectivity prescribing particular routes of expression such as madness, illness and criminality. However, the later writings of Foucault testify to a shift in his interest. Foucault's discussion on the technologies of the self emphasizes the intentional self, designing schemes for self-formation. This is the first vector. However, the project of Foucault is a historical one, an attempt to draw a history of contemporary subjectivity, to unravel the historicity of the ways of our thought and behavior today. When Foucault turns to concrete practitioners and writers of antiquity, and we follow him, we witness their insights and personal experiences as the unfolding of the first vector "for them". They voice their original ideas as enacting their self-expression. For "us", however, their perceptions and awareness have already been integrated into the fabric of culture, which influences us as our cultural given, the second vector. This constant integration of the first vector into the second vector, of the personal insights of oneself into the cultural given for others is an important dynamics in the formation of subjectivity. The subjectivation Foucault talks about can be found in revising this process, and recovering our own voice, the first-hand experience of the world, and an ability to transform it. I argue, that for Korean *ki suryŏn* practitioners this process starts not with the intellectual pursuits, as it was for Michel Foucault, but with bodily practice.

The work of Marcel Mauss and Pierre Bourdieu related mostly to the second vector, and the later work of Michel Foucault to the first. My own study focus on the self as a junction, an intersection of the vectors. I observe the work of the two vectors in Korean *ki suryŏn,* an East Asian technique of the body directed at self-cultivation and subjectivation. My research is concrete and site-specific. I attempt to trace the work of the two vectors on the intentional, emotional, cognitive, familial, national and universal planes of the self in the context of personal life-stories, examining how are they articulated and narrated.

In line with the direction suggested by Pierre Bourdieu, I also attempt to "decode" what bodily stances of GiCheon mean to the practitioners and what are the values incorporated within them. How does GiCheon practice mould the self? What is the direction and the form of this modification? Here I would like to introduce the notion of "experiential modalities", which show the working of the two vectors on different planes of the self. As outlined in the next section, experiential modalities demonstrate that different planes of the self are continuous.

1.8 Experiential modalities as a framework to analyse GiCheon experience

I began my research on GiCheon with the goal of inquiring into the experiences of the practitioners and the ways these experiences are articulated, narrated and understood. During the span of about eight months I have interviewed sixty one persons; some were old friends with whom I had already spoken many times, some were strangers whom I met for the first time for an interview that lasted a couple of hours. The trainees and teachers I met correspond to various points on a spectrum connecting the two poles of "friends" and "strangers". I recorded more than one hundred hours of interviews and filled ten notebooks. Afterwards, as I was listening to the recordings and reading the notes, I searched for a method to navigate through this sea of information. I noticed the repetition of particular notions, phrases and

words as they appeared in the narrations of a number of people. I started focusing on these notions and phrases, often terms from GiCheon vocabulary, and later started using them as focal points round which my analysis could evolve. I noticed that the words *ki*, *suryŏn,* pain and mountains came up again and again in the narratives of my informants.

The articulations of GiCheon practitioners, including myself, are generated and influenced by approaches theorized within GiCheon ideology, and the terms *ki* and *suryŏn* are used frequently. In addition to that, the experience and its articulation have their grounding and locale in the physical stances of GiCheon. It is not unexpected therefore that although each person experiences and narrates GiCheon differently, there are common points. These common points are created and strengthened in the formal and informal exchanges with other practitioners and teachers in the GiCheon community.

As emphasized by Thomas Csordas (2002) and other ethnographers of the body, the life of the body and the body itself are deeply cultural. Ruth Barcan (2013: 224) notes, for example, that in contemporary socio-cultural approaches to the body it is almost axiomatic that dominant conceptions of, metaphors for and experiences of the body are formed in relation to the economic, technological, ideological, symbolic and social parameters of any society. In this dissertation I argue that the way in which GiCheon trainees experience, understand and articulate the body and the self follows the traditional East Asian view of the self and the universe as interrelated and continuous, and the universe itself as living and sentient (see for example the account of Kim Yŏnghŭi in the Chapter Three). The narrations of Korean Seoul GiCheon practitioners hold this in common with their Chinese counterparts practicing *yangsheng* in Beijing (Farquhar, Zhang 2012), as I explain in section 1.10 of this Introduction. The intermediate (though not always necessary) links between the body and the universe are the family and the society. I suggest that following similar changes and processes along the first vector of emotion→cognition→body→family→society→universe

helps us in identifying the self as continuous with the universe. I refer to these similar changes and processes as "experiential modalities".

The term "experiential modalities" was introduced by Thomas Csordas in his conceptualization of our bodily existence, or embodiment. The range of potential experiential modalities consists of the ways or the modes to perceive and classify culturally conditioned sensations, emotions and impressions (Csordas 2002: 59, 219, 261). As discussed in this Introduction, the concept of the self I develop in the present study is multiple, unfolding through various "levels of the self" along the first or the second vector. My interviews with GiCheon practitioners show that particular manners of being, attitudes and forms of reflection occurring at the initial levels of the self are developing into similar processes at the outer levels of the self, thus forming chains unfolding along the first vector. The narrations of GiCheon adepts convey phenomena and experiences related to the intentional, emotional, cognitive, bodily, familial, social and universal self in clusters of sensations, feelings, impressions and ideas. These clusters can be recognized as experiential modalities. One example of such an experiential modality is constituted by the experiences of "warmth" discussed in detail in Chapter Five, on the basis of the interview with Ms. Sin. On the corporal level it manifests itself as warmness of the body, on the emotional level it appears as warm feelings, on the levels of the familial and social self it unfolds as warmer relationships with the surrounding people.

Identifying particular modalities of experience in different contexts reveals the connection between different levels of the self. In case of warmness of the body and warmer relationships between people the connection is evident, because similar words are used. But in the case of pleasant feelings in the body developing into happiness and joy evolving into a desire to dance, as described in the narration of Ms. Sin in Chapter Five, the connection is less evident, as different words are used for experience arising in different selves: bodily,

emotional and cognitive. The concept of experiential modalities provides a challenge to the Cartesian mind-body dichotomy as it posits intention, emotion, cognition, body, family, society and universe as continuous.

However, various planes of the self cannot always be neatly classified as bodily, familial, social or universal. The case of Kim Wŏn'gyu (not a real name) also reviewed in Chapter Five shows that an experiential modality of "lack" can show on the economical plane as a lack of money and on the educational plane, as a lack of system. In Kim's narrative this modality of experience manifests on an intellectual level as a lack of interest in the explanations of the teacher, on a spiritual level as a lack of advancement, on a bodily and emotional plane as a lack of feelings.

Experiential modalities can be individual or culturally imposed, or culturally established. Such notions as *ki* and *suryŏn* are vital cultural notions, key words that generate images, feelings and experiences. These fruitful words are like soil on which different things can grow. They are cultural frameworks of meaning that prescribe and form experience, suggesting particular ways of its articulation and formulation. Both *ki* and *suryŏn* are "power words" that generate experiences of the intentional, emotional, bodily (or individual), familial, social and universal self. These cultural notions mold and modulate individual experience, creating what I call "culturally advised experiential modalities". I discuss the power words *ki* and *suryŏn* and culturally advised experiential modalities generated by them in Chapter Three and Chapter Four.

Mountains come up repeatedly in the interviews. The word "mountain" is reviewed in Chapter Seven as another key word, which has the power to generate culturally recommended experiential modalities. In Korea, mountains surround us physically and topographically, but also culturally and spiritually. Mountain worship and the cult of *sansin* (山神 mountain gods) are among the central features of the Korean cultural landscape (Mason 1999). The word *san*

(山 mountain) figures in many Korean proverbs in various meanings (see Chapter Seven). Images of mountains, or of ascending a mountain, can generate modalities that define and condition experience. Of particular importance is the notion of the body of a mountain, and its interaction with the body of an individual. These two bodies are connected physically and metaphorically. Another key word generating an experiential modality is pain, a subject I discuss in Chapter Six. Pain is always present in GiCheon practice, but dealt with and conceptualized by the practitioners in different fashions.

Power words like *ki* and *suryŏn,* mountains or pain, produce and shape experience. Different people use similar words as the agents of a particular culture; they bear, implement and actualize this culture. Yet as individual agents they shape different experiences with the same words. I refer to these experiences as "culturally recommended experiential modalities". The key words come from the culture, but individuals apply them strategically, filling them with meanings which vary according to the need and social circumstance.[24] This articulation of the experience, an attempt to make sense of it and to harmonize it with the self-image of an individual is a part of self-modification undertaken in GiCheon and similar disciplines. It can also be formulated as "self-craft".

[24] The concept of cleanliness in South Korean Christianity discussed by Nicholas Harkness in his book Songs of Seoul can serve as an example of a power word which can generate modalities of experience. Nicolas Harkness does not refer to the concept of experiential modalities. Nevertheless, I find that his argument exemplifies the meaning of culturally advised experiential modalities which mold and modulate experience. Christian cleanliness is a notion that generates a modality of experiencing life as a struggle for cleanliness or to get rid of uncleanness. Similarly to *ki* and *suryŏn*, the key terms of GiCheon, cleanliness which is a central to Korean Christian discourse, implies and requires self-transformation on multiple levels. Cleanliness operates on several modalities of psychological, material and social life: the imperfect voices, the heart-minds and social relations of Christian adepts should be cleaned. The members of the Church interviewed by Harkness and the Church leaders in their sermons experience and articulate this process of cleansing on various levels. They try to cleanse their vocal cords from extra vibrations and their voices and mind-hearts from sadness. They attempt to clean their social relations from hierarchal remnants of the Korean past, striving toward an enlightened egalitarian brotherhood or sisterhood in Christ. This cleansing is often an axis around which they conceptualize, and on the basis of which they articulate, their practice (2014: 136-137, 148, 228). This practice, a practice of singing, is at the same time the practice of Christianity, as Nicolas Harkness shows in his book. Similarly to the concepts of *ki* and *suryŏn* I discuss in the present dissertation, the term cleanliness carries a substantial ideological weight within a particular social institute. In the case of *ki* and *suryŏn* the institute is GiCheon, in the case of striving for cleanliness the institute is the Church.

1.9 *Ki suryŏn* as self-craft

In modern society mediated experiences often supplant direct contact with the world. Digital technology reduces tactile interaction, contributing to the alienation from the body and the self. Subversive alternatives to industrial dominance and hegemony, the processes and practices of art and craft generate intimate experiences, cultivating our subjectivity through tactile familiarity, connecting us "back to ourselves" (Fariello 2005).

Recent studies on art and craft emphasize their experiential, body-based and creative aspects (Fariello and Owen ed. 2005). However, an action of crafting can be directed not only toward an inanimate object, but equally toward one's body. In this case one's body as a subject applies a set of particular skills and techniques to one's body as an object. The body also serves as a means, a medium through which this process occurs. I suggest categorizing this type of activity as "self-craft". Self-craft is an empirical knowledge system arising from personal experience, which alters my self and the world around me. It can be compared to the notion of *malleation* in sculpture, carving, polishing and other ways of alteration of the object and reshaping it in a new form, as Lobetti has done in his study of ascetic practices (Lobetti 2014: 124). An irregularly shaped log becomes a plank, a rough block of stone turns into a statue. In many spiritual traditions around the globe the work on the self carried out by the self is metaphorically compared to the work of the blacksmith. The self is like a piece of hot metal, shaped into a sword or a dish. This metaphor portrays the work of transforming the body and mind-heart as the craft of a blacksmith. Self-craft as an idea is an additional source of inspiration for my analysis of Korean *ki suryŏn* in the present dissertation. *Ki suryŏn* is a technology of the self in contemporary Korea, and I ask what kind of technology it is, how it works, and what are its outcomes. But *ki suryŏn* is also a self-craft. From these perspective

my research questions can be formulated as "what kind of the self is crafted in *ki suryŏn* and how?".

Contemporary theories view craft as a way of knowing the world. Recent feminist critiques of philosophy and science have incorporated the activated knowledge that is craft within the field of academia: not passive, detached and "objective", but subjective, responsive and responsible. This knowledge is a tactile engagement with the world – a process mutually transforming and enriching both myself and my world – this is my knowledge of the world and the world's knowledge of myself (Hardy 2005). This vision of craft as experiential, bodily, emotional as well as cognitive knowledge accords well with the idea of *ki suryŏn* as self-craft.

One's action upon the world, the effort to engrave the stone, to carve a wooden block into a statue, is the projection of the self upon the world (Merleau-Ponty 1945), the first vector. The resistance of the stone or the wood, the cuts and calluses on my fingers, are the actions of the world upon myself, the second vector. Philosophy as experiencing, knowing and discovering myself and the world (Foucault 2001: 466-467, 2009: 118-119) occurs at the moment of my encounter with the world. As an act of transformation of myself and of the world it leaves marks upon myself and upon the world. The world and I come into contact at the moment of creative action, an artistic expression, and the two vectors intersect. When my craft is my self-craft, when I craft my body and my mind-heart, when I am the subject and the object of the transformation, the two vectors intertwine in me.

1.10 *Ki suryŏn* in the context of the East Asian crafting of the self

The Chinese parallels of contemporary Korean *ki suryŏn* are *qigong* and *taijiquan*. These and other practices such as folk dance, walking, mountain climbing, badminton, choral singing, water calligraphy, poetic writing and keeping pets are the subject of a study by Judith

Farquhar and Qicheng Zhang (2012). These practices are referred by contemporary residents of Beijing as life-nurturing activities (Chinese: *yangsheng* 養生). Judith Farquhar and Qicheng Zhang joined in such life-nurturing activities in Beijing between the years 2002 and 2004, and conducted interviews with other practitioners (Farquhar and Zhang 2012: 7, 211, 237). In their study Farquhar and Zhang draw on Foucault's explorations of the care of the self, and also relate to these practices as "craft" – they call them "craft of living", "craftwork of the well-formed life", "craft of everyday life", "craft of health and happiness", and "active crafting of the times and spaces of life" (2012: 16, 19, 126, 142, 176, 185).

The idea of "life as craft" resonates with the ancient East Asian approach to life as constant generation and regeneration at every level of reality, including its ecological, social, physiological and psychological dimensions. In this worldview, culture is a refinement from natural resources, not a separate entity. And the patient crafting of life by man follows and is a part of a larger cosmological process of life-unfolding, formulated in the *Inner Canon of the Yellow Emperor* (黃帝內經 *Huangdi Neijing*) as "heaven and earth mingle their qi [*ki*], limit its span, and call it man".[25] Judith Farquhar and Qicheng Zhang find that this traditional view on life as a process of unceasing genesis and transformation is alive and well in contemporary East Asia (Ibid: 10, 179, 217, 228, 268, 284).

Farquhar and Zhang define *yangsheng* as a contemporary invented tradition, the forms of which arise within urban conditions. Nevertheless, this living tradition manifests continuity with ancient East Asian ways of life and thought articulated in the *Book of Changes*, *The Inner Canon of the Yellow Emperor* (黃帝內經 *Huangdi Neijing*), *Dao De Jing* (道德經) and the *Analects of Confucius* (論語 *Lunyu*). *Yangsheng* as witnessed in today's

[25] *Inner Canon of the Yellow Emperor*, *Plain Questions* (juan 8: 25), quoted in Farquhar and Zhang 2012: 256, 268.

Beijing is an expression, embodiment, and re-creation of these writings (Ibid: 28, 50, 140, 237). A long East Asian tradition of self-cultivation (Chinese: *zixiu* 自修) forms a historical setting for contemporary *yangsheng*. The term *zixiu* itself is ancient (Ibid: 13, 17), but its contemporary meaning as embracing and defining a whole range of various activities is a new phenomenon of the 20th and 21st centuries.

In his discourse on invented traditions, Dipesh Chakrabarty states that ideas acquire materiality through the history of bodily practices (Chakrabarty 1998: 295, referenced in Farquhar and Zhang 2012: 31). The efforts of *yangsheng* practitioners to balance and harmonize their lives constitute a historically based form of embodiment that can never be fully articulated in words (Farquhar and Zhang 2012: 235).

Yangsheng-related literature connects to medical and psychological knowledge, and moral, legal, hygienic, aesthetic and recreational aspects of life. Yet the common motive shared by *yangsheng* narratives is the impulse to improve. Authors of these books argue that health and well-being manifested in eating well, sleeping well, digesting and breathing well are a personal responsibility, requiring deliberate effort, regulation and cultivation (Ibid: 131, 151-152). What emerges from the accounts of *yangsheng* practitioners, is the experience of a body fortified from within, defended against pathology by the systematic generation of positive, wholesome and personally powerful forms of *qi* [*ki*] (Ibid: 217).

But *yangsheng* is more than individual self-cultivation. For many practitioners it is also a form of contribution to the cultural form and life of the community, the city, the nation and even humankind as a whole (Ibid: 59, 176, 220). Older *yangsheng* practitioners quote Mao Zedong's slogans "Serve the people", and "Great public with no private".[26] They also quote the Confucian traditional virtues of respecting the elderly and cherishing the young, considering the needs of others and modestly yielding to others. A way of thought that

[26] Acting only in the public interest, not for private interest.

inclusively embraces morality, nurturance of life and political commitment is characteristic of *yangsheng* culture. The cultivation of morality is inseparable from spiritual and physical health. *Yangsheng* gives life a wholesome form, prolonging it toward personal satisfaction with "moderate well-being", toward more harmonious integration with family, community and nature (Ibid: 190-192, 237).

In the spirit of Farquhar and Zhang's work, the present dissertation approaches Korean *ki suryŏn* as a contemporary urban phenomenon, which draws upon old East Asian traditions of self-cultivation. If *yangsheng* is a newly invented East Asian tradition of nourishing life, then Korean *ki suryŏn* is a part of this tradition. As elaborated upon in the following chapters, the practitioners I interviewed articulate their aspirations toward self perfection as embracing their family, community, and sometimes even nation and humankind, and they practice GiCheon in seeking to do so. They yearn for, and at times succeed in achieving greater harmony with themselves and nature.

1.11 Autoethnography as method

This dissertation is largely based on the analysis of interviews with GiCheon practitioners, which I recorded and took notes of. These notes served as a guide indicating what material is available and which interviews are most relevant to my research. In the text of the dissertation, I focus on the interviews of the practitioners that express more clearly what other trainees also say. However, as a scholar-practitioner myself, I also utilize my personal diary, documenting my daily GiCheon training, and my own GiCheon experience.

Therefore, my work fits the classic model of autoethnography as conceived of by David Hayano in 1979. Hayano was one of the first anthropologists who brought the term "autoethnography" into wider usage. For him it meant a researcher writing an ethnography of her "own people", while fully identifying herself with this group, and enjoying a full

membership in the group, as recognized both by the researcher and the members of the group (Hayano 1979: 99-100).[27] My case meets these criteria, as for the last sixteen years I have been a GiCheon practitioner and teacher. Besides the knowledge gained through years of teaching and practice, in this dissertation I also use information acquired from co-trainees, instructors and friends during formal sessions, semi-formal gatherings and informal conversations.

The notion of autoethnography has evolved since its introduction by Hayano in 1979, and according to more contemporary classifications my research also falls under the categories of embodied knowledge and personal experience, reflexive ethnography, narrative ethnography and self-ethnography. The questions of self-construction and self-narration are relevant for autoethnography (Ellis and Bochner 2000: 734, 740-742, 746), thus connecting the notion of autoethnography to the concept of technology of self.

A diversity of genres in writing the self is apparent in the ethnographic literature. These works differ in the voice given to the narrator, and the manner in which the ethnographer inserts herself in the text and comments on the words of others (Brettell 1997: 225). Some anthropologists decide to alternate between the third person and the first person in the text, the approach I adopt in my study. The purpose of this is to portray the collaborative and interactional nature of the research and to reveal the relationships between the researcher and the interviewed (Gmelch 1991: 21, cited in Brettell 1997: 225).

The tension between creativity and restraint in the act of self-narrative is the central theme of the volume *Re-writing the Self* edited by Deborah E. Reed-Danahy. As this book shows, anthropologists are increasingly explicit in their investigation of links between their own autobiographies and their ethnographic practice, re-thinking the relationship between ethnography and autobiography. The concerns emerging here are those of identity and

[27] While the classic definition of autoethnography is the ethnography of a group of people to which the ethnographer belongs, the term "self-ethnography" usually indicates the ethnography of the ethnographer herself, the study conducted on the individual by this individual.

selfhood, of voice and authenticity, of cultural displacement and exile. The autoethnographer is a boundary-crosser, a role that can be characterized by dual identity. Stressing multiple, shifting identities, autoethnography foregrounds the multiple nature of selfhood. Who speaks and on behalf of whom? Who represents whose life, how, why and by what means?

As anthropologists increasingly engage in their own "self-documentation" through autobiographical writing, the line between ethnography and autoethnography becomes increasingly faint. What is the relationship between ethnographic representation of others and self-representation? Ethnography in general is autobiographical, and autobiography reflects cultural and social frames of reference (Reed-Danahy1997: 8-9). Many an ethnographer is an insider and outsider, embedding the elements of her own life experience in the stories she writes about others. Many biographies shelter autobiographies within them, many ethnographies shelter within them autoethnographies (Brettell 1997: 245).

Ethnographer Motzafi-Haller explores in her work the questions of multiple identities through her own experience of being both a "native" and an "outsider" anthropologist, a Mizrahi Jewish woman struggling to get accepted into an academic world dominated in Israel by Ashkenazi Jews. She attempts to problematize the categories of "native" and "outsider", examining some of the personal and epistemological questions of writing within and moving between, these two positions. This also evokes questions of authorship and representation that underline much of critical discussion within anthropology. She writes about inner conflicts, personal and epistemological issues relating to the project of autoethnography, and about the difficulty of finding her own voice (Motzafi-Haller 1997: 196-197). Motzafi-Haller writes within the blurred lines of "native" and "outsider" anthropologists, of "self" and "other", of subject and object. She notes that her ability to shape her own identity and that of others is closely linked and works within the powerful objectification of such identities in a particular social and historical moment. At a particular instant, because of her newly earned credentials,

she was invited into the privileged hegemonic club of established western academics. Accepting that, she simultaneously resented the moment that transformed her from the subject of those professional researchers into a member of the group who made their careers by writing about "Others".

There is always a connection between the researchers' positioning in society, their history, and the kind of research agenda shaped by their personal background (Motzafi-Haller 1997: 204-216). I started my PhD on GiCheon in the year 2010 at Leiden University, the Netherlands. I began my GiCheon practice and teaching in the year 2001 in Seoul, South Korea. Being a GiCheon practitioner always was and is more important for me than being a researcher. Like Pnina Motzafi-Haller and many others, I am an "insider" and an "outsider", a researcher and a "research subject", a participant and a scholar. Like her and many others, I have to deal somehow with complex and confusing problems of identity, representation and articulation. How did my interviewees and I, the interviewer, perceive each other? For them I was a fellow GiCheon practitioner on one hand, and a scholar representing a "non-Korean, foreign world" on the other hand. For me they were co-practitioners, sometimes old friends and acquaintances on one hand, the "interviewed" on the other. Here trust and suspicion, feelings of alienation and unity, together with mutual stereotypes, sometimes growing or receding during the meeting, came into a complex play. Some of them tested me, others perhaps felt that they were tested.[28]

After starting my GiCheon practice in 2001, within a very short time I found myself at the heart of the GiCheon hierarchy. My teachers and friends Lee Kit'ae and Kim Hyŏnt'ae were the two main followers of Lee Sangwŏn (Yi Sangwŏn). My account of GiCheon weaves my words with those of my teachers, also because my life had become deeply intertwined

[28] One example of such a complex dynamics was my interview with Kim Pohŭi (not a real name), a student in her early twenties (interview of 08.11.2010, Seoul, South Korea). I felt that our interview was her chance to voice her anger and dissatisfaction with GiCheon practice, forced upon her against her will by her father, at the tender age of thirteen. I review this case in greater detail in Chapter Five.

with theirs. On one hand, the GiCheon community accepted me completely and unquestionably. At the same time, as a non-native Korean speaker born outside Korea, and of only partial Korean ethnicity, I always have been and always will be an outsider.

The account of an anthropologist Pnina Motzafi-Haller was an inspiring one for me, as is the story of Caroline Brettell who wrote a book on her mother Zoe Browne-Clayto Bieler. Both the daughter and the mother, the subject of the book, are writers. The book itself reconstitutes the journey of the daughter through her mother's life. The mother/daughter writing genre often blurs the traditional line between academic scholarship and personal narrative (Brettell 1997: 229). My own writing shares these specificities. For me and for many people I interviewed, GiCheon is a profound life-shaping experience that reaches down to the deep planes of the self. This experience is made possible through the guidance and assistance of the Other – the teacher. The instructor guides the student through hard and painful stances, evoking feelings of renewal and regeneration afterwards. The relationship between the student and instructor is intense, requiring a strong degree of trust. It also involves mutual identification, and the student often perceives the instructor as a "door-opener", who shows the student a new way, almost giving her or him a new life.[29] This is why I find it appropriate to compare the teacher-student relationship in GiCheon to a mother-daughter relationship, drawing inspiration from this mother/daughter genre.

Lee Kit'ae and Kim Hyŏnt'ae are my GiCheon teachers and I am a GiCheon teacher myself. It is hard and sometimes impossible to define where their understanding of GiCheon finishes and where my own thoughts begin. To which degree the metaphors I use to articulate my GiCheon experiences are the continuation and the development of what my teachers told me? Where within the continuum of which "student" and "teacher", "me" and "Other" are the poles do I find my writing? Caroline Brettell encounters similar dilemmas when writing

[29] See the account of Cho Chinsik, Chapter Four. He elaborates on his relationship with his teacher Kim Hŭisang.

about her mother Zoe. Caroline writes also from her personal memory, recounting her own (Caroline's) life and childhood. Caroline's words about her mother – whom do they belong to? Are they Caroline's or Zoe's? (Brettell 1997: 230).

Caroline Brettell mentions that her mother Zoe Browne-Clayto Bieler was "writing cultures" as she wrote about herself and others: Zoe engaged the world through her own experience as a participant and an observer (Brettell 1997: 230). Caroline does the same in her texts, as do I and many other scholars. As a scholar-practitioner, I am simultaneously a scholar writing an academic text, and a practitioner and a teacher of GiCheon. Most of the current text is written from an academic viewpoint, that of a "scholar". At times, however, I will slip into a "practitioner and teacher" mode in order to share with the reader my personal GiCheon experience – or the lack of it. Almost an "ideologue" of GiCheon, and trying to be aware of that, I will likewise relate some of GiCheon theory and philosophy. I will try to make a distinction between these two roles, despite the fact that in actuality they merge and intersect, continuously informing each other.

1.12 The structure of the dissertation

After outlining the previous research and my methodology in the present Introduction, I will proceed toward briefly introducing GiCheon and its history in Chapter Two. The concepts of *ki* and *suryŏn* are central to GiCheon. In Chapters Three and Four I start discussing what they mean to the practitioners, and this discussion continues throughout the following chapters. Chapter Three reviews the various meanings ascribed to the term *ki* in vernacular Korean and in the narratives of GiCheon trainees. Chapter Four examines the concept of *suryŏn* and how it is understood by the practitioners. *Suryŏn* is a common concept of East Asian culture, yet each trainee explains it differently. This very personal view on *suryŏn* connects to a "narrative direction" or "narrative inclination" of each GiCheon adept. Chapters Three and

Four will present to the reader the processes and techniques of self-perfection in GiCheon to show the diversity and variety of individual experiences. This diversity will be further explored in Chapter Five. The purpose of Chapter Five is to clarify the theoretical frame of "experiential modalities" by focusing on those experiential modalities which are personally colored. Chapter Five will also prepare the reader for the contents of Chapter Six, showing that the pain of *naegasinjang*, the central GiCheon position, is fundamental to GiCheon and colors the narrative of most of my interviewees. Chapter Six studies the pain of *naegasinjang* as an essential characteristic of the practice. Chapter Seven which preceeds the Conclusion, will lead the reader back from the intimate experiences of pain toward a more general context, elaborating on the cultural background of GiCheon as a part of mountain traditions of Korea. My conclusions will be presented in Chapter Eight, outlining the place of GiCheon within contemporary Korean society.

Chapter Two: GiCheon Basics

2.1 A short history of GiCheon

In 1980s Korea, industrial growth led to rising concerns with personal health and self-improvement. As noted by Foucault, practices of self-reflection, self-improvement and self-discovery are utilized as strategies of living the world by those who can afford to do so, people with more extensive life choices (2001: 109). In contemporary times this middle class trend to "better" living connects with the pursuit of "nature", invented and constructed to counterpoise pollution and urbanization. The appropriation of this type of practice by the middle class of South Korea holds that in common with similar phenomena elsewhere in the world. In *ki suryŏn* the connection with "nature", that is the connection with mountains, the dwelling place of mountain immortals, adds cultural depth to this middle class trend.[30] Mountain trips and hiking have always been popular in Korea. The hiking boom of the 1980s coincides in time with the rise of leisure culture, *sŏngin undong* (成人運動 sports for adults) and *ki suryŏn*. Their acclaim was made possible by the thriving economy of the 1980s, which contributed to the development of middle-class with sufficient means to fund self-perfection in the industrial setting (Dax 2015: 83, Moon-Kyum Kim 2005: 80). Mountain culture and mountain hiking were re-invented in a new context, and served to counterbalance "urbanization" (Dax 2015). *Ki suryŏn* groups rely on the mountain culture of Korea conceptually and practically. The terminology of *ki suryŏn* groups draws on the traditions of mountain immortality (U Hyeran 2006b: 75), and they often organize practical retreats in mountains centers. *Ki suryŏn* is also directly connected to mountain hiking, which I will further elaborate on in Chapter Seven.

[30] I elaborate on the notion of mountain immortality in the Introduction, and in Chapter Seven.

Similarly to other *ki suryŏn* groups, GiCheon achieved its maturity as a movement in the 1980s. However, the roots of this cultural phenomenon started appearing in the 1970s. Kouksundo (U Hyeran 2006b: 78) and GiCheon were among the first *ki suryŏn* groups which were established in South Korea in the early 1970s. *Ki suryŏn* groups often inter-twined, co-influencing each other. In the early 1970s, the first GiCheon teacher Pak Chŏngnyong (later called by his students Taeyang Chinin 大洋眞人 "perfected man Taeyang") trained and taught together with his "brother" Sŏ Inhyŏk, the leader of Kuksul (국술).[31] Four of the seven founding members of Dahn (= Tan) World, originally called Tanhak Sŏnwŏn (丹學仙院 Tanhak Immortality Institute) were GiCheon practitioners, and instructors of Tanhak Sŏnwŏn used to attend GiCheon studios and practice there in the 1980s.[32] Also in the 1980s, Kim Chŏngho and Na Hanil, two students of Taeyang Chinin, created Haidong Gumdo (海東劒道 Haedong Kŏmdo) on the basis of GiCheon sword art.

Taeyang Chinin first appeared in Pusan in the early 1970s and started teaching GiCheon positions and martial arts. We do not know when exactly he started using the word Kich'ŏn (or GiCheon 氣天) to identify his practice, but a picture taken in the year 1973 in Tonghwa-dong (동화동, nowadays Sindang-dong 신당동) shows the words Kich'ŏn Sŏnmujang (氣天禪武場 Kich'ŏn Chan Martial Arts School) (Kim Hŭisang and

[31] *Chinin* (眞人 Chinese: *zhenren*, perfected person) is a term from the vocabulary of East Asian practices of nourishing life and internal alchemy (See Introduction). GiCheon is one such contemporary practice. In GiCheon *chinin* is simultaneously a title and a formulation of a goal, toward which the trainees are instructed to aspire.

[32] At the outset, Dahn World (Tanhak Sŏnwŏn) was also connected to Kouksundo (U Hyeran 2006b: 78). This is another example of the inter-connection and co-influence of various *ki suryŏn* groups.

Kich‘ŏnmun Ponmun 1998: 6).[33] At later stages Taeyang Chinin also called his practice Kich’ŏndo (氣天道 Kich’on Way) and Kich’ŏnmun (氣天門 Kich’on Gate), finally settling for GiCheon (氣天 Kich’ŏn).

Taeyang Chinin claimed that he was raised and taught GiCheon in the mountains, by Wŏnhye Sangin (元慧上人), an old man who possessed extraordinary powers.[34] According to Taeyang Chinin, Wŏnhye Sangin could run faster than the wind, created a magical boundary in the mountains from which Taeyang Chinin, as a child, could not stray, and, to some extent, communicated with birds and animals (Pak Taeyang and Ch’oe Hyŏn’gyu, unpublished manuscript).[35] We can easily identify Wŏnhye Sangin as a traditional *sinsŏn,* an immortal mountain dweller, an exemplar of a perfected being, whom GiCheon practitioners are instructed to emulate. This origin myth of GiCheon demonstrates that GiCheon is a part of Korean mountain culture, and is the first among a series of contemporary GiCheon-related legends. These legends started emerging in the 1970s but were mainly composed in the 1980s,

[33] In the text of this dissertation I will refer to Chan (禪) pronounced as Zen in Japanese and as Sŏn in Korean, as “Chan”. Elements of Buddhism, Chan-Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism and mountain cults are plentiful in the mythology of GiCheon and other *ki suryŏn* groups (Kim Hŭisang and Kich’ŏn Ponmun 1998, Kim Hŭisang and Kich’ŏn Ponmun ed. 2000). So the word “Chan” in the name of the group is not surprising. Due to particular traditions and complex power relationships within the GiCheon hierarchy, the name of the author Kim Hŭisang does not appear on the covers or inside the books published in 1998 and 2000, and he is not even mentioned as an “editor”. Instead, the credit for the authorship and the edition is taken by the GiCheon organization Kich‘ŏnmun Ponmun (GiCheon Headquarters) as a whole.

[34] *Sangin* (上人 a superior person) is higher in the GiCheon hierarchy than *chinin*.

[35] The manuscript was circulating among GiCheon practitioners, and I personally received it from the now deceased GiCheon teacher Kim Hŭisang. Kim Hŭisang heard that the writer Ch’oe Hyŏn’gyu held a series of interviews with Taeyang Chinin which lasted for six months, and composed the manuscript on the basis of these interviews. Kim Hŭisang has received the manuscript from other GiCheon practitioners, and assumed that this manuscript was indeed composed by Ch’oe Hyŏn’gyu. I later met the author Ch’oe Hyŏn’gyu, who confirmed that he is the author, and gave me his belated permission to read and reference the manuscript. Ch’oe Hyŏn’gyu has previously submitted the manuscript for consideration to the Han’gyŏre Publishing Company where the manuscript was rejected. However, some of the workers of the Han’gyŏre were GiCheon practitioners, they liked the manuscript and started circulating it within the GiCheon community. The manuscript describes the childhood of Taeyang Chinin in the mountains, his later descent into South Korean society and his adventures there.

and recorded by Kim Hŭisang in the years 1998 and 2000 (Kim Hŭisang and Kich'ŏn Ponmun 1998, Kim Hŭisang and Kich'ŏn Ponmun ed. 2000).

A significant body of contemporary mythology has been accumulated in GiCheon circles over the years, describing the circumstances of Taeyang Chinin's descent from the mountains, meeting his adoptive mother and transferring from Pusan to Seoul. This fascinating material focused on the interplay of such social and mythic actors as policemen, Buddhist monks and mountain spirits in the context of suspicions of espionage on behalf of North Korea, is not yet fully recorded and awaits further research.[36]

Taeyang Chinin had numerous followers, of whom the best known among his direct students and friends are Kim Ohyŏng, Yuk Taean, Lee Sangwŏn (Yi Sangwŏn), Pak Sŏngdae, Kim Hŭisang, Pak Sagyu, and Mu Nami. Besides their links to GiCheon, some followers of Taeyang Chinin had connections with "traditionalist" (reconstructed) practices, such as Korean dance (Pak Sŏngdae and Mu Nami), Korean philosophy (Kim Hŭisang), Korean fortunetelling and healing (Kim Ohyŏng), or the production of *hanbok*, Korean traditional clothes (Lee Sangwŏn).

Just as with other practices that stress the value of Koreanness, in GiCheon too *saenghwal hanbok* (生活韓服 Korean clothes for everyday use) is the preferred attire. Similarly to some practitioners of Korean traditional dance or music, or contemporary Confucian scholars, the followers of Taeyang Chinin wear this particular type of dress developed by contemporary designers on the basis of traditional attire. The trend to wear this in everyday life is shared by Korean urbanites who associate themselves with some kind of "traditional" or quasi-traditional practice. This way, they are placing themselves in obvious

[36] This material has partially been recorded by Ch'oe Hyŏn'gyu during his interviews with Taeyang Chinin, but has never been published.

visual contrast to “regular” Koreans who are dressed in Western clothes, thus expressing ideological disagreement with Westernization and the loss of traditional values.

In the 1970s and the 1980s Taeyang Chinin taught GiCheon in an informal way, not insisting on the traditional teacher-disciple relationship, but rather treating his followers, mainly of similar age, as friends and comrades. Kang Oksŏn, the adoptive mother of Taeyang Chinin, and a professional Korean shaman specializing in *sinch’im* (神針 acupuncture directed by spirits) always welcomed his friends at their home. GiCheon teaching was unsystematic and the practitioners changed frequently. Mostly GiCheon was perceived as a martial art and practiced by people interested in combat.

As the years passed, the practice of Taeyang Chinin was identified in Korean society as martial arts, dance, magic/mysticism, a meditation technique and therapeutic gymnastics. Each of the major followers of Taeyang Chinin developed GiCheon in one of these directions. Lee Sangwŏn established GiCheon as a meditative self-healing discipline. Previously Taeyang Chinin taught GiCheon differently to different people, without order or system. Lee Sangwŏn systematized the teaching method to be applied to all the students more or less equally, though keeping in mind the particular characteristics of each person. Lee Sangwŏn has modified the main GiCheon position, *naegasinjang,* to fit the body constitution of contemporary Koreans. Besides, Lee Sangwŏn has realized the importance of prolonged standing in the *naegasinjang* position, and correcting the position of the student, and his method was later adopted by other GiCheon instructors in Korea. The followers of Lee Sangwŏn say that Lee Sangwŏn asked Taeyang Chinin countless questions, and made endless efforts to procure the answers from Taeyang Chinin, information that Taeyang Chinin never transmitted to anyone else.

In the 1980s Taeyang Hagwŏn (대양학원) was opened in Noryangjin (노량진), Seoul. It was an *ipsi hakwŏn* (입시학원 a private academy for students who have failed their university entrance exams, and are studying for next year's exams). GiCheon was a mandatory subject, studied and practiced at Taeyang Hagwŏn in order to maximize concentration and improve study results. Teachers such as Kim Ohyŏng, Yi Myŏngbok, Kim Hŭisang and others taught there; Yi Myŏngbok composed a textbook (1988). Taeyang Hagwŏn closed a few years later, though the students of Taeyang Hagwŏn continued to various Seoul universities, where they formed GiCheon clubs.

In the opinion of Kim Hŭisang, as he has written to me in the years 2010 and 2011, it was at Taeyang Hagwŏn that GiCheon teaching was systematized and classified into practices of warming-up, static discipline, dynamic discipline, breathing techniques and decorum training. The contribution of Kim Ohyŏng to GiCheon development is critical in this respect.

Kim Ohyŏng was a childhood friend of Taeyang Chinin, the son of a neighboring household. In his youth Kim Ohyŏng was an adherent of another discipline, which greatly enhanced what GiCheon calls *naegong* (內功 inner power) and facilitated his later GiCheon training with Taeyang Chinin.[37] Kim Ohyŏng prefers to keep secret the name of that other discipline and the circumstances of his discipleship there. Due to the efforts of Lee Sangwŏn

[37] GiCheon and other similar practices are contemporary manifestations of East Asian culture of nourishing life and inner alchemy. The vocabulary of GiCheon comes from this culture. In GiCheon *naegong* indicates power accumulated in the lower abdomen. This power is generated through improved circulation of *ki* in the body and mind, and shows as physical and moral strength and balance. The character *kong* can be also translated as "achievement" or "result". I translate it a "power" in order to emphasize its accumulative character. In her article "Daoyin 導引 'guiding and pulling'; gymnastics" Catherine Despeux translates *naegong* (Chinese *neigong*) as "inner practices", when she renders the title of a book *Neigong tushuo* (內攻圖說) of late Qing period as *Illustrated Explanations of Inner Practice* (Despeux 2008b: 336). Therapeutic exercises *daoyin* (Korean *toin*) is another term shared by contemporary GiCheon practice with ancient East Asian methods of nourishing life. But GiCheon distinguishes clearly between *toin* shared by many practices and the six basic positions which are unique to GiCheon. During the GiCheon classes taught by the followers of Lee Sangwŏn, stretching and pulling exercises called *toin* are performed in the beginning and in the end of the session.

and Lee Kit'ae, static postures taught by Kim Ohyŏng were incorporated into the body of GiCheon training, despite the fact that they did not originate with Taeyang Chinin.[38]

Lee Sangwŏn met Taeyang Chinin in the early 1980s in Seoul. In 1996 he received the formal title *sabu,* or *sabunim* (사부, 사부님 master) from Taeyang Chinin, while Pak Sagyu, who started practicing at a similar time, received the formal title *munju,* or *munjunim* (문주, 문주님 director). This caused much controversy, as no one in the GiCheon community could determine which title, *sabu* or *munju*, indicated a higher hierarchical status.

In 2000, when I started practicing GiCheon, during official ceremonies Lee Sangwŏn and Pak Sagyu bowed to Taeyang Chinin together, demonstrating their equal status as his two most prominent followers. In later years Taeyang Chinin granted the titles of *sabu* and *munju* to many other instructors, thus emptying these titles of their supposed original meaning.

Pak Sŏngdae, the author of a number of books on GiCheon (2000a, 2000b), started Kich'ŏn Corporation (사단법인 기천) in 1992 in Seoul, together with Taeyang Chinin, Pak Sagyu, Lee Sangwŏn and other leaders. In October 1996 another organization, Minjok Sŏndo Kich'ŏn (민족선도 기천 Kich'on Way of Immortality of the (Korean) People), was formed by Taeyang Chinin, Pak Sagyu, Lee Sangwŏn, Kim Hŭisang, Kim Yŏnggi and others.

Though they tried to work together as one unit, many GiCheon leaders had their own followers and supporters, who constituted separate collectives. In 1997 when an economic crisis struck South Korea, Pak Sagyu had to leave Seoul. He settled down at Kyeryong mountain (계룡산) in 1998 and established the Kyeryong Kich'ŏn (계룡기천) organization there. Mt. Kyeryong was considered to be one of the five sacred mountains of Silla (Ch'oe Chin'gu 2013). Its spiritual significance can be seen in the rituals of *sansinje* (山神祭 festive

[38] Lee Kit'ae, personal communication.

sacrifice to mountain gods) that have been regularly held there in the Chosŏn era up until today. Mt. Kyeryong has also been important for a number of new Korean religions (Jai-Sok Choi 1967, Han'guk chŏngsin munhwa yŏn'guwŏn 1988: 238-242), so its choice as a GiCheon center is not surprising in this context.

After Pak Sagyu left, Lee Sangwŏn was asked to assume the leadership. Lee Sangwŏn continuously attempted to bring a new unity into GiCheon, working together with Taeyang Chinin, Pak Sagyu, Pak Sŏngdae, Kim Hŭisang and Chŏn Ch'anuk. Lee Sangwŏn changed the name of the organization into Kich'ŏn Chungang Hyŏphoe (기천중앙협회 Kich'ŏn Central Association), of which he became a chairman in 1998.

By the year 2001 GiCheon leaders were already realizing that their attempts to "unite under one banner" were failing. At the meeting in 2001 they agreed to split. In 2001 Pak Sŏngdae changed the name of his own organization to Kukcharang (國子郎, 국가의 아들과 딸들, Sons and Daughters of the (Korean) Nation). Kukcharang has been organizing dance performances on stage in various Korean theaters and outdoors and also given GiCheon classes. Kukcharang is still an active organization.

The word 기천 (Kich'ŏn) was transcribed into English as Kichun by Kich'ŏn Chungang Hyŏphoe in 1998. The website http://www.kichun.co.kr was opened and managed by Pak P'yŏngsu on behalf of the Kich'ŏn Chungang Hyŏphoe. In 2001 Lee Kit'ae (Yi Kit'ae), a disciple of Lee Sangwŏn, transcribed *Kich'ŏn* as GiCheon, in order to differentiate the lineage of Lee Sangwŏn from other branches of the practice. In 2001 Kich'ŏn Chungang Hyŏphoe opened the website http://www.gicheon.com. Lee Kit'ae managed this web-site on behalf of the organization.

Since 2004 Lee Kit'ae has been teaching GiCheon outside Korea, and the term GiCheon has become known within the international community of *ki*-training, gaining some social capital. As a result, the followers of other leaders, not only of Lee Sangwŏn, nowadays use GiCheon for transcribing *Kich'ŏn.*

In the year 2002 Kim Sanghwan, the owner of Turtle Press and a professional maker of DVDs on Korean martial arts, contacted Lee Sangwŏn, and informed him that he would like to shoot a commercial DVD on GiCheon in Korea. Though GiCheon had been shown on Korean TV and radio every few years, no commercial DVD was in circulation. By then Lee Sangwŏn had been long experiencing difficulties in managing Kich'ŏn Chungang Hyŏphoe, and the decision to split had already been taken by GiCheon leaders.

In May 2002 Lee Sangwŏn called his major followers to Puch'ŏn for a meeting, where he announced the foundation of a new organization, Kich'ŏn Sangmuwŏn (기천상무원), and distributed new titles to his own followers.[39] Kim Hyŏnt'ae and Lee Kit'ae were granted the titles of *wŏnjang* (원장 director), while Kim Mansŏng got the title of *pŏmsa* (범사 instructor). In 2006 Lee Sangwŏn also gave me the title of *pŏmsa*.

Lee Sangwŏn was the most loyal and committed champion of Taeyang Chinin, to whom Taeyang Chinin always turned in times of trouble. Lee Sangwŏn always supported Taeyang Chinin emotionally and economically until the death of Lee Sangwŏn in June 2007. My research is based on the interviews with practitioners from different GiCheon lineages, but mainly with the students and followers of Lee Sangwŏn.

[39] The word Sangmuwŏn could be translated as a "General Directorate" (*sangmu* 常務), or "Academy for the Advancement of the Martial Arts" (*sangmu* 尙武), but the exact translation is uncertain.

2.2 The setting for practice: what, where, how

Since its origination in the 1970s, various instructors have taught GiCheon at mountain centers, rented studios, police stations, schools, universities, academies and colleges, private companies and banks, hospitals, clinics and health centers in South Korea. The wide range of GiCheon practitioners includes different occupations, various ages and health conditions, diverse social and economic status (but mainly middle-class and upwards). In Korea, I have met schoolchildren, university students, company workers, sales-persons, taxi-drivers, construction workers, school teachers, university professors, owners of small businesses and big corporations, bank employees, housewives, news-reporters and other professionals among GiCheon adepts.

GiCheon studios in Seoul, Pusan, Puch'ŏn, Kyŏngju, Taejŏn and other cities usually operate from morning till evening. There are a few classes per day taught by instructors, and trainees are free to attend as many classes as they wish for a fixed monthly fee. Trainees can also come to the studio any time to practice by themselves. The monthly fee does not depend on the number of times you attend. Most people train a few times a week, although some "devotees" attend the studio daily, or even twice a day. Many practitioners, however, fail to continue GiCheon after starting. This is usually attributed to the fact that the practice is hard and painful.

A GiCheon session usually runs from one to one-and-a-half hours. In many studios the floor is washed before and after the training. Newcomers and advanced students practice together. New students repeat the positions observing the teacher and the experienced trainees, who are often positioned by the instructor in the front line of the practice group. While training in the studio "meditation music" is commonly turned on during the session, as

the practice is considered a form of meditation, and incense is burned.[40] Before and after class the students and the teacher bow to each other in a special way, which is called the "GiCheon greeting".

The training starts with a warming up, which usually consist of slow rotation movement of various joints in the body (knees, waist, shoulders, wrists and neck). After that static positions are performed, followed by dynamic ones. The vocabulary that the GiCheon practitioners used in their interviews with me when describing the practice, and the concepts they related to, often came from the lexicon of the GiCheon studio. These terms and notions situate GiCheon within the East Asian tradition of inner alchemy and nourishing life (Pregadio 2008). Having briefly described the GiCheon session, I will presently clarify the meaning of some basic words and expressions from Gicheon terminology.

GiCheon dynamic positions, including martial and sword arts, arise from six static basic positions called *yukhap tan'gong* (六合 丹功). *Yukhap* (六合) means "six positions unified". *Tan'gong* means "cinnabar [field] practices" or "strengthening cinnabar [field]". As mentioned in the Introduction, *tan* (丹 Chinese: *dan*, cinnabar) is an important element in East Asian alchemy. In inner alchemy of the human body it is usually mentioned in the context of "cinnabar fields". The upper cinnabar field is located in the forehead, the middle – in the chest, while the lower and the most important one - in the lower abdomen. Though the Sino-Korean word *tanjŏn* (丹田 Chinese: *dantian*) could refer to any of the three cinnabar fields, GiCheon practitioners mostly use it as indicating the lower cinnabar field. *Tan'gong* (丹功) in GiCheon and other contemporary East Asian practices is understood as the

[40] "Korean music for meditation" (명상 국악) is sold in South Korean shops. It is usually produced by modern composers on the basis of traditional music.

strengthening of the lower cinnabar field, and accumulating more *kong* (功 power), or *naegong* (內功 inner power) there. *Yukhap tan'gong* are believed to heal the body and mind, and improve *ki* circulation, resulting in growing and strengthening *naegong*. Later *naegong* can be utilized in dynamic GiCheon positions, directed toward martial arts. *Naegong* is also believed to develop the moral maturity of the person, clear vision and judgment.

Of the six basic positions, *naegasinjang* (內家神掌) is the first, and it is the heart of the practice, believed to suffice for achievement of perfect health, immortality and final enlightenment.[41] *Naegasinjang* is considered to be the most efficient for improving the flow of *ki* and developing *naegong*. Most of my interviewees often talked about this position and the pain it brings. In South Korean studios it is maintained by the students for long periods of time, sometimes for 40 minutes or more. *Naegasinjang* is performed as follows: the legs are spread shoulder-length, the ankles are turned outward, the knees are bent down and inward, the back is arched, the buttocks are pushed out, the shoulders are pulled back, the arms are stretched out in the front above shoulder-height and finally the palms are pressed outward (see picture 2). In *naegasinjang*, the backbone is stretched from the neck to the coccyx, while the weight is directed downwards, toward the ground. GiCheon instructors comment that this contributes to the centering of the lumbar and pelvis area, supporting the whole body and balancing right and left hip joints, knees, ankles and shoulders.

[41] The exact meaning of the combination of these Chinese characters is unknown.

picture 2 (copyright to Sangmuwŏn, reproduced with permission)

Naegasinjang position is explained by the instructors to be reminiscent of a "phoenix which is about to lay an egg". The "egg" here is a metaphor for the new self of the practitioner, an outcome of the painful practice. The metaphor of the egg is one of the popular motifs in East Asian inner alchemy (Schipper 1993: 189).[42] This position is described as a perfect application of *yŏkkŭn*, the principle of the maximal bending of the joints. Ankles, knees, waist, elbows, wrists and finger joints have to bend to the maximum. Joints in GiCheon are believed to be passages, or gateways (門 *mun*), though which *ki* flows. Maximal bending of the joints in *yŏkkŭn* opens the passages to allow the flow of *ki*.

The other central posture in GiCheon is *tanbaegong*, a bow, which involves bending of the main joints of the body: knees, waist, elbows and wrists. In Chinese characters it is sometimes spelled as 丹拜功, where *tan* (丹) is cinnabar, *pae* (拜) is to bow, and *kong* (功) is power. This spelling stresses the function of the exercise as gaining inner power and storing it

[42] Schipper talks about the metaphor of an egg in the context of natural perfection and inner harmony, the goals of nourishing life and inner alchemy practices. The egg here is also a belly, a seat of intuitive perception. This is idealized inaction, the universe before Heaven and Earth came into being. For a human being, it means the peaceful uncorrupted state of a baby but also the potentiality of a later outburst in martial arts, in nature - a quiet moment before the storm.

in the lower cinnabar field, the abdomen. 檀拜功 is an alternative spelling, where *tan* (檀) indicates Tan'gun, the legendary founder of Korean nation. My GiCheon teachers mentioned that maybe this type of ritual bow was performed in front of Tan'gun, and the term *tan'gun* could be interpreted as a title for ancient Korean chiefs. This interpretation connects to nationalist views in GiCheon, projecting this practice back in time toward the legendary Korean past (Kim Hŭi-sang and Kich'ŏnmun Ponmun ed. 2000: 11). As explained in the Introduction, GiCheon is not alone in its nationalist views on Tan'gun and immortality, but forms a part of contemporary *sŏndo* culture.

Nationalist sentiment also surfaces in the interviews of some practitioners and colors their narratives. The next section will introduce the interviewees central to the current study and identify the leading experiential modalities of their accounts. I have already introduced the notion of experiential modalities in the previous chapter. Experiential modalities allow me classify the narratives the practitioners use to describe their experiences. As a narrative direction, experiential modality serves to identify the way in which an informant communicates her or his perception. I hope that from the moment my interviewees start speaking through my text my differentiation of the various experiential modalities used by the interviewees could help the reader to better understand what they say and how the information is communicated.

2.3 The practitioners

As already mentioned, the narratives of the practitioners make sense in the context of their concrete life stories. Each life story is narrated as having a direction, a goal, or a pitch, a tonality, to which I refer as its experiential modality. Here I am talking about personally colored experiential modalities, not about culturally recommended ones. GiCheon practice is bodily, and the experiential modalities are rooted in bodily experience. The way GiCheon

practice is lived and understood modulates the texture and temper of a particular life story retold. GiCheon training becomes a part of the direction the life flow takes, and the ideas and concepts that anchor the meaning of the practice are inter-woven into the fabric of life, and the social landscape within which it unfolds. As the lives of my interviewees talking about their GiCheon experiences take place in contemporary Korea, images of Korean social life pervade their conversation. They talk about Korea old and new, and about "being Korean", which often has a specific connection to their GiCheon practice. This way the conversations I had with my informants, and the research analysis that follows, provides in a way a window into contemporary South Korean life. Some chapters of this dissertation involve the same protagonists, and I will now briefly introduce the major ones, and the circumstances of our acquaintance. Hopefully, this will provide the reader with a setting or a background, facilitating understanding and contextualization of the interview extracts I present in the following chapters.

The main actor of Chapter Three is Kim Yŏnghŭi (not a real name), a university student in her early twenties at the time of the interview in 2010.[43] We return to Kim Yŏnghŭi's rich narrative in Chapters Four, Five and Six. I first met Kim Yŏnghŭi in 2001. Her father had asked GiCheon instructor Lee Kit'ae to teach his two daughters sword art. I joined the practice, and trained for a few months together with Kim Yŏnghŭi, then fourteen years old and her sister Kim Pohŭi (not a real name), aged thirteen. Pohŭi was an animated rebellious teenager, while her sister was quieter and had a tendency to do what she was told, or so I thought. Almost ten years later when I met the sisters again in order to interview them for this GiCheon research, I received very different impressions. Pohŭi had become, to my eyes at least, a typical Korean female student, dressed and made up following the prevailing social codes. She expressed anger and resentment about being forced, ten years ago, into

[43] Interview of 05.11.2010, Seoul, South Korea.

boring and painful GiCheon practice together with old people. She considered it as generally wrong on the part of her father. As a child, she felt she was supposed to spend time with other children, not with grandfathers and grandmothers in a GiCheon studio. I discuss her interview in greater detail in Chapter Five, and the experiential modality central to her account I identify as "pain and discomfort".

The interview with Yŏnghŭi lasted about three times longer than the interview with her sister. Compared with 2001 the roles had switched. In their youth, it was the younger sister who talked. Now that they had matured, the older sister had much more to say. During our long conversation Kim Yŏnghŭi talked about her life and the place of GiCheon practice in it. She drew lots of parallels between Catholic and GiCheon practices – a motif I discuss in Chapter Three. Like many other of my interviewees she talked about "being Korean". She considers both Catholicism and GiCheon linked to being Korean – but for different reasons. Catholicism connects to being Korean because *since ancient times […] religion has a great significance for Koreans,* while *GiCheon is consistent with Korean sensibilities.*

I decided to call the experiential modality of Kim Yŏnghŭi "self-confidence and self-discovery stemming from the ability to withstand hardship", a theme I develop in Chapters Four, Five and Six based on the extracts from her interview. The main motif of her narrative is the realization of her own wishes and goals, distinct from those of her family, overcoming self-alienation and finding her own way in life. Yŏnghŭi discovers herself as a young female student in South Korea. She complains about social pressure to marry, which is different in her opinion for boys and girls. A daughter to a middle-class family, Yŏnghŭi is a target of complex expectations. Her mother wants her to get a job, while the father encourages her to continue studying, as Kim strives to find herself and form her own decisions. In talking about her life and life-challenges, she voices criticism toward the competitiveness of the society –

she feels compelled to compete with *the daughters of my mother's friends whom I don't even know*.

Other female protagonists of this dissertation, Pak Kyŏngae (not a real name) and Sin Hyŏnju (real name) also air complaints of gender discrimination in South Korean society. I discuss the extracts of their interviews in Chapters Four, Five and Six. Pak Kyŏngae, a team manager of a bank in her early fifties at the time of the interview, is among the few female workers of her generation at the bank. Pak expresses interest in social responsibility toward other women as a class – she wants her junior female colleagues to practice GiCheon – but they do not listen. In her interview Pak talks about the difficulty and stress of managing the family and concurrently maintaining a successful career. Combining these two projects requires special techniques and strategies – and for her, GiCheon practice is such a strategy. I describe Pak's experiential modality as "bearing hardship" – in her account Pak emphasizes the importance of patience and forbearance. The tonality and temper of *ch'amta* (참다 bearing with things), as Nancy Abelmann has noted, often colors the discourse of women in contemporary South Korea, in particular when talking about family life (Abelmann 2003: 74-77, 82-86, 172). In the case of Pak Kyŏngae, *ch'amta* relates not only to family life, or life in general. It is rooted in the physical experience of maintaining the hard and painful positions of GiCheon, particularly *naegasinjang*. I discuss the narrative of Pak in detail in Chapter Four. Pak Kyŏngae also returns to the pages of this dissertation in Chapter Seven.

Sin Hyŏnju was equally concerned about the welfare of her family – her natal family, with which she lived at the moment of our interview. She was a worker of a trading company in her early forties, temporarily unemployed. The concern of Sin for the welfare of her parents shows consistently in her interview. She even avoided practicing *tanbaegong* at home, worrying that the parents might see that and imagine that she had fallen prey to some strange cult – *tanbaegong* practice looks like a ritual bow, only it is a bow to "nothing" – there is no

cultic or other object in front of the practitioner performing this exercise. The experiential modalities of Sin could be named "better *ki* flow", or "warmness-softness" and "smooth and effortless passage", as I explain further in Chapter Five. The narrative of Ms. Sin demonstrates their unfolding as manifest along the first vector of progression. "Smoothness" works progressively at various levels of the self. For the physical embodied self "smooth and effortless passage" is manifested in the fast emergence of sweat, for the emotional self this is direct realization and expression of feelings, for the physical and social self it means words pronounced and actions accomplished with greater ease. For Sin, GiCheon practice was a means to restore her health, but it also helped her to *become a better daughter*, contributing to better communication with her parents and other people in her life.

I met Ms. Sin only once, in a Pusan GiCheon studio, and when I was listening to her account, I identified with it. By 2010, the time of our interview, I had already appropriated and interiorized an East Asian understanding that people belong to "types" or "groups", defined mostly by their physical constitution. Ms. Sin had a body structure similar to mine, and as I listened to her, I realized that she also had a similar personality and her GiCheon experiences were very similar to mine. Only, as many other Koreans practitioners, she could register and articulate what I could not. Short but focused and informative, her interview became an important resource for my study on GiCheon and contributed to my own self-understanding.

Kwŏn Kuho is another protagonist who returns again and again in the text of this dissertation, in Chapters Three, Four and Seven. A scientist and an owner of a trading company in his late fifties, he was one of the close followers and supporters of the late Lee Sangwŏn, who usually was called Sabunim by his students. Kwŏn Kuho once told me half-jokingly that *GiCheon practice is not good for business, because it decreases your greed for money*. Kwŏn is the owner of an archery club, where he also teaches GiCheon to the archers.

My teachers Lee Kit'ae and Kim Hyŏnt'ae rarely refer to Lee Sangwŏn when they talk about GiCheon. They prefer to articulate their own insights. However, Kwŏn Kuho and other close followers of Lee Sangwŏn who did not become officially acknowledged GiCheon leaders, mention and quote Lee Sangwŏn almost in every sentence they pronounce about GiCheon. And of course these practitioners have supplemented the explanations with their own understanding. As I discuss in the next chapter, Kwŏn Kuho expresses regrets on the Westernization of Korean society and wishes for the development of Korean identity.

Similarly to Kwŏn Kuho, Ha Tongju is anther GiCheon practitioner who was very close to Lee Sangwŏn. Ha Tongju is a *hanŭisa* (韓醫師 doctor of Korean Medicine) in his fifties.[44] He supported Lee Sangwŏn economically on numerous occasions, and remains his devoted follower. In my conversations with him, Ha mainly talked about the connections between Korean medicine and GiCheon, providing complex data that mostly did not find their way into the present dissertation. Ha Tongju mentioned that previously he knew about *ki* flow in the human body only theoretically. Practicing GiCheon made him aware of the *ki* circulation in his body also practically. He thinks that each of the six basic positions encourages *ki* movement in a different *ki* channel of the body. I mainly present the extracts of my interviews with him in Chapter Seven, which focuses on the image of the mountain. The language of the *hanŭisa* Ha Tongju is figurative and concrete at the same time, and his metaphor of the mountain both poetic and practical.

Ch'oe Hyŏngsu, the owner of a small business in his early 50s, also talks about mountain climbing in Chapter Seven. Ch'oe was the first GiCheon student in the studio of Lee Sangwŏn in Puch'ŏn in 1995. That was a difficult time for Lee Sangwŏn; he lived in his studio and did not even have hot water. Ch'oe Hyŏngsu installed a water boiler for him. Later other students came, including Kim Hyŏnt'ae, who became one of GiCheon leaders. Ch'oe

[44] I briefly review the notion of "Korean traditional medicine" in Chapter Three below.

Hyŏngsu had a special talent for GiCheon, and under different circumstances he also would have liked to become a GiCheon instructor. Ch'oe Hyŏngsu thinks that Korean tradition, religion, philosophy and manners are blended inside GiCheon. He notes with sorrow, however, that GiCheon does not fare well in contemporary Korea. Like Kwŏn Kuho, Ch'oe expresses sadness about the Westernization and computerization of Korean society. He connects GiCheon directly to mountain dwellers and immortality practices, which I discuss in Chapter Seven.

Kim Wŏn'gyu (not a real name) is another follower of Lee Sangwŏn. I first met him in the year 2001 at the GiCheon Munmak Mountain Center, when I had been practicing GiCheon for a few months only. Kim Wŏn'gyu took part in a GiCheon teachers' course at Munmak. Due to my limited knowledge of Korean language at a time, we barely spoke to each other. In the year 2011, when I was interviewing practitioners from a different lineage, I suddenly met him again, and we talked. Between the years 2001 and 2011 Kim Wŏn'gyu had studied with a few GiCheon teachers. The experiential modality dominating his account is lack, disappointment and unfulfilled expectations, as I elaborate in Chapter Five.

I belong to the lineage of Lee Sangwŏn, and so do most of my informants, as it was easier to approach the GiCheon followers from my own branch for the interviews. But there are a few exceptions to this rule. One of them is Cho Chinsik, a GiCheon instructor who appears in Chapter Four. Cho Chinsik is a student of Kim Hŭisang, a well-known GiCheon leader who, as already briefly mentioned, composed a number of books on GiCheon (Kim Hŭisang and Kich'ŏnmun Ponmun 1998, Kim Hŭisang and Kich'ŏnmun Ponmun ed. 2000). I had the honor of being Kim Hŭisang's friend for a short while before his death, even though we communicated with letters only. When I started interviewing GiCheon practitioners for this research, I met a few people who knew Kim Hŭisang and had studied with him personally. This gave me a chance to know more about this remarkable person, a significant

figure in GiCheon history. In the narration of Cho Chinsik, Kim Hŭisang appears as a teacher whose intervention was critical for inducing an inner change in Cho. After becoming a teacher himself, Cho attempted to generate similar transformations in other people. When describing contemporary South Korean society, Cho talks about the people who are focused on impressing others – and among these people he counts himself, or rather he maintains he was like that before the transformation. Cho sees GiCheon as a method for "subjectivation" – that is living for yourself, rather than to impress others. I discuss the details of Cho's narrative in Chapter Four.

Now, after briefly introducing the main informants who described their experiences and contributed their insights for the present research, I will proceed to analyzing the meaning of *ki* in the narrations of the trainees.

Chapter Three: *Ki* in the narrations of the practitioners

3.1 Introduction to the concept of *ki*

The focus of this dissertation is *ki suryŏn*. This term is composed of two words that can be analysed separately. After dedicating the current chapter to the experiential modalities generated by the power word *ki,* I will focus attention on *suryŏn* in Chapter Four.

When asked about the subject of my PhD research, I usually answer "it is on *ki suryŏn*". When my interlocutors are native speakers from South Korea, they immediately react by mentioning their mother/cousin/themselves and the type of *ki suryŏn* they engage in, or did in the past. Perceiving me as a "specialist" on *ki suryŏn,* sometimes they ask if I think that the particular kind of *ki suryŏn* their relatives or they themselves practice is "good". However, when my collocutors are other than native Korean speakers, the question that follows my remark "I write on *ki suryŏn*" is "what is *ki suryŏn*?". Is it gymnastics? medicine? religion? In the Introduction I have attempted to show that I conceive of *ki suryŏn* as a contemporary manifestation of age-old practices of inner alchemy and nourishing life. I would like to emphasize, though, that the word *ki* combined with the term *suryŏn* does not completely describe what *ki suryŏn* is. Due to particular historical, social and linguistic circumstances the term *ki suryŏn* got to denominate a distinct set of contemporary practices. However, the two parts of this term are still relevant to the combination *ki suryŏn*. The Sino-Korean words *ki* and *suryŏn* are both modern and ancient, each containing multiple connotations. They are words of vernacular Korean, familiar to everyone, yet every person infuses them with her or his own personal interpretation, drawing on an enormous cultural reservoir they connect to. The words *ki* and *suryŏn*, in combination but also separately, are in common, everyday usage in *ki suryŏn* studios and in the discourse of the adepts.

GiCheon practitioners often mention *ki* in the interviews. While listening to, transcribing and analyzing the interviews, I noticed that each practitioner has a unique perception of *ki*, connected in the discourse of each to a chain of particular associations. Each practitioner has her or his individual story, a specific vision in which conception of *ki* plays a different role. In the current chapter I provide two examples of *ki* perceptions from the accounts of two GiCheon practitioners, Kwŏn Kuho and Kim Yŏnghŭi. I will also briefly mention how a few other adepts talk about *ki*.

The central axis of the present chapter is "*ki* in the narrations of the adepts". However, a few introductory remarks are necessary before we proceed. *Ki* is one of the basics of the East Asian view on life (Teiser 1996: 32), and as a key concept it organizes, regulates and tones experience and its expression. The character *ki* (氣) is variously translated as energy, spirit, breath, vigor, vitality, stamina or will-power. In philosophical translations from Chinese it has been rendered into English as "the vivifying principle or aura of Chinese cosmogony", breath, vapor, air, steam, gas, ether, vital fluid, force, influence, vital force, vital energy, material force, configurative energy, temper, manner, demeanor, feelings, passion-nature, weather, life-giving principle, matter-energy, subtle spirits, or vital energizing field (Jung-Yeup Kim 2008: 1).

The character *ki* first appeared on the Shang oracle bones and on the Zhou bronze inscriptions as three horizontal lines, similar to modern character for three (三 Chinese: *san*, Korean: *sam*). *Shuemun* (說文), a Chinese dictionary of the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE), explains this character as representing rising mists, and defines it as "cloud vapors" (雲氣 Chinese: *yunqi*, Korean: *un'gi*) (Ames and Hall 2001: 72). *Ki* was developed as a philosophical concept by many East Asian scholars, one of them the Chosŏn Confucian

Hwadam Sŏ Kyŏngdŏk (花潭 徐敬德 1489-1546) who elaborated on the ideas of the Song dynasty scholar Zhang Zai (張載 1020-1077). Based on the *Book of Changes*, Zhang Zai and Sŏ Kyŏngdŏk understood *ki* as a never-ending process of life and death. According to this view, all things are simultaneously processes constantly intermingling with each other. *Ki* assembling and dissolving may be observed in the appearance and disappearance of races and nations, of ideas and religions, of thoughts and images in a human mind. Humans forming armies, animals forming packs, molecules forming substances — all these are examples of *ki* flow and circulation (Ten 2011).

More mundanely, *ki* is a part of many words and expressions in vernacular Korean. *Ki ka makhida* (기가 막히다), literally "*ki* is blocked", means being stunned, startled. *Ki ka chugŏtta* (기가 죽었다), literally "*ki* died", stands for losing courage, becoming dispirited. It is close in meaning to *ki ka ppajyŏtta* (기가 빠졌다), literally "*ki* drained", or "*ki* sunk", which implies a decrease in courage. *Ki ka ch'ada* (기가 차다), literally "*ki* is full", conveys the feeling of being overwhelmed, "this is more than I can bear". *Ki ka nŏmch'inda* (기가 넘친다), literally "*ki* overflows, runs over" means being over-confident. *Ki ka saratta* (기가 살았다), literally "*ki* came to life" indicates liveliness and acting with boldness (in an ironic sense). *Ki ka seda* (기가 세다), literally "*ki* is strong", indicates a strong will or stubbornness. *Ki rŭl ssŭda* (기를 쓰다), literally "to use *ki*", is an expression for a zealous effort. *Ki rŭl p'yŏda* (기를 펴다), literally, "to unfold the *ki*", stands for acting with freedom and courage.

These common *ki*-related expressions create a frame of reference of emotional or intentional states, which are directly linked to the state of *ki* in the body. The term at the same time summons undertones of flow, or movement.

In this vein, many GiCheon trainees identify *ki* with ability, whether it is physical or mental-emotional, rising or falling. This layer of associations connects to notions of power, courage, and self-confidence, and is related to self-transformation. Bank manager Pak Kyŏngae, who is in her early fifties, explains *ki* as mental strength and patience in dynamic interaction: *When we negotiate, in order to make the other party agree to our terms, we push and pull. ... And whose* ki *is stronger? I really feel it. That is the fight of* ki. *And impatient people, they lose [in this fight].* [45] Ms. Pak uses here an expression *ki ssaum* (기 싸움 fight of *ki*), a general concept frequently used to indicate the imposition of one's will on another or the convincing of someone about something.

GiCheon instructors often talk about *ki* flow (循環 *sunhwan,* circulation) and *ki* blockage (막히다 *makhida,* to get stopped or blocked).[46] For *ki* flow also the word *p'ullida* (풀리다), the antonym of *makhida*, is utilized, which means "untie, get loose", "be released", which is positive. These notions, common in the culture of *ki suryŏn* in Korea, are shared by *hanŭihak* (韓醫學 Korean traditional medicine) which is part of the broader framework of

[45] Interview of 17.01.2011, Seoul, South Korea. Here and in the text below quoted phrases are in Italics. Elision points indicate pauses in the talk of the interviewed person. Elision points in square brackets - […] - mean that I omit some part of text as repetitious or because it is not important for the flow of the argument.

[46] The "circulatory system" is a Western notion linked to William Harvey, a co-creator of the "circulation concept". The circulation concept established itself in European thought around 1750, and emerged simultaneously in medicine, economics, natural sciences and journalism. Circulation is a movement in a circle or circuit, and is an idea that, in medicine, developed with the "discovery" of blood circulating through the entire body's vessels as a result of the heart's pumping action. Barbara Gerke discusses the circulation notion in her article "On the 'subtle body' and 'circulation' in Tibetan medicine". She notes that in Tibetan medicine, for example, most channels appear to be open-ended, not circular. Some run straight from top to bottom as open-ended ducts, or just branch out like a tree (2013: 90).

East Asian medicine. Korean traditional medicine coexists today in South Korea with biomedicine, as two officially recognized medical systems. It shares East Asian classics such as the *Inner Canon of the Yellow Emperor* (黃帝內經 *Huangdi Neijing*) with Chinese medicine in China and Taiwan and *kampō* medicine in Japan (Taewoo Kim 2010: 12, 30; Scheid 2002). Korean and East Asian medicine focus on preventive practices and nurturing life (養生, Chinese: *yangsheng,* Korean *yangsaeng*), and in it the term *ki* refers to the physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual life of the person. The worldview based on the *Book of Changes* ascertains the vitality of life and supports an inclination towards a balanced state in bodily, medical and social contexts. The various forms of usage of the term *ki* in East Asian medicine and philosophy attempt to grasp the moments of changes and transformation of liveliness in self and society (Taewoo Kim 2010: 76, 80, 119-120, 168). East Asian acupuncture theory views the body as a network of *ki* movements, organized in channels (meridians) and acupoints. Since *ki* is not visible, the only way to know it is to experience it, according to doctor and scholar Taewoo Kim. So Korean medical doctors research *ki* using their own bodies (Ibid 140, 169).

Ha Tongju, a GiCheon practitioner and a doctor of Korean Traditional Medicine in his early fifties, talks about *ki* circulation as follows.[47] *If we practice in a more efficient way […] [we perceive] "how* ki *circulates". […] [We realize] that the reason for practice is making this* kiun *circulate [through the body].*[48] *[…] For example, we stand in the* naegasinjang *position until we realize the cosmic* ki (天氣)*. […] Some people, their* ki *circulates well, this is so if they are young and healthy. Children [have their* ki*] well circulating. Children [sense*

[47] Interview of 26.11.2010, Pundang, South Korea.

[48] Ha Tongju and others use the terms *ki* and *kiun* (기운 energy, strength) interchangeably.

the ki*] immediately […], the younger – the better. […] Elderly people cannot feel it. […] If you train and advance continuously […], then you perceive it.*

The idea of *ki* circulation is widely discussed by GiCheon practitioners and teachers, and in GiCheon-related texts. In Chapters Five, Six and Seven I will examine different contexts in which such debates arise. However, the adepts do not necessarily connect *ki* to *ki* circulation and *ki* blockage. Below I provide examples of diverse frames of reference associated by the trainees with the idea of *ki*.

To the question "what is *ki*?" my interlocutors gave diverse answers. Some GiCheon trainees defined *ki* as "*saengmyŏng ŭi wŏnch'ŏn* (생명의 원천 the root of life), *saengmyŏng ŭl yujihanŭn ponjiljŏgin kŏt* (생명을 유지하는 본질적인 것 an essential thing that sustains life)"[49], "*saengch'e enŏji* (생체 에너지 life energy)"[50], "*mom esŏ ŭi chindong ŭi p'adong* (몸에서의 진동의 파동 the waves of the vibrations inside the body)"[51], "*uju enŏji* (우주 에너지 cosmic energy)"[52], abstract terms that might not relate to their personal experience. Others said that every person has *ki,* that plants and stones have *ki.*[53] Many did not reply what *ki* is, but explained instead what kinds of *ki* we have or should have. One example is "*t'aeŏnal ttae pumo hant'e pannŭn kiun* (태어날 때 부모한테 받는 기운 the *ki* we are

[49] Interview with Ch'oe Hyŏngsu, 10.11.2010, Seoul, South Korea. Ch'oe Hyŏngsu gave me explicit permission to use his real name.

[50] Interview with Che Hyŏnuk, 07.12.2010, Pusan, South Korea. Che Hyŏnuk gave me explicit permission to use his real name.

[51] Interview with Kwŏn Kuho, 07.11.2010, Seoul, South Korea. Kwŏn Kuho gave me explicit permission to use his real name.

[52] Interview with Kim Chaehŭi, 11.01.2011, Seoul, South Korea. Kim Chaehŭi gave me an explicit permission to use his real name.

[53] Interview with Kim Yŏnghŭi (not a real name), 05.11.2010, Seoul, South Korea.

endowed with by the parents at birth)" and "*chagi sŭsŭro mandŭro kanŭn kiun* (자기 스스로 만들어 가는 기운 the *ki* we build up ourselves [throughout our lifetime])".[54]

For GiCheon adepts, *ki* is at the outset not a foreign concept, but a word of their spoken language. Yet, many of them report that their awareness of *ki* has been modified through the practice. As a power word that generates culturally recommended experiential modalities, the word *ki* opens a range of meanings which are in constant flux, coming to signify new or different scopes of experience. For example, for Ms. Sin Hyŏnju it has become an experiential reality, no longer a figure of speech: *I never thought about* ki. *I do not know about that kind of thing. ... I belong to the kind of people who do not believe in what is not seen [by the eye]. ... Before [starting GiCheon] I thought that* ki *is something unreal, non-existing ... that people just talk about... . But now it seems to me that it exists. ... It seems that every person has it. And ... there is such a thing in nature. .... I do not know what it is, but it seems that it exists.*[55]

3.2 *Ki* as waves coming from the vibrations in the body

As I have mentioned previously, Kwŏn Kuho is critical of the "Westernization" of Korea. He returns again and again to the idea of "Oriental thought," which constitutes an important part of his explanation of what *ki* is. The word *ki* itself, though one of the cornerstones sustaining traditional East Asian thought, is, in his opinion, also Westernized and approached from a Western perspective. This is how Kwŏn Kuho talks about Korean words that have lost their "original" meaning.

[54] Interview with Ha Tongju, 26.11.2010, Pundang, South Korea.

[55] Ms. Sin gave me explicit permission to use her real name.

So all [Korean] words now ... the word "East" came into being [because it is at the East] when viewed from the perspective of Western people. [...] We forgot our language. […] The East was entirely dominated by the West so we have to use only [Western] words. […] The words become understandable only when we explain them from a Western perspective. [...] I got Western education [...], in order to lead a conversation, we have to use the words in the Western manner.

Mr. Kwŏn complains about the Westernization of the whole system of thought and expression in the East, and in fact it denotes even the Westernization of experience itself. Though having grown up and attended school in South Korea, Mr. Kwŏn sees himself as having received an education governed and directed by Western ideas and a Western worldview; he finds himself incapable of stepping out of this frame of mind. He believes that this limitation is shared by other Koreans and other people of the East. Though he speaks Korean, he feels that he is forced to use Western notions, otherwise the words and concepts do not make sense. This is how he explains what is *ki*:

I think ki *is waves, [...] vibrations in the body. [...] What comes from vibrations, are waves, right? […] A wave is a thing that cannot go in a straight line. [...] A wave is undetermined ... the general movement of a wave […] is shaped […] and moves like a screw. The earth circles the sun [...], but this movement is not circular. It is elliptical […]. When we talk about "[the earth] circling [the sun]", we always think that is should be a circular movement [not an elliptical one]... But it is inclined, curved […]. However, this is just one example. […] On earth […] everything moves in curves. Everything is waves […] the heart-rhythm […], sound waves […]. Actually, any movement can only be represented by a curve [...], as some waves.*

Mr. Kwŏn defines *ki* as waves created by vibrations, which can be observed in any movement. These waves go in curved lines, like a screw. But he is not satisfied with this explanation, as he clarifies in the next extract from his interview, referring again to Western concepts.

Now when we talk this way, […] we talk in a partial way, does it really help? [...] That is the Western way. [...] In my opinion, the fact that we have to keep talking about that using the concepts of the West … […]. This part is explained like this, that part is that. We talk about this part, but do we see the whole? In my opinion we are not seeing the whole.

Mr. Kwŏn considers his own explanation of *ki* to be partial, bound to the Western way of thinking and articulation. He thinks that the modality of *ki* should be broader and include a wider assortment of experiences and connotations. Kwŏn Kuho is a scientist, and Western scientific knowledge is based on rationality. Rational thinking is highly reductive and ignores other forms of experience (and how these are articulated) as forms of knowledge. Mr. Kwŏn finds himself limited by Western concepts and can only explain *ki* as waves.

For Mr. Kwŏn, talking about *ki* is a chance to articulate what he perceives as the domination by the Western way of thought of the Eastern way of thought. He hopes, however, that the Eastern way of thought can be recovered, and with that a better understanding of what *ki* really is can be reached: *In Korea ... In order to talk about the East, it is like a thread, [...] we have to unite it like that, [...] continuously […]. Untie more and more […] the words of our tongue one by one… […]*

Kwŏn Kuho assumes that words and concepts are like threads that have become entangled during the long span of history. These threads should be untied, taking words and conceptions one by one. This might result in a broadening of our understanding *ki* and restoring its "original" content. Differently from a scientist Kwŏn Kuho, who is dissatisfied by his own explanation of *ki* and considers it only partial, Kim Yŏnghŭi, a university student

in her early twenties and a Catholic believer, provides a more comprehensive interpretation. For her, *ki* is related to "help", and the connection between things and beings of the universe. The universe of Kim is living and sentient, the dwellers of which mutually stimulate and foster each other.

3.3 *Ki* as help

We now proceed to analyse in detail a few extracts from the accounts of Kim Yŏnghŭi that relate to her perception of *ki*.[56] Kim talks about *ki* in the context of her GiCheon practice, which is connected to her relationship with faith. Kim comes from a Catholic family. The themes of her Catholic faith and her development as a Catholic believer permeate her discussion on GiCheon and also her sense of "being Korean".

Since I was born, my family, my grandmother and everyone [in my family] is Catholic, my father is also Catholic. […] But I am not as committed, do not have as deep religious feelings as the others [...]. Simply, when I pray […] now, also in the church, I am not that hard-praying style. But now, what […] I think about Catholicism, is not that a deity (神 sin) *would do something for me, nor wishing for that, while sitting still [without doing anything], but* I have to make an effort myself.[57]

Kim Yŏnghŭi ascribes great importance to her Catholicism, which she sees as one of Korea's religions. Being Catholic for her is an attribute of being Korean. *S*he remarked that *religion has a vital significance for Koreans* in the context of explaining to me the

[56] Interview of 05.11.2010, Seoul, South Korea.

[57] Korean Catholics officially employ the word *hanŭnim* (하느님) to indicate God, but not the Sino-Korean word *sin* (神), indicating gods and spirits in East Asian tradition. However, Kim uses both words *hanŭnim* and *sin*. When translating the narrative of Kim into English, I render *hanŭnim* as "God" and *sin* as "deity".

importance of Catholicism to Koreans in general: *[…] Since ancient times Koreans have believed in religions like Buddhism, or Confucianism, or things like that. Nowadays there are also non-religious people though. There are many people without religion, yet I think that religion has a vital significance for Koreans.*

Being Catholic holds a great deal of personal meaning for Kim, and she explains her perception of GiCheon concepts and experiences through Catholicism – and vice versa. Being Catholic is an important experiential modality for Kim, which, together with GiCheon concepts, establishes and configures her experience of life and the way this experience is voiced. This is how Kim answered my questions about *ki*:

- In GiCheon we talk about ki*. What is* ki*, in your opinion?*

- Invisible force.

- […] If it is invisible, how can we know if it is there or not?

- So, mostly, I guess, it is ambiguous. […] Because it is invisible, because we do not know if it is there or not, I cannot say anything for sure. But […] I can get conscious of it through feeling ... […]... In hancha, ki *is air or a kind of energy […]. But in GiCheon we undergo physical and mental training […] in order to know this invisible force, in order to feel it. […]*

Kim Yŏnghŭi is hesitant when talking about the existence of *ki*, because it is not seen by the eye. She *cannot say anything for sure,* she explains, *because we do not know if it is there or not.* Yet, her GiCheon training heightens her sensitivity to *ki*, opening and developing it as an accessible experiential modality. Her account echoes that of Mr. Ha above, who claims that *if you train and advance continuously […], then you perceive it.* Ms. Kim further clarifies that *ki* is recognized during the practice as *the feeling of arising strength.* Like Kwŏn Kuho, she mentions Oriental thought in this context.

This is mostly Oriental thought, it seems. […] Through this training, physical and [mental], when we perform tanbaegong *or* naegasinjang *or similar positions, […] despite the*

fact that [these positions] are hard, [I have] the feeling of arising strength. […] The power that helps me to maintain [these difficult positions]? Or […] [it makes me] capable of developing a better way of thinking, more positive thoughts. […] I think someone is helping me [to achieve that]. […] Someone […] unknown.

Kim Yŏnghŭi notes that *ki* is invisible, and its presence is therefore difficult to ascertain. Yet, *ki* can be known *through feeling*. This *feeling of arising strength* is simultaneously the *power that helps […] to maintain [these difficult positions]*. It also contributes toward *more positive thoughts.* These three aspects of GiCheon experience, *arising strength, maintaining [difficult positions]* and *developing* […] *more positive thoughts* are key points around which the narrative of Kim evolves, as I point out also in Chapters Four and Five. In the present extract from her interview these three aspects are characteristic of her *ki* perception. *Arising strength* is the help Kim receives. *Maintaining [difficult positions]* constitutes the effort she sees herself as obliged to make. And *developing* […] *more positive thoughts* is clarified later in her narration as a moral stance for "aspiring to the good and avoiding the bad".

The next extract from Kim's interview explains what she means by Oriental thought. It is a discussion of the East Asian conception of the mutual interconnectedness of the cosmos, where things and beings help and sustain each other: *In the East [we believe that] the earth, the sky, the stones, all the things co-exist with us and live together with us, and interact with each other. I believe that they help each other. Because I believe that, when I train this way, things around me, forces around me, I think they help each other, so I think that all these things together are called* ki.

As we have discussed in the Introduction, contemporary practices of *ki suryŏn* integrate older East Asian ideas of mutual connections and inner harmony between things and

beings. Things and beings in the universe talk to each other, nourish and foster each other's life. These connections between earth, sky, stones and all phenomena, and the help they provide to each other and to humans, are called *ki*. An additional basic point Kim touches on is belief: *because I believe that.* I will return to this point later in this section. Meanwhile, I will continue reviewing the idea of help: Kim receives help not from *the earth, the sky, the stones* alone, but also from her fellow GiCheon practitioners. In the following extract she describes the support she receives from other adepts during the practice, as well as the invisible source of help, which connects to her on-going effort to continue holding the positions.

[...] [When I stand in naegasinjang position*] in my head, mentally, in the beginning [I think] "Oh, it is hard, I hate that!", but after a while [I say to myself] "still, I ought to do that, I can do that". [...] An ability to go on, [a feeling of] doing it together [with someone] ... "The gentlemen and ladies [practicing at my side], all of them are doing it, I have to do it as well!" - when I think that, my body holds out, it seems. Though it is hard, I never put my arms down, I keep on. It is really hard, how can I continue doing that? I also wonder about that, because I have not seen [that invisible someone], but I think that [someone invisible] is continuously helping me to endure [the difficulty].*

In the previous extracts we have seen that Kim links her understanding of *ki* to help. But the things and beings that grant mutual help include not only *the earth, the sky, the stones.* When Kim practices with other gentlemen and ladies in a GiCheon studio, the feeling of togetherness strengthens her own resolution: *all of them are doing it, I have to do it as well!* This is a concrete example of how the GiCheon community helps Kim Yŏnghŭi to cultivate her strength. The connection between *arising strength* and *sustaining difficult positions* Kim mentioned in the previous extract in relation to *ki* is elucidated here in very concrete detail.

The strength arises on a path of hardship and doubt, *it is really hard, how can I continue doing that?,* as a result of painstaking effort of enduring the difficulty.

The content of the help Kim receives, though, is not limited to the support she receives from her fellow trainees, who practice diligently at her side thus inspiring her with their example. She also gets help form someone or something she *has not seen.* Who or what is that additional factor continuously helping Kim that she *has not seen*? Kim has previously called it *ki*, but she has an important comparison to make in this respect. This is a point where the connections Kim Yŏnghŭi draws between Catholic and GiCheon practices in her narration come to the fore. *[...] When I pray as a Catholic, when I ask God or a deity to help me […], in a similar way, similarly to thinking that somebody is helping me when I practice GiCheon, it is something I do [myself], but I think that around me invisible things help me, like a deity. I think there is a similarity between my religion and GiCheon in that respect. […] Not taking the wrong way, and a desire to maintain my original intention, or something I want to do, a goal. I ask for help to be able to go straight to the goal, without wavering […].*

Kim suggests that the being she asks for help when she prays as a Catholic is similar to the invisible things that help her when she practices GiCheon. These *invisible things* she associated with *ki*, they are *like a deity*. The key words *ki*, emphasised in GiCheon, and God, emphasised in the institution of Catholicism, intertwine. The connection of the *ki* concept to gods and spirits is well-known in traditional East Asian thought.[58] But Kim gives her own

[58] The Chinese Neo-Confucian scholar Zhang Zai (張載 1020–1077) says: "Scattering and differentiating, capable of achieving form, is *qi* [*ki*]. Clear and penetrating, incapable of achieving form, is *shen* (神 Korean: *sin*, god, spirit) (散殊而可象為氣 清通而不可象為神)". I explore the connection between *ki* and spirits in East Asian thought in greater detail in my article "The notions of Ki 氣 and Great Void 太虛 in the philosophy of Chinese scholar Zhang Zai (張載 1020-1077) and Korean scholar Hwadam Sŏ Kyŏngdŏk (花潭 徐敬德 1489-1546)" (Ten 2011).

explanation to the relationship between *ki* and the divine, placing them in a hierarchical order, as we will see from other extracts from her interview later in the text of this section.

Ki and God in Kim's narration are in a way interchangeable: the function of both is *to help*. *Because I believe that, when I train this way, […], forces around me […] help each other,* she says. The operation of *ki* comes with faith. Kim is a practicing Catholic, which might explain the importance of belief for her, as faith is one of the central precepts of Christianity. *When I pray as a Catholic, when I ask the deity to help me*: the function of *ki*, the divine and help are connected not only to belief, but also to prayer. Christian terms "belief" and "prayer" come up often in the accounts of Christian GiCheon adepts, though rarely appearing in the narratives of non-Christian GiCheon trainees.

I have referred previously to the *better way of thinking, more positive thoughts* Kim develops through the help that she receives. The value judgments of right versus wrong, of better versus worse figure significantly in her narrative. In the last extract Kim talks about *the wrong way*, which she links to *wavering.* It is implied that the *right way* is *going straight to the goal*, according to her *original intention.* The *right way* connects in Kim's narrative to a *better way of thinking* and *more positive thoughts.* As Kim Yŏnghŭi clarifies again later, this is a part of her Catholic prayer, which she also calls meditation:

This is also a part of my meditation, I ask for help so that I won't take the wrong way, and beware, […] without getting deflected […] this is how I pray about the state of my mind-heart. Similarly to this, when I practice GiCheon, [I think] that […] I ought to practice hard, to retain [a difficult position] a bit longer, […]. When I train [GiCheon] while maintaining these kinds of thoughts, […] things around me […] that are called ki *[…] help me. In religion they are the things that [help] me […] to make an effort on a daily basis.*

Effort (노력 *noryŏk*) is one of the key words of Korean social life. Constant effort at school and work is expected and demanded, and the term *noryŏk* serves as a subject of academic study and in the titles of articles (Song Mano 2012, Im Sŭngt'aek 2010). *Noryŏk* refers to a constant need for self-perfection or self-improvement, characteristic of Korean, or maybe even of East Asian culture, of which *ki suryŏn* in general and GiCheon in particular is one expression.

For Kim *noryŏk* is one of the central concepts of her narrative. Previously she had already described the effort of *sustaining difficult positions* resulting in *arising strength*. Application of effort accompanied by *these kinds of thoughts* results in receiving help. *These kinds of thoughts* she describes now relate to previously mentioned *more positive thoughts.* But the structure of the constellation between the four elements of *help*, *sustaining difficult positions*, *more positive thoughts* and *arising strength* is different in the current extract.

Previously, *arising strength* was another name for the *help* in *sustaining difficult positions* and developing *more positive thoughts.* Help was something that made *sustaining difficult positions* and developing *more positive thoughts* possible. But in the current extract *retaining difficult positions longer* and *maintaining these kinds of thoughts* precede receiving help. Help is a result of an effort, but help, in turn, also contributes toward better and stronger effort, thus closing the circle: *things that [help] me […] to make an effort on a daily basis.* Help, the notion Kim connects to *ki* and God, precedes and follows her effort, both in daily life and in her practice in the GiCheon studio, bringing about more effort, as Kim confirms again:

[…] I live my life, so if I try harder, God or the deity will at any rate protect me and help me […]. I think so, and also in GiCheon, somebody else cannot do that instead of me,

and if I practice nobody gives me anything [for that], but if I by myself, alone, still pray, and practice [GiCheon], they will help me […] and I always pray […] like this.

God or the deity, says Kim, will protect her and help her if she tries harder. Kim connects help and prayer to *ki* and to God. And this is how she compares the two: *[…] I think that a deity is different from the concept of* ki. *It is similar, but not identical. […] The concept of the deity is much bigger, broader, the range is wider, but* ki *is something I can […] feel only when I practice GiCheon. And the concept of* deity *in religion is anywhere anytime, I think.*

Kim Yŏnghŭi experiences God as bigger, wider and broader than *ki*. This echoes her relationship with GiCheon, which she associates with *ki*, and Catholicism, connected in her narration to deity. Catholicism and deity are primary for Kim, while GiCheon and *ki* are secondary. Though the terms *ki* and God are intersecting, and at times parallel each other, the experience of God is absolute, while the experience of *ki* is limited. Also experiencing the divine stretches over a longer period of time than experiencing *ki*, due to the difference in the starting date of her Catholic and GiCheon practices:

-What is more important for you, Catholicism or GiCheon? And why?

-Catholicism is a bit more important to me […]. Because, since birth, before I became aware of myself, I was already a Catholic, [and] I am still a Catholic now. […] [For me Catholicism] has been longer than practicing GiCheon. And because […] I started [praying] before [beginning] GiCheon [practice] […] I feel [Catholicism] as closer to me. […]

Kim mentioned that her whole family, including her grandmother and father, are Catholics. Having practiced Catholicism longer than GiCheon, Catholicism is closer to her

heart, and holds more personal meaning, and this may explain her placing God hierarchically higher than *ki*. But there is another reason for her preferring Catholicism to GiCheon.

Even before I started thinking about it, I was already a Catholic, so it came to me so naturally, it is really a part of myself. But GiCheon – simply one day father said "let's go!", so we went […], so at the outset I was somewhat reluctant. However in relation to Catholicism there was nothing like that, no one ever forced me, well, I could go or not go […]. So […] I respect Catholicism as much as [my family] respected me.

Kim and her younger sister, aged twelve and thirteen at the outset, were forced into GiCheon training by their father irrespective of what they themselves wanted, as I have previously mentioned, and will discuss in detail in Chapters Four and Five. To Catholicism, however, Kim Yŏnghŭi was introduced in a natural, gradual fashion, and was never forced: *no one ever forced me, well, I could go or not go [to church].* Kim feels that in her relationship with Catholicism her free will and her own person were respected by her family. Therefore, Kim feels equal respect toward Catholicism. As to GiCheon practice, she was compelled to do it by her father. As a result, she was *reluctant* to perform it, and now she rates it lower than Catholicism in her own personal evaluative framework. The following extract from Kim's interview confirms again that she sees Catholicism as larger and more meaningful than GiCheon:

I think that religion has great significance for Koreans. But GiCheon, for Koreans … […] … rather than a religious concept … […], [it is] not something I cannot reach, something I cannot sense, like a deity … GiCheon is merely just my own suryŏn (修練 *training*). *[It is something] very personal. Both [Catholicism and GiCheon] are […] … very personal, but in religion I think there is something spiritual, something like a soul. […] … But GiCheon, as compared with a religion, is looking for myself […]. I see it as a martial art. It*

is one among [different] martial arts, but a religion is everything. The concept of religion is bigger, it contains a notion of the almighty […], it is total.[59] *GiCheon is not as big as that, is it?*

Kim sees the divine as bigger than *ki*, and Catholicism as bigger than GiCheon. God is *anywhere anytime*, Catholicism is total, while *ki* and GiCheon are more limited in scope and more personal. Kim relates to GiCheon as to *suryŏn* (修練 training) which helps her to be a better Catholic.

Despite the fact that Kim Yŏnghŭi was pressured into GiCheon practice against her will, her account of her GiCheon experience is generally very favourable. Only occasionally she acknowledges her initial reluctance to practice. In the case of her sister Kim Pohŭi, though, the account of GiCheon experience is rather grim and dreary, a point to which I return in Chapter Five.

To summarize, there are three important themes in the way Kim narrates the experiential modalities generated by the power word *ki*. The first theme is developing sensitivity to *ki: in GiCheon we undergo […] training […] in order to know this invisible force, in order to feel it*. As I have mentioned previously, this point comes up also in the account of Mr. Ha. The second theme is the connection of *ki* to help and to the divine. As I have pointed out before, the content of this help includes *arising strength* and the ability to *sustain difficult positions* and *develop more positive thoughts.* The hard effort involved in maintaining difficult positions brings about receiving more help and support. Through this effort the *strength arises.* The help, connected in Kim's narrative to *ki* and to the divine, also propels her to pick the right way, to maintain *an original intention* and *not to be deflected*.

[59] Kim uses here the English term "almighty".

Kim mainly talks about *ki* as help. The notion of help in her narrative is inter-connected with the idea of the effort that she herself has to make. Her concept of effort fits within the first vector as originating in the self and moving outward from the center. The help Kim receives is part of the second vector, as it is coming from outside herself. However, help comes to Kim both previously to effort, but also following the effort. So in this element of her narrative a connection is established between the first vector – Kim's own effort and desire – and the second vector, the reaction of the world around her to her action, her wishes and her prayer. The way she expresses her understanding of *ki* and the divine shows how her conceptualization of GiCheon and Catholic practices form a logically consistent whole. GiCheon and Catholicism are routes through which her effort is exercised. They are not the only routes. Other aspects of Kim's life are also described by her as routes for exercising her effort, accompanied by a sense of direction and purpose. She relates it in detail while talking about *suryŏn*.

The third theme is the connection of the concept of *ki* to Oriental thought. This theme echoes the account of Mr. Kwŏn, who also mentions Oriental thought. Kim also connects GiCheon practice more directly to Korean culture: *In Korean, no, in* hancha *there is this saying. […]* Susin ch'ega ch'iguk p'yŏngch'ŏnha (修身齊家治國平天下 *cultivate the body, regulate the family, govern the country, bring peace to the world*).[60] *What does it mean?* Susin (修身) - *if I discipline my body well,* ch'ega (齊家) - *I can govern the household,* ch'iguk (治國) – *if I can rule the country,* p'yŏngch'ŏnha (平天下) *I can pacify the world. The most basic here is* susin (修身) - *if I cultivate myself, if I practice correctly, then I can govern the family, the country, even the world. All these things I can equally regulate, if only*

[60] These words are from *The Great Learning*, one of the four books of the Confucian canon, as I have mentioned in the Introduction.

I develop myself, take good care of myself, control myself well. Viewed from that perspective, GiCheon is consistent with Korean sensibilities well enough.

Here Kim refers to the Confucian scheme of self-cultivation which I have outlined in the Introduction. She indicates that this scheme agrees with *Korean sensibilities* (한국 정서 *Han'guk chŏngsŏ*). In this extract in particular and in her narrative in general Kim Yŏnghŭi emphasizes self-development, self-realization and self-control. This notion of self-discovery developing into self-confidence I identify as her leading experiential modality. This personally colored experiential modality is articulated alongside the culturally suggested experiential modalities connected to *ki* and *suryŏn*. Kim's personally colored experiential modality surfaces more and is voiced more clearly in the extracts of her interview I present in Chapter Four. In that chapter Kim will again be one of the main protagonists.

3.4 Ki as explained through modern Western science, Oriental thought, and Christianity

In this chapter I have shown that Oriental thought, modern Western science and Christianity are all actively engaged by the practitioners in their explanations of what *ki* is. As I have mentioned, *ki* is one of the key concepts in GiCheon, and the construction of *ki* constitutes also the construction of GiCheon. The way practitioners variously describe *ki* demonstrates the different individual constructions of the practice. These different understandings correspond to different points on the opinions spectrum of GiCheon, and the inner sub-divisions of the practitioners.

GiCheon practitioners I have interviewed come from diverse backgrounds, and the articulation of their experiences is very personal. Nevertheless, studying their narratives made me classify them into "groups" according to various criteria. The key variable in my

classification was the degree of their acceptance of and identification with official GiCheon ideology, which usually follows the degree of their personal connection to Lee Sangwŏn and other GiCheon leaders. People who are closer to the "core" of GiCheon community tend to identify the practice as *suryŏn*, while those closer to the "periphery" prefer to classify it as *undong*. According to this criterion, the protagonists of Chapter Four are representatives of the first group, while Kim Wŏn'gyu from Chapter Five stands for the second group. Yet these groups of more devoted and less devoted GiCheon practitioners sub-divide also into sub-groups. The group of trainees who are closer to the core of GiCheon community can again be divided into "sub-groups" according to their attitude toward modern Western science and modernity in general. Kim Hŭisang, an important GiCheon leader and an author of a number books on GiCheon, upholds a very positive view on modern science and modernity, maintaining that GiCheon is a hidden treasure of Korean society, which can help Korea to claim its place among the world nations (Kim Hŭisang and Kich'ŏnmun Ponmun ed. 2000: 11, 28, 38-39, 242). An opposing view is represented by Ch'oe Hyŏngsu from Chapter Seven. He and the practitioners of older generation link GiCheon to an idealized image of "old Korea", associated with childhood fairy tales and traditional images of mountain immortals. Mr. Ch'oe maintains that GiCheon practice made him change his way of thinking. His way of thinking became *pigwahakchŏk* (비과학적 unscientific), as he mentions in an extract from an interview not quoted in the text of the present dissertation. It should be noted that he uses the term *pigwahakchŏk* in a positive sense. By unscientific he means deeper way of contemplation and seeing things within a context.

Between these two positions, one "pro-" another "against" modern Western science, Kwŏn Kuho from the present chapter finds himself somewhere in the middle. As a scientist himself, he identifies with science and explains *ki* through modern Western scientific

concepts, such as *heart-rhythm* and *sound waves*. Yet, he is critical of his own explanation and considers it incomplete. Mr. Kwŏn's explanation of *ki* represents a conflict shared to a certain degree by many GiCheon practitioners and their contemporaries. It is a conflict between Korea old and new, between the way of life gone forever, yet reconstructed, reproduced and idealized within contemporary discourse, and the modernity, associated with the West, science and globalization. In the context of this relationship with the past, the present is promising, as Kim Hŭisang suggests in his books, but also limiting, as Kwŏn Kuho explains in his interview. In order to reach the resolution of this conflict by "reconnecting" to the "lost tradition", or the lost understanding of *ki*, Kwŏn Kuho proposes a historico-linguistic analysis: *In order to talk about the East, it is like a thread, [...] we have to unite it like that, [...] the words of our tongue one by one… […]*.

Not all practitioners perceive GiCheon or *ki* as contradictory to or conflicting with other worldviews or value systems. GiCheon practitioners who are Christian mostly describe harmony between their GiCheon and Christian practices. In the interviews, they articulate deep Christian insights reached via GiCheon practice, or voice GiCheon experiences by using Christian terminology. Kim Yŏnghŭi from the current chapter is a representative of this group. Other members of this group are, for example, GiCheon teacher Kim Hyŏnt'ae, a follower of Lee Sangwŏn, and Yi Sŏngdo from Pusan, a student of Ch'oe Kwangbok, whom I have briefly mentioned in the Introduction. Also Yi Pyŏngil is Christian, a GiCheon leader from the group of Chŏn Ch'anuk. Yi Pyŏngil, a creative and inspiring personality, told me that the way God breathed life into Adam and Eve in the Bible shows the centrality of breath and breathing (one of the meanings of *ki*) for creation and sustention of life, an understanding we actualize through GiCheon exercises. He also said that the creation of the world in the Bible starts with God's words. This shows us the importance of words and sounds for the origin of life, therefore we exercise *ŭmp'agong* (음파공) in GiCheon, a practice in which separate

syllables are to be pronounced slowly and in a low tone, for the development of abdominal breathing.[61] The insights of Yi Pyŏngil, Kim Yŏnghŭi and other Christian practitioners demonstrate their perception of GiCheon and Christianity as organically complementary.

The organic unity of Oriental thought and Christian understanding in the narration of Kim Yŏnghŭi demonstrates one aspect of the new living practice, the new living tradition, that GiCheon is. The narrative of Kwŏn Kuho and his struggles with contradicting trends of thought exemplify another aspect of the formation of the GiCheon tradition in local and global contexts. An ambivalent attitude toward modern Western science and modernity is connected to attempts of defining GiCheon as Korean, but also as East Asian. I return to this problem in Chapter Seven, where I will briefly analyze a few GiCheon legends and their nationalistic character. As for now, in the next chapter we will proceed to examine another important aspect of GiCheon as a constructed tradition: its definition as *suryŏn*.

[61] Interview of 30.01.2011, Seoul, South Korea. Yi Pyŏngil gave me explicit permission to use his real name.

Chapter Four: *Suryŏn* in the narrations of the practitioners

4.1 GiCheon as *suryŏn*

In previous chapters I have outlined the conceptual framework of technologies of self as elaborated by Foucault, the way technologies of self are approached in contemporary scholarship, and the notions of *ki suryŏn* and *ki*. In this chapter I will focus on the notion of *suryŏn* (修練 self-cultivation/training). It is often referred to by the interviewees as being central to GiCheon, and associated with the process and the goal of self-transformation. The word *suryŏn* (修練) consists of two characters: *su* (修) – to cultivate, to study, to discipline; and *ryŏn* (練) – to polish, to practice, to exercise. The term *suryŏn*, translated by Isabelle Robinet into English as "cultivation and refinement", is not of recent origin and already forms a part of the title of *Xiulian xuzhi* (修練須知 Required Knowledge on Cultivation and Refinement), an anonymous work which is a part of the Taoist Canon (Robinet 2008a: 557).[62] In contemporary vernacular Korean, the term *suryŏn* is commonly used in the context of training of both the mind and the body, life-long dedication, whole-hearted acceptance and constant diligent practice. *Ki suryŏn* adepts of various affiliations and lineages often use this term.

The interview material presented in this chapter shows that the notion of *suryŏn* arises often in the narratives of GiCheon practitioners. Adherents of GiCheon also use the words *suyang* (修養 personal improvement) and *suhaeng* (修行 practice) in a meaning

[62] Modern editions of the Taoist Canon (道藏 *Daozang*) are based on the Ming Canon of 1445, which, in turn, is based on the catalogues of Taoist writings prepared more than a millennium earlier (Boltz 2008: 28).

similar to *suryŏn.*[63] While many trainees understand GiCheon practice as *suryŏn* (self-cultivation), others assert that it should be categorized as *undong* (運動 sports). As I discuss also in Chapters Three and Five, this difference in understanding relates to the position of the trainees in GiCheon circles. Those close to the core of GiCheon community, who have to a significant degree interiorized the ideology, define GiCheon as *suryŏn*, while those at the periphery label GiCheon as sports. Even the former group however sometimes intentionally refer to GiCheon as *undong* and not as *suryŏn*, because the term *suryŏn,* which implies deeper meaning, might scare people away, as evidenced by an extract from the interview with Chang Namju, a robot engineer in his late twenties, in section 4.3 of this chapter.[64] Chang believes that the word *suryŏn* possesses some special meaning in the eyes of many non GiCheon-practicing individuals.

When analyzing the understanding of *suryŏn* in the interviews of the practitioners, I interpret it as connecting directly to self-consciousness, self-understanding and self-construction. The sections 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4 discuss three examples of self-building as articulated by Cho Chinsik, a GiCheon instructor in his early thirties, a university student, Kim Yŏnghŭi, in her early twenties, and a bank team manager, Pak Kyŏngae, in her early fifties.[65] In the sections 4.5 and 4.6 I discuss short extracts from the interviews with Kwŏn Kuho, a businessman in his late fifties, and Kim Yŏngbo, a man in his early fifties working in retail business.[66] I analyze the way Cho Chinsik, Kim Yŏnghŭi, Pak Kyŏngae, Kwŏn Kuho and Kim Yŏngbo talk about *suryŏn*, and the meanings this term holds for each of them. In

[63] See Chapter Six on GiCheon as ascetic practice.
[64] Interview of 09.12.2010, Pusan, South Korea. Chang Namju gave me explicit permission to use his real name.

[65] Interview with Cho Chinsik, 07.03.2011, Seoul, South Korea. Cho Chinsik gave me explicit permission to use his real name. Interview with Kim Yŏnghŭi (not a real name), 05.11.2010, Seoul, South Korea. Interview with Pak Kyŏngae (not a real name) 17.01.2010, Seoul, South Korea.

[66] Interview of 16.11.2010, Seoul, South Korea. Kwŏn Kuho gave me explicit permission to use his real name. Interview of 09.12.2010, Pusan, South Korea. Kim Yŏngbo gave me explicit permission to use his real name.

section 4.2 I also introduce a few extracts from the interviews with Yi T'aegyŏng, a man in his early thirties working in ship-building, which support the interpretation of *suryŏn* held by Cho Chinsik.[67] In section 4.6 I mention briefly how the social aspect of *suryŏn* is explained in GiCheon theory and texts, as this point is especially highlighted by Kim Yŏngbo.

4.2 *Suryŏn* as self-knowledge passed on to others

Let us start with an extract from the interview with Cho Chinsik:

First of all, […] I started looking at my habits and observing the patterns [of my actions]. My [GiCheon] suryŏn *became a chance to observe the habits and patterns connected to my body […] that were wrong. […]. For example, when I was training […], other people were also practicing [behind me], those who came six months ago, and I just came less than a month ago. […] And I thought that I could not perform the exercises in a way that I perceived as successful or well. When you cannot achieve something in this way, you should try harder, you should show more [effort], but [instead of doing this] … when the teacher Kim Hŭisang came to me, my facial expression demonstrated [to him] everything [I felt internally and he said] "what is the problem?" [I replied] "I cannot do that well".*[68] *When the teacher responded "no one can do that well in the beginning", I had a moment of sudden awakening. My reason for coming here […] is not to demonstrate anything [to anyone], […] but to develop some space in my mind-heart.*[69] *At this point my previous habits [of perception] became visible [to me]. […]*

When his teacher, Kim Hŭisang, remarked that *no one can do that well in the beginning,* Cho became conscious of his old behavioral pattern and realized that impressing

[67] Interview of 09.12.2010, Pusan, South Korea. Yi T'aegyŏng gave me explicit permission to use his real name.
[68] Kim Hŭisang was a well-known GiCheon leader, as I briefly mentioned in the Introduction.

[69] The translation of a Korean word *maŭm* into English as "mind-heart" reflects the thinking of the practitioners. *Maŭm* can indicate both the mind and what in English is referred to as "heart", that is both mental faculties and feelings.

others with his practice had been his purpose. Cho Chinsik also realized that it didn't have to be that way and that a better motivational strategy would be "practicing for yourself" rather than "practicing to impress others". His reason for practice was thereby altered into what he expressed as *getting some space in my mind-heart.* We might categorize Cho's experience as that of a rediscovery of motivation, as he begins practicing for himself and not for others.

According to Cho, through GiCheon practice his self was modified. His teacher's remark revealed the nature of Cho's "old self", and at that instant a "new" self emerged. The moment of self-visibility is thus the moment of self-transfiguration. When I see my old self, my old self fails, and a new self is born. In a metaphorical way we could express it as "dying" or "annihilation" of the old self. The old self dies when it is perceived, brought into awareness, revealed.

An important point here is the presence of the "Other". For Cho Chinsik old habits and behavioral patterns only became observable when the Other, his teacher, intervened and asked "what's the problem?" At that moment Cho realized that what he (Cho) wanted was to look competent in the eyes of other people. The Other – a teacher, a friend, a co-practitioner – has a key role to play in the transformation of the self. The Other serves as a mirror, revealing our self to us. Now, similarly to his teacher, Cho Chinsik plays the role of the Other in his interaction with his own students, as he relates in the following extract from his interview.

[I tell my students] "in suryŏn*, do not look at me, but instead look at yourself". These people […] are very self-conscious and conscious of others, so …they want to make themselves perfect and dislike criticism. So […] in the beginning, they are very conscious of the teacher and the people around. After some time passes, I begin to tell them to focus on themselves. When they do so and start to focus primarily on themselves, from that moment they become chuch'e* (주체 *subjects*) *for themselves [...]. But they do not gain this knowledge by themselves. […] This is my story […]. These people, similarly to me, grew up in a different*

environment [from mine] but [they] tend to be similar to me […], there are many people like that. […]

In his narrative Cho Chinsik describes a certain type of people whom he terms "perfectionists". These people are usually very conscious of themselves and of others and whatever they do, they aspire to perfection and detest criticism. When they come to a GiCheon studio and perform exercises, their main goal (of which they are most likely unaware) is to show others that they "can do it well" and to impress others. Cho Chin-sik counts himself among these people. Cho's comment *there are many people like that* hints that the desire for self-promotion through one's performance and sensitivity to social pressure are marked characteristics of contemporary South Korean society.

After turning into a teacher, when encountering students with similar issues to those he confronted in the past, Cho attempts to reconstruct his own pedagogic experience with Kim Hŭi-sang, his own teacher. But the roles have shifted: Cho now seeks to carry out for others the role Kim Hŭisang played for Cho. Cho stands in the place of Kim Hŭisang, while Cho's students come to stand in the shoes of Cho himself: Cho Chinsik wishes to deliver to them the message Kim Hŭisang had administered to him. The essence of his role is provoking a transformation of the students' own subjectivity and inducing them to perform GiCheon positions for themselves rather than for others. Cho Chinsik uses the Korean word *chuch'e* when he says that *from that moment they [the students] become subjects for themselves.* Cho Chinsik tries to encourage the process of subjectivation in his students.[70]

So, now [it is] not the idea of undong *that categorizes GiCheon, but* suryŏn*,* suhaeng*, that concept. … I had many different experiences. So it was through* suryŏn *[…] that the experiences I accumulated through my lifetime […] became organized and ordered. That was*

[70] As mentioned in the Introduction, I suggest that the concept of subjectivation introduced by Michel Foucault can be very useful in analysis of contemporary *ki suryŏn*. The fact that GiCheon practitioners themselves use the ideas of "subjectivity", in the sense it is also used in the name of North Korea'schuch'e (주체) ideology, supports my suggestion.

that … [I realized]. […] Through continuous suryŏn*, I started observing myself and my way of thinking.*

For Cho, *suryŏn* is the road to seeing himself, and by developing awareness of his old habits and aspirations, to modifying his self. In order to better illustrate the aspect of *suryŏn* that relates to self-knowledge as leading to self-modification, I will bring up an extract of an interview with another GiCheon practitioner, Yi T'aegyŏng:

- Do you have a religion?

- Buddhism.

- How do GiCheon and Buddhism relate to each other in your mind-heart?

- I think they are suryŏn*, and I wish to practice them my whole life.*

- You think that both Buddhism and GiCheon are suryŏn*?*

- Yes. […] In GiCheon we feel […] through the body, in Buddhism we […] manage the mind-heart. […] These two things support each other […]. In Buddhism […] the mind-heart comes first […], but in GiCheon it is through our kiun (기운) *[…].*[71] *After doing* suryŏn *[…], I felt that […] I have used my body in […] a wrong way. [As a result of the practice] parts [of the body] get more flexible, relax little by little. [Parts of the body that were] stiff, […] open up a bit. […] I learned a lot about my own body [...]. In the old days I just did not know, [so] I thought I should just go to the hospital. [Now I realize that] this is not good. In the hospital […] you take lots of medicines and the pain is gone for a moment, but I think that the pain is [just] lying dormant. […]*

Both Yi T'aegyŏng and Cho Chinsik see *suryŏn* as bringing self-knowledge. First of all, this self-learning relates to the bodily self. *GiCheon practice became a chance to observe the habits and patterns connected to my body that were wrong,* says Cho. However, Cho does

[71] Yi T'aegyŏng uses the word *kiun* here in the sense of *ki*. Cf. my elaborations on the meaning of *ki* in Chapter Three.

not elaborate in detail on his bodily habits. Instead, he describes his behavior habit of "looking competent in the eyes of the others". Unlike Cho, Yi gives a more detailed account on what happened in his body: *[As a result of the practice] parts [of the body] get more flexible, relax little by little. [Parts of the body that were] stiff, […] open up a bit.*

We could compare "relaxation and opening up of the body" described by Yi to the "relaxation and opening up of the mind-heart" discussed by Cho. The tension Cho felt when he found himself under a constant pressure to *perform well* and *look well in the eyes of others* was later relieved, which he refers to as *developing some space in my mind-heart.* Cho's language indicates inner ease and letting go, a reduction of pressure. We could therefore see the accounts of Yi and Cho as supplementing and interpreting each other, pointing out that the narratives of GiCheon practitioners, often so different, have important common points. Another idea that Yi and Cho share is "awakening". Let us consider the following extract from the interview with Yi T'aegyŏng.

- *What is* suhaeng *or* suryŏn*?*

- Suhaeng *and* suryŏn *are the same thing, I think.*

- *So what is it?*

- *[…]* Suhaeng *is the way to kkaedarŭm* (깨달음 awakening). *[…] Through* suryŏn *I realized "I should live like that!" […]. Sometimes, without me knowing, if I become greedy, for example, it can be like suddenly falling down, [straying from the correct path]. […]. [Through* suryŏn*] I can solve the problem of these [dangerous] moments with more wisdom, so I wish to practice for a lifetime.*

Both Yi and Cho relate self-learning also to the cognitive self. We have seen how Cho describes the moment he suddenly became aware of his old behavioral patterns. Yi T'aegyŏng likewise connects *suryŏn* to awareness or awakening. Yi uses the word *kkaedarŭm,* which can also be translated as "enlightenment". *Kkaedarŭm,* enlightenment, is

another key word used in Korean society, the usage of which is not limited to Buddhist discourse. *Kkaedarŭm* is utilized as in describing religious or spiritual experiences, so in ordinary speech means "awakening" or "awareness". *Suryŏn* lets Yi become aware of how he should live. In relation to the mind-heart, Yi talks about the danger of becoming greedy, mentioning that *suryŏn* means observing this, discovering this and preventing it from taking over. The moments of awareness of Yi and Cho make them look back and see their pasts in a new light.

For Cho and Yi *suryŏn* is self-learning that brings about self-alteration, modification of the self. Many adherents perceive the practice of GiCheon as an act of re-making the self. Here we come to another key element of self-transformation, which continues the motif of looking back, at the old, pre-modified self. In order to re-make ourselves we have to go back, to the place where we started. Many practitioners say that the training makes them recall their childhood, for example this is how an image of a toddler is evoked by Cho Chinsik: *When I was learning GiCheon steps, […] I thought that it is like I was learning to walk as a kid. Accordingly, when the teacher says "do this, do that", I become a young child.*

The self is an important concept in the narration of Cho. He uses the Korean word *chagi* (자기) for the self and while he does not give a definition of the self, the meaning of his narration is clear: *The important thing is, that the "self" enters there. I chose it [*suryŏn*] myself, and I found it myself. GiCheon is a fixed practice: "you have to do like this". People do it, and if the position becomes wrong, we say that it is a mistake [you have to correct] but, if I, on the contrary, make [the student] choose [the way she wants to perform] the position… I adjust the position, if I lower the position, more power is generated; if I raise the position, you get more space to breath. [As a teacher] you have to let the students themselves opt for the degree of hardness in* suryŏn*. [If] the teacher [says] "this is how you do that", it might become a torture for the student. From the point of view of the body, physically, it might be*

effective, but if the "self falls out" [the student] cannot practice [alone] at home. However, if the student regulates the training by herself, she will practice at home even if you don't tell her. The self for Cho Chinsik is an independent agent capable of acting freely and of making choices. If you are forced to practice GiCheon against your will, it might contribute to your health, but the *self falls out*: you are no longer an agent actualizing your free choice.

The story of Cho Chinsik relates to different selves on the vectors, but mainly to the cognitive, the individual and the social self. The focus of his narrative is the conscious realization of who he was and how he came to be like that – that is analyzing the presence of the second vector in his life and revealing that he was motivated by the desire to *look good in the eyes of other people*. The narrative of Cho provides a good example of the second vector working, the vector of societal and environmental influence surrounding an individual. Cho further contemplates on who it is that he wants to be, and how to awaken a similar realization in others. In his relationship with his students the self of Cho is his social self on the first vector: he is bringing about the change not just in himself, but in the selves of other people, in a way placing them within the boundaries of his responsibility. The first vector in my two vectors model signifies intentions, desires and actions coming from within the self and unfolding toward the outside. Cho develops the social self of his students and attempts to instill in them particular characteristics, activating the first vector not just in his self, but also in others. This is an example of the self expanding like contracting circles on the water, starting from the personal self (Cho) and continuing toward his GiCheon social self, which includes his students. His idea of freedom relates to multiple selves on the first vector: for the intentional self, the freedom to define his own motivation (*my reason for coming here*), for the cognitive and emotional self, to think and to feel (*to develop some space in my mind-heart*), and for the bodily and individual self, to act (*you have to let the students themselves opt for the degree of hardness*).

4.3 *Suryŏn* as a voluntarily chosen, special path

*I chose [*suryŏn*] myself, and I found it myself,* says Cho. This free agency is also a fundamental element of GiCheon practice for the university student Kim Yŏnghŭi and we will now turn to extracts from her interview:

[GiCheon practice and university study] are similar, I think. Because actually they are hard during their completion […]. But if I want to do it, I do it. And other people around me, for example family and friends, cannot say anything [against that] to me. However, those people also cannot help [with suryŏn*]. In any case […] university study is something you do as self-directed practice, and GiCheon you also do alone. The teacher cannot threaten me [into practicing by saying] "you'll be punished if you don't do that" […]. Because it is something I do [following my own decision].* Suryŏn *is something I do by myself, of my own accord. […] "*Suryŏn" *is something I want to do, but that process is hard, but I bear it, endure it and develop myself [through it] […].*

For Kim Yŏnghŭi the sense of subjectivity is characteristic of *suryŏn:* you engage in it because you want to, and not because others made you to. In case of Kim Yŏnghŭi, her subjectivity is defined by whether an action is performed freely or under pressure: "do I practice because I want to, or because others force me to?". For Cho Chinsik subjectivity is defined by the goal of the action: the motivation focused on impressing others changed into *getting some space in my mind-heart.* Kim defines *suryŏn* as a self-directed study, chosen and continued voluntarily. Not every study is *suryŏn,* but only that through which you endure hardship, generate self-development, and to which a high personal value is attached:

Not everything can be suryŏn*, because the value I grant [to it] is different. Because for example Spanish is now my major, and my hobby is making cookies. Of course I want to study Spanish and I want to learn how to make cookies, but this one I do with a goal so we*

can use the meaning of suryŏn *here, and in the case of cookies, I want to learn it, but I do not attach great value to it, it is just something I want to do. So people call things like that hobbies.*

The sense of actualized subjectivity Kim developed through the practice is related to her new motivation: doing things because she wants to. However, her GiCheon practice hasn't started that way: *[...] My thoughts changed so much. ... before [engaging with GiCheon practice] I did not have much self-confidence. ... I just went to school in an irresponsible fashion. My father was very stubborn and ... authoritarian and he used to give orders ... Like in the army. ... Father said "do this", "do that". He was also like this about GiCheon, first he said "Let's go!". [So] we had to go. The atmosphere at home was such that we could not say "I do not want to do it". ...*

The father of Kim Yŏnghŭi forced her and her sister Kim Pohŭi (aged thirteen and twelve at the outset) to practice GiCheon against their will. Every morning when he woke them up for practice *it was a battle*, says Kim Yŏnghŭi. Ironically however, it was this involuntary training imposed on the child that resulted in the unfolding of her subjectivity and free will. Years later Kim feels grateful to her father, with whom her relationship has also gradually improved.

But while I was doing GiCheon ... my own thoughts started to appear. Of course I listened to my father, but I did not follow him 100%, not absolutely. ... Because I did what father said I did not have self-confidence. [When my own thoughts started appearing] I developed self-assurance... Suddenly while ... [before this time] I had not done anything extra. [At school] I only studied, [but now] I wanted to play musical instruments, I wanted to learn dancing. I wanted to take part in activities outside the school. I wanted ... to go out with friends. ... What I wanted to do, what I liked ... I discovered things like dreams [of my future] ...

Similarly to Cho, the account of Kim shows her step-by-step realization of how the external influences of the second vector shaped her life. As the first vector was activated, her subjectivity, self-determination and freedom grew; she gained a vision of how unfree she was before, and how her actions and function were actually determined by her surroundings: her family and society. So inversely to the case of Cho, it was the formation of a new self that brought about the realization of the quality of the old self.

With GiCheon Kim started crafting her self along the first vector: discovering and following her own desires, different from the expectations of her family. For Kim, *suryŏn* is not limited to GiCheon practice, but includes also studying Spanish at university. Similarly, her self-crafting process was generated by GiCheon training, stimulated by it, but not limited to it. Used to waking up at dawn in order to join her father and her sister for GiCheon training, Kim now appreciates her habit of waking up early as a valuable asset, and she also started to meditate on a regular basis (as she says in another part of her interview, not quoted here). Her self-crafting likewise included dancing, playing musical instruments, taking part in various activities outside school and going out with friends.

Kim's old self appears "familial" and "social", formed along the second vector without deliberate consideration and without any self-crafting on her part. Her intentional self was very weak – it seems she hardly had any intentions or desires at all, agreeing instead with what her family and her society expected from her and planned for her. Her new self, on the contrary, comes across as intentional, active and strong.

For Kim an important element of *suryŏn* is the endurance of hardship and the self-development that comes from this experience. GiCheon positions are hard and painful to sustain, and this aspect of GiCheon training is referred to by practically all the participants. However Kim takes overcoming pain to the next level. For her the painful exercises are an allegory for possible new projects in life, and her ability to sustain the pain is a source of self-

confidence to accomplish the projects successfully and emerge victorious. The ideas of these possible new projects and endeavors develop, in Kim's opinion, as a part of her GiCheon self-crafting and *suryŏn*, unfolding along the first vector.

Through GiCheon … I started spending more time thinking … "I want to study that", "I want to live like that", "I will do that": this … autonomous thinking (chuch'ejŏgin saenggak) ... I got self-confidence … So I got to know what I want. And when I do it, even if it is hard, I can do it till the end without help - I got such ideas. Before that I was just studying because mother and father told me. All my friends did it, so I just followed them. After that, I would just get into some university, graduate. If I could get a job ... I was thinking about my future without real interest. … Marrying, if I got the chance. I would live somehow... Although it is my life, [I was looking at it] as if it was the life of someone else. But now, I will do what I want, even if it is hard. I will live …in a determined way. … Thinking concretely about my future. It is interesting to think about it.

When describing her old self, Kim describes a state of self-alienation: *Although it is my life, [I was looking at it] as if it was the life of someone else.* GiCheon practice, however, brought her subjectivation – Kim calls it autonomous/subjective thinking. She uses the same term *chuch'e* as Cho Chinsik, as discussed in section 4.2. Her confidence and newly acquired sense of self Kim associates with her *naegasinjang* experience:

And each separate thing – it is like doing naegasinjang *for twenty minutes. ... In* naegasinjang*, it is really hard each time … as if I am dying. But later the mind-heart is relieved, the feeling in the body is … really good. And these [other things that are like* naegasinjang*] … it is hard while I do it, but later … I get great satisfaction. And it becomes another part of my self-confidence; it helps me. Each time I go up, step by step.*

Kim figuratively compares her newly born self-confidence to rebirth after death: *naegasinjang* is hard *as if I am dying*. I return to this point later in Chapter Six. Like many

other GiCheon adepts Kim articulates her *naegasinjang* experience in a symbolic way. For her standing in *naegasinjang* is a metaphor, and each new endeavor in life is the possible object of this metaphor. *Naegasinjang* is hard and painful, yet you feel soothed and relaxed afterwards. Each time the completion of *naegasinjang* is fulfilling for Kim: it builds her self-confidence. And so does the accomplishment of each new venture in life: it is hard while you do it, but you experience triumph after you succeed, and it integrates into your ever-growing sense of self. Kim believes that if she could do something as hard as *naegasinjang*, she could do anything, anything at all: *So when instructor Lee told us to stand in the* naegasinjang *position for twenty minutes, for thirty minutes, or for one hour, if I could accomplish that till the end, and because I could accomplish that, my self-confidence was boosted. […] I thought "I can achieve anything!".*

The leading motif of Kim's account of self-crafting through *suryŏn* is becoming aware of her desires and dreams, and realizing that she is able to follow them. This self-assurance is grounded in the *naegasinjang* experience of overcoming pain and difficulty. But the complex process of self-crafting contains many elements and types of activities. In Kim's case it included *going out with friends*, *taking part in activities outside school,* dancing and playing musical instruments. An additional important element of self-craft, however, was Kim's exposure to the world of adults in the GiCheon studio. The new self of Kim came into being following her GiCheon practice in the studio. Before starting the training, Kim, as a child, was confined to the route school ↔ home. GiCheon training gave her access to a different world. This was a new experience for her.

We [my sister and me practiced] GiCheon [when we were] in elementary and middle school, so ... we were the youngest, there were many adults [at the studio], of my father's age, men and women. As I looked at the adults … At school I saw only persons of my own age. Through GiCheon I met many adults. I [saw their] ways of behavior. I got to know the way

people should treat each other. ... "There is also an [adult] world like this" [I realized] through GiCheon. My friends [at school] did not know [this new world] at all. Only I knew [it]. ... And as I mentioned, I started spending more time thinking, alone.

Subsequent to her exposure to the world of adults Kim started perceiving herself not just as a child, but as a member of a wider community of GiCheon practitioners. She learned about the interests and troubles of adults as their world opened in front of her. Her social self was modified, or reborn, as she started realizing herself as a member of GiCheon community which included also her and her sister, but mostly men and women of her parents' generation. Kim's "GiCheon social self" was born.

The self-crafting of Kim included her GiCheon practice, and other activities such as dancing, playing musical instruments, and interaction with the world of adults. Her self-confidence grew and her social self expanded. Kim's new social self manifested also outside of the GiCheon community in Kim's relationship with other children at school. Now these relationships are marked by more self-confidence.

I was introvert... emotionally I was shrinking ... I did not have self-confidence. ...with GiCheon I got self-assured. My personality also changed ... For example, when I first went to school, I did not have friends or acquaintances ... I did not talk to people first, [hoping that] someone would talk to me, start a conversation.... I did not take any action. But now I have approached them, asking "what is your name?"... Psychologically .. self-confidence was formed. In the past ... if I disliked something, I could not even say that. ... Now if I dislike something [I say] "I dislike that". ... [Before that] I bore with things (ch'amta).[72] *Because I focused too much on the other person. [I wondered] "if I said ... that I disliked something – what would the other person think of me?" But if we bear with things [like that], the relationship gets worse ... mutual communication does not work. I realize that*

[72]Nancy Abelmann suggests this translation of *ch'amta*, as I have noted in Chapter Two.

[now]. […] With friends, I was watching them closely, trying to read their minds (nunch'i pogi). If I did this and that, what would she think of me? Should I do this? Should I do that? I was looking for an answer, but there is no answer [to this question]. I just have to do my best. If I like that friend and I treat her well, it will turn out all right for me. And so I got more friends. […] I realized that if I treated people well, I would get more friends, even though they are not my friends now.

GiCheon made Kim bear with things less and talk more, bringing better communication. Her social self, related to her school functioning, was modified along the first vector, following her self-crafting process. She became more open, and started expressing directly her likes and dislikes, acquiring more friends at school.

Kim's slightly philosophical understanding of *suryŏn* as a personally important study is supported by other GiCheon practitioners. Here is how Chang Namju talks about this: *In my case, I spent three years here [in the GiCheon studio], and will spend more [time here]. […] I tell people around me [...] that there is a good* suryŏn *method called GiCheon. We use the expression* suryŏn*, but when I talk to those people I use the expression* undong. Suryŏn *has a bit different meaning from* undong*, doesn't it? […] In [the word]* suryŏn *different messages […], individually important values are included. Something that makes me grow, […] a philosophical spiritual element for self-perfection […]. The expression* undong *relates only to the body, health, etc. of the person. So for ordinary people […] the expression* suryŏn *is difficult to accept […]. […] For ordinary people the word* suryŏn *means something [that only] very special people do […]. So when I talk with them [I try to show that* suryŏn*] is not something [only] special people do. Every person is special, […] I use the word* undong *in order to lower the threshold. […] [I tell them] "if you are interested, come and try [GiCheon practice]".*

For Chang, *suryŏn* contains a philosophical, spiritual element of self-growth and self-perfection, and individually important values. This echoes Kim Yŏnghŭi's vision of *suryŏn* as a difficult process of self-development, personally selected and personally meaningful. From Chang's narrative it seems that his understanding of *suryŏn* is shared by people around him. Ordinary people associate *suryŏn* with *something [that only] very special people do,* this is why Chang does not use the word *suryŏn* when advertising GiCheon to others, in order to not scare them away.

GiCheon trainees often discuss the difficulty of bringing new people to a GiCheon studio and keeping them practicing there. This difficulty is usually attributed to the fact that the positions are hard and painful. Yet, this hardship has positive moments for Kim Yŏnghŭi and for Pak Kyŏngae, to whose interview we now turn. Pak Kyŏngae, a bank team manager in her fifties at the time of the interview, talks about *suryŏn* mainly in the context of the endurance of hardship. Pak also refers to the concept of *ch'amta*, but her perception is different from Kim's.

4.4 *Suryŏn* as endurance of hardship

*"*Suryŏn" *is something I want to do, but that process is hard, but I bear it, endure it and develop myself [through it]* says Kim Yŏnghŭi. For bank team manager Pak Kyŏngae sustaining hardship and performing purification are the main characteristics of GiCheon *suryŏn,* as demonstrated in this extract from her interview:

-*GiCheon is really good sports (*undong*). […] It is actually* suryŏn*, not* undong.

-*What is* suryŏn*, in your opinion?*

-Suryŏn*? […]* Suryŏn *is the cleansing* (takkko kanŭn kŏt) *of body and mind-heart together. […] Habits or wrong things are corrected […]. And the mind-heart also […] - through the process of making it bright?. To suppress bad feelings, to feel more secure […] relaxed? […]*

The ability to maintain the mind-heart in a relaxed state … […] When one is relaxed because she is lucky and has no troubles […]- but this is not always possible for a human being. In life everyone has troubles. But despite of these troubles the act of staying calm and peaceful – is suryŏn*. This is also true of the body, […] the pain of the physical should be manageable.* Suryŏn *is bringing yourself to the level where you can manage your pain. Even if it hurts, to be able to handle your condition, or just to accept the fact that it hurts. […] We cannot correct everything […]. Even if it is a bit uncomfortable, we have to go with it together.*

For Pak *suryŏn* is an exercise in cleansing the wrong habits of the body and *brightening the mind-heart - suppressing bad feelings.* The idea of cleansing the wrong habits of the body reminds us of the interpretation of *suryŏn* given by Cho Chinsik and by Yi T'aegyŏng. However for Pak, *suppressing and managing the pain* are central, describing her striving for self-modification. The concepts of patience and endurance evoked by Pak are all tinged with the idea of suppression To accept the hard, the painful, the uncomfortable, *to be able to handle your condition* and *cleanse the mind-body*, these are the outcomes of her GiCheon training. Another extract from her interview continues in a similar vein:

… In family relationships… I learned to bear things (ch'amta) *better. Before that I would be fighting... But with family, you have to accept things because there is no choice. … It is not something you can solve by fighting. We have to accept things and let them go, with GiCheon* suryŏn *I learned to do it a little bit better. […]. So while my tolerance for stress has increased, I can now maintain continuously what is important for me and my strength to go forward has increased ...*

In her interview Pak Kyŏngae also talks about the difficulty of maintaining a highly demanding career and simultaneously functioning as a mother and a wife in contemporary South Korea. Her various tasks are not easy to combine and her life is full of stress. For Pak,

GiCheon *suryŏn* is a stress-relieving method. It helps her to bear what she has to bear, she observes that with GiCheon her *ch'amta* potential and her strength have grown.

Ch'amta, bearing with things, is a common expression in the Korean language that is often used by women when discussing relationships and attitudes (Abelmann 2003: 74-77, 82-86, 172), as mentioned in Chapter Two. For Pak, *ch'amta* is forbearance, the product of her emotional stability and peace of mind. This is her resistance against hardship in an attempt to maintain her self-integrity. For Pak, *ch'amta* lies along the first vector, this is what she chooses and aspires to, and this is what her GiCheon *suryŏn* is about. Kim Yŏnghŭi, however, interprets *ch'amta* differently. In the experience of Kim, *ch'amta* is associated with Kim's older, pre-modified self, formed along the second vector. *Ch'amta* is what Kim did before she gained self-confidence. By *ch'amta* Kim means holding back, keeping silent and lacking self-expression. She contrasts this with more outgoing communication supported by her newly found self-confidence. So for Kim Yŏnghŭi *suryŏn* led to an escape from *ch'amta* behavior, while for Pak *suryŏn* led to an increase in *ch'amta* ability.

In the interview, Pak Kyŏngae shows aspirations to develop a contemplative view on life, to learn acceptance and reconciliation. These intentions lie along the first vector and relate to her mind-set, her emotions and cognition, her body, and to her family relationships. But the hardships Pak is confronting are coming from the outside; they are the forces of the second vector she attempts to counteract. This is achieved by building a stronger self, one capable of forbearance and determination. *My tolerance for stress has increased, I can now maintain continuously what is important for me and my strength to go forward has increased.* This is how Pak describes her struggle with the difficulties of life, a struggle carried out along the first vector of progression. GiCheon helps her in this struggle, also enhancing her efficiency as a worker:

I often go on business trips. … If I practice GiCheon for thirty, forty minutes before sleeping, I sleep really well and the time difference is not a problem ... And the next day when I wake up my body is light. … After you are in the airplane for twelve hours, you are tired. The tiredness of the body is immediately relieved. … The feeling in the body changes, and the time difference is not felt much. … My colleague was getting out into the park, and I was solving this problem staying inside the room. … These are very economical exercises. The space … even a little bit of space is enough. The time … if you practice … just twenty, thirty minutes, you feel relaxed. For busy people who do not have time, it is the best physical activity. …

GiCheon *suryŏn* helps Pak to overcome jetlag on business trips, thus enhancing her work performance as a team manager at a bank. In addition, *suryŏn* for Pak involves developing better *ch'amta* ability and better functioning as a mother. In short, she presents GiCheon *suryŏn* as the ideal practice for the modern office worker. Besides perfecting herself personally, Pak attempts to help other women around her to cultivate themselves.

I suggested … practicing GiCheon … to my […] junior colleagues … Through GiCheon I managed my stress. … I cultivated courage, confidence. Something like spiritual stability. So I recommended GiCheon to my junior female colleagues, because in this society women easily get hurt. … So from that point of view … GiCheon could be good ... But they do not listen. … I have many young female junior colleagues.

Pak thinks GiCheon *suryŏn* is good for women, for it makes them stronger. She talks about women as socially vulnerable: *in this society women easily get hurt.* GiCheon could be a remedy for that, as it cultivates *courage, confidence and spiritual stability.* However, younger bank workers do not listen to Pak and show no inclination to join. Nevertheless, for Park, recommending GiCheon, not only to her colleagues at work but also to other women, is important. Two years after starting the practice she has written a short text on her GiCheon

experiences, a copy of which I received. In the concluding part Pak proposes trying GiCheon "especially to women in their early forties who feel that their bodies are not like before", as GiCheon makes "the mind-heart peaceful and the body strong". Through GiCheon she attempts to stimulate women to brave social circumstances which she perceives as challenging, to cultivate the "female social self".

4.5 *Suryŏn* as purification

The imagery of suryŏn as the *cleansing of body and mind-heart*, which came up in the beginning of Pak Kyŏngae's interview extract, is accepted by most GiCheon practitioners. Kwŏn Kuho explains it through a few concrete metaphors:

> Suryŏn *means "cleansing" (*닦는 *tangnŭn) […], it is like washing a plate after eating. […] In the body murky* ki *is accumulated […], it is like getting rid of this* ki. *In life, murky* ki *occurs because of stress, or from food. […] If water […] is disturbed, it gets murky […]. If you throw soil into water, it becomes muddy. But if the water flows, it purifies, because of circulation. […] GiCheon* suryŏn *or other kinds of* suryŏn *are similar. If* ki *is circulating, any murky substance is washed away, and good* ki *is accumulated […].*

Here Kwŏn relates to a popular metaphor in orally transmitted GiCheon philosophy which compares *ki* in the human body to flowing water. Stress or unwholesome food stains the *ki* and makes it murky. GiCheon *suryŏn*, however, makes the *ki* flow. Similarly to running water, through flowing *ki* gets purified. GiCheon theory compares the human to a lake which is connected to other lakes by routes and channels. A certain amount of water (*ki* manifesting as blood and lymph, awareness, consciousness, sensibility and in other forms) circulates within the lake; new water constantly comes in, and some water breaks away. As the new water (*ki* manifesting also as food, sensations, experiences, perceived words and actions of others etc.) comes in, there is a constant need to purify the water. There always will be bad

water left and some stagnation cannot be avoided. But the relative amount of bad and stagnant water can be reduced, in an attempt to achieve better circulation, the goal of GiCheon practice.

GiCheon stances are supposed to facilitate smooth passage of *ki* through the body and mind-heart – allowing food and liquids to be absorbed easily, sweat and excrements to leave the body comfortably, thoughts and emotions to be perceived and realized efficiently, and words to be said and actions to be performed with greater straightforwardness and simplicity.[73] In GiCheon thought this is addressed as *ki* flow and metaphorically compared to the circulation of water. As I have mentioned in Chapter Two, these ideas have much in common with traditional Korean medicine, and are interiorized and articulated by many trainees.

4.6 *Suryŏn* as cultivating the social body

This is how GiCheon practitioner Kim Yŏngbo talks about *suryŏn* as purification: *The word* suryŏn (修練) *consists of two characters:* su (修) – *to cleanse, and* ryŏn (練) – *to purify/to discipline. This means to cleanse my body and mind-heart, to repeat this endlessly, through* naegasinjang, tanbaegong*, the six basic positions, then through our dynamic disciplines and sword art […], to practice steadily and perfect myself.*[74] *That is* suryŏn*.*

Kim talks about *suryŏn* as cleansing and purification, stressing its continuous, infinite quality. Body and mind-heart should be polished perpetually and steadily, bringing the perfection of the self. As many other trainees, Kim does not intend to perfect his individual self only.

[73] I discuss the motif of "straightforwardness and simplicity" in greater detail in Chapter Five, referring to it as "smooth and effortless passage".

[74] Mr. Kim uses here the expression *nae chasinŭl pparaganŭn kŏt*, literally "washing myself", in the sense of "perfecting myself".

In a larger sense […] in Korea GiCheon is still unknown […]. So in order to make it more widely known […] … if one has something good […] one should never sink into self-satisfaction, alone. […] One should share it with the others, then the value [of this good thing] can double […]. In Korea still, if we say "GiCheon" […] [it is less known] than other martial arts or so […], it's a shame.

Kim Yŏngbo aspires to cultivate the social self, opening GiCheon to a wider population. He sees it as his obligation, and as countering individual self-satisfaction. The motif of GiCheon *suryŏn* as self-perfection starting on the level of the individual body but going on toward the cultivation of the body of the society, is time and again emphasized in GiCheon books. *Suryŏn* should be carried out not for individual interests alone, but also for society. An ideal GiCheon practitioner is cultivating herself for the purpose of personal health, advancement and enlightenment, while actively contributing to the development of South Korea (Kim Hŭisang and Kich'ŏnmun Ponmun ed. 2000: 10, 38-39).

The idea of developing the social self also comes up in the interviews of Cho Chinsik, Kim Yŏnghŭi and Pak Kyŏngae. Cho Chinsik relates to the social self of his GiCheon group, when he tries to awaken in them the same process his teacher Kim Hŭisang activated in him. Kim Yŏnghŭi develops her school self when she wins over more friends and improves her relationships with them. She also discovers her GiCheon social self when she identifies with adults practicing by her side in the studio, a point we touched upon in this chapter and also in Chapter Three. Pak Kyŏngae expresses attempts to attract other women to GiCheon, to support and strengthen their common female self, composed firstly of her younger female colleagues at the bank, and secondly of other South Korean women around her. According to GiCheon books, this is what *suryŏn* is and should be about. And this is close to what Kim Yŏngbo means: do not practice for your personal gain, share with others, and the value of what you have will double.

4.7 Applying the two vectors model

In this chapter I have applied the two vectors model in my analysis of the experiences of the practitioners. I have portrayed the resistance of the first vector achieved through GiCheon practice against the second vector; intentional subjective drives that attempt to counterbalance external, unconsciously absorbed influences. But we have to bear in mind that according to an alternative understanding the function of GiCheon practice itself might sometimes be categorized as fitting the second vector, and not the first. This is the case when we look at the change in motivation: the intention behind the practice – and sometimes the intentions behind other actions unrelated to the practice – is modified by the fact and reality of practice itself.

The narrative of Cho Chinsik shows that initially he had a strong inclination to objectify himself. "How do others see me from the outside?", "How does my training look from the outside; do I appear to perform the exercises well?" were the questions that troubled him. He was pre-occupied with the gaze flowing along the second vector from the outside toward the inside. The intervention of his teacher Kim Hŭisang changed that. After a short exchange with his teacher, Cho started practicing for himself. The direction of the flow from the external toward the internal changed toward the external from the internal. The teacher was the catalyst for this change, an active carrying signal that caused the transference from the second vector to the first. The "Other" thus served as a vehicle for transfer between the two vectors.[75] The ability to observe and modify his habits and his way of thinking comes about through the active and intentional interference of the first vector into the work of the

[75] However, if we consider GiCheon practice itself as an "external influence" administered on the self of Cho, then we might also categorize the change of his intention as having been impacted by the external. This is also true for the experience of Kim Yŏnghŭi.

second vector, old patterns were formed unconsciously but now they are visualized and intentionally modified.

Kim Yŏnghŭi in the beginning felt the impact of the realm of the external; her authoritative father and her mother seemingly decided her life for her. Her own agency was rather weak. Kim's father, who brought her to the GiCheon studio, and the practice in which he made her engage were the catalysts that caused Kim to develop her internal self. Accordingly, she developed free agency and successfully passed from a state in which she was impacted upon and controlled by externalities to one in which her internal drive is decisive.

In the case of Pak Kyŏngae we see that she had a strong actualized self from the start. Pak talks a great deal about suppressing, overcoming and becoming peaceful in spite of pain. Notwithstanding her agency, her internal self still seems to be troubled by life. She therefore utilizes GiCheon as a tool for developing internal strength further to cope with external conditions and uses it to advance the resistive capacity of her own agency against externalities.

The notion of *suryŏn* as purification emphasized by Kwŏn Kuho likewise involves transference from the second vector to the first. Purification or cleansing through conscious directed effort implies overcoming a murky state which came about without the intention of the self.

4.8 Applying Foucault's technologies of self

Foucault's concept of technologies of the self which I use to approach GiCheon involves questioning and inquiring about self-formation. The problem of forming the self opens on two analytical levels. When it comes to the timescale, the first level of analysis is the past. What is my old self? What pushed it into being? Who am I and how did I come to appear like

this? This is an inquiry into the old, pre-modified self. The second analytical level ventures into the future. What do I want to develop into and who am I becoming? This is an examination of a new, potential self, and its possible trajectories of progress. On a theoretical and methodological level these are two different questions, one relating to the past, the other querying the future. Yet, for the self and its relation to the world, the past and the future intersect and merge in the present moment.

The story of Cho Chinsik related above demonstrates that the realization of the qualities of the old self and the coming to life of a new self sometimes take place simultaneously, in the present moment. The moment I see the old self, it changes. This is when the moment of self-knowledge turns into a moment of self-transformation. A different dynamic is revealed in the story of Kim Yŏnghŭi, though. For her, self-modification preceded self-realization. Only after her old self was left behind, her newly formed self became aware of what her old self had previously been. As to Pak Kyŏngae, for her the notion of self-knowledge, it seems, did not constitute an issue at all. Both her previous self and her desired future self were visible to her current self clearly. For Pak, what was at stake was developing the ability to bear the burdens of life with dignity, and to successfully progress from the old self toward the new self, strong and forbearing.

In this chapter I have followed the development of the intentional, emotional, cognitive, physical, familial and social selves in the transformative progress undertaken by a number of GiCheon practitioners. In this context the notions of the Other, of returning to the source, of freedom, hardship and purification underlined by Foucault in his conceptualization of the technologies of self (2001: 16, 83, 92, 123-130, 167, 476-477) are important for anchoring my analysis.

In his research on the techniques of self-change and self-modification Foucault has established the essentiality of these moments or elements as particular techniques which I

have identified in the narratives of the practitioners. We have examined how these vehicles of self-transformation are accounted for and utilized by the trainees, both in their direct experience and in its articulation. The first is the presence of the Other and her or his role. Foucault stresses that only through an active involvement of the Other can the moment of self-alteration take place (Foucault 2001: 123-130). The presence of the Other, as a technique for self-transformation, manifests in the narration of Cho Chinsik.

Another element Foucault defines as central to self-formation is a return to the source. Time and again he reiterates the idea of going back to the origin in his discussion on self-care (2001: 92, 476-477). Chronologically, this return to the source can also be interpreted as going back in time. This also shows in the narration of Cho Chinsik, when he talks about *becoming a young child.* This motif of recollected or imagined "original purity" is also articulated by Kim Yŏnghŭi when she talks about her *desire to maintain her original intention* in an extract from her interview quoted in Chapter Three.

An important moment in self-formation discussed by Foucault in his account of self-care in ancient Greece and Rome is the notion of freedom and free choice (2001: 83, 128, 477), manifesting actively in the narrations of Cho Chinsik and Kim Yŏnghŭi. Foucault stresses also the aspect of hardship as central to the techniques of self-development (2001: 46, 146). Hardship is emphasized in the narrations of Kim Yŏnghŭi and Pak Kyŏngae. For Foucault, bearing hardship is often linked to cleansing and purification (2001: 16, 167). As I have clarified in section 4.1 of this chapter, the theme of cleansing is already present in the word *suryŏn* itself. Kwŏn Kuho elaborates on this aspect in section 4.5.

Looking at the inner connections of these symbolic means, we notice the links between the Other and freedom, between hardship and purification, and between purification and returning to the source. The metaphor of the self as imprisoned within a cell is common to many traditions of self-cultivation. If the self is inside the cell, it cannot get out. Only the

Other can unlock the cell from the outside and thus assist the self with gaining freedom. As to purification and hardship, the common motif is that a dirty thing is hard to clean, and the cleansing process is painful and uncomfortable for the thing, like a cloth that is being washed, as Kim Yŏngbo says in the extract from his interview (footnote 13). The cleansing also constitutes a return to an "originally clean" state of the self, hence its connection with the return to the origin, emphasized by Cho Chinsik.

I have begun to elaborate on the purification aspect of *suryŏn* and how it is explained in GiCheon theory in the section 4.5. We have seen that this point is critical for many practitioners, and it is often verbalized by them. The discourse of hardship as purifying and restoring the flow of *ki* will continue in the following chapters, particularly in Chapter Six in the context of pain in GiCheon.

4.9 Attitudes toward *suryŏn* as personally colored experiential modalities

As I have discussed in the Introduction, the study of the interviews for the purpose of writing this dissertation has made me realize that each practitioner has a narrative direction or narrative inclination in her or his account, which I decided to call experiential modalities. We can trace this narrative tendency also in the stories discussed in this chapter. For Cho the leading theme of his account was gaining an understanding of his old behavioral patterns, a technique of self-knowledge and self-transformation he utilized later as a teacher. Cho became a GiCheon teacher himself, and in describing his GiCheon experience he stressed the role of his teacher Kim Hŭisang – the teacher's role is central to Cho's account. Cho Chinsik thinks, speaks and conceptualizes as a teacher, as someone whose task is to gain understanding and pass it on. The way Cho reflects on what GiCheon brought to him, on his role, the way he frames GiCheon practice shows that being a teacher forms his experience and narrative. Becoming and being a teacher defines his narrative direction.

For Kim Yŏnghŭi, the main motif of her interpretation and articulation of her experience was self-awareness and self-actualization. She perceived her wishes and desires as distinct of those of her parents. Kim Yŏnghŭi, a university student in her early twenties at the time of the interview, recalls the process and progress of adolescence developing into adulthood. As much as her development and increasing awareness of herself come from her GiCheon practice, they also come from being a growing child and a maturing teenager. These factors form and impact her narrative tendency. The aspect of aging while being engaged in GiCheon is remarked upon by other trainees. When you practice for a number of years, your GiCheon practice becomes part of life. If you generate wisdom and enlightenment, it is difficult to differentiate where they originate. Do they come because of GiCheon practice or because of the passing of the years?

For Pak Kyŏngae, the third protagonist of the current chapter, the focus of her narration lay in her ability to bear pain and move forward nevertheless. She emphasizes the qualities of fortitude and forbearance, these are the qualities she cultivates and aspires to. Her narrative tendency is largely influenced by the fact that she is a middle-aged female company worker, having to multi-task and deal with stress.

The next chapter pursues a few additional themes or directions of personally colored experiential modalities in the interviews. For example for Sin Hyŏnju, one of the protagonists of Chapter Five, it is the notion of a “smooth and effortless passage”, connected to ideas of warmth, smoothness and good communication. This motif was mostly activated in her communication with her parents. This is Sin’s narrative direction, and “smooth and effortless passage” is the personally colored experiential modality central to her account.

Chapter Five: Personally colored experiential modalities

5.1 Supporters of *suryŏn*: their personally colored experiential modalities

The narrations of many GiCheon adepts convey phenomena and experiences related to the mind, the body, family and society, in clusters of sensations, feelings, impressions and ideas. These clusters often contain vectors of progressive advance from the body to the family (body→family or individual→family), from the body to society (body→society or individual→society) or from the body toward the universe (body→universe or individual→universe). For example, the sensations of warmth and softness start in the body and continue toward the family, or toward "openness", which can be openness to the words of others or toward other things, such as music (the case of Sin described in this chapter). These are examples of personally colored experiential modalities. They originate in the bodily self, but continue outward, toward the familial, social and universal self.

The power words *ki* and *suryŏn* often serve as the axes of narration for the practitioners. Culturally recommended experiential modalities generated by these notions have been examined in the previous two chapters. I define them as "culturally" recommended experiential modalities by the very fact of their generation through power words. This chapter follows a few additional themes or directions of the interviews which I have decided to call "personally colored experiential modalities" and they differ from the culturally advised experiential modalities. Personally colored experiential modalities are individual for each person.

Culturally advised experiential modalities form individual experience from the outside, according to the cultural norms and following the second vector of progression. Though the experience originates with the self, it is formed, formulated and articulated within and according to a culturally advised modality. Personally colored experiential modalities

concern the formation, formulation and articulation of an experience following the first vector, that is according to the preference of the self. When using the term "experiential modality" in this chapter, I refer to such personally colored experiential modalities, and not to the culturally recommended ones.

Narratives are trying to express bodily experience, but also bodily experience creates narration. Experiential modalities originate in the body. In the case of GiCheon practitioners, the tonality, the direction and the pattern of their narratives are rooted in the bodily experience of GiCheon positions, and mostly in *naegasinjang*. At times, the bodily experience that foregrounds the narrative tonality occurs not at the exact moment of performing a GiCheon position, but is felt in everyday life as a general result of or in connection with the practice. Looking back at the protagonists of Chapter Four, in this section I will review again the experiential modalities central to their accounts. I will identify the bodily experience they stem from, thus attempting to access reality through the representation, or to find experience in the narration.

The experiential modality of Cho is "identifying and understanding old behavioral patterns". According to his narration, this experiential modality stems from that one moment when Cho had a problem with performing a GiCheon exercise, as he described in Chapter Four. At that moment he felt physical discomfort and emotional distress. A conversation with his teacher Kim Hŭisang then took place and Cho had a flash of enlightenment. He gained a better vision of his past behavioral patterns. Additionally, he also gained a better vision of others – now he can recognize the "desire to look competent in the eyes of other people" in his own GiCheon students. This experiential modality of Cho starts in his own body, but continues toward the bodies of others.

The expansion of the experiential modality from the individual body toward the social

body is equally evident in the case of Pak. Her experiential modality is "bearing pain with fortitude". Ms. Pak's pain is clearly connected to standing in the *naegasinjang* position, but for her this pain becomes a metaphor for the general pain and burden of life. This metaphor in turn informs how she understands not just herself, but life on its myriads of levels. As we have seen in Chapter Four, Pak's wish to remedy her pain by developing strength progresses toward her aspiration to introduce other women into GiCheon practice. Life is difficult not just for Pak alone - *in this society women easily get hurt.* An evolution of a personal self into a social self occurs in the narratives of both Pak and Cho. Pak's desire to build her own strength continues toward an objective to cultivate the strength of other women. Cho's understanding of his old behavioral patterns develops into a yearning to help others achieve an awareness similar to his. Both Pak and Cho identify with their group. For Pak these are women in general and young female colleagues in particular; for Cho these are people with specific character traits in general and those practicing GiCheon at his studio in particular. These are two examples of experiential modalities starting in the bodily self and unfolding toward the social self, along the first vector of progression. A social commentary is implicit in the narrations of Pak and Cho, who portray contemporary South Korean society as a challenging place for working women with families (Pak) and a marked sensitivity to social pressure (Cho). Yet Pak and Cho do not show interest in criticizing their social circumstances. Instead, they are both looking for survival strategies which will work for them personally, but also for others, socially.

For Kim Yŏnghŭi the experiential modality of self-discovery and self-confidence starts in *naegasinjang*. Maintaining the arduous position seems almost impossible during the first seconds. *It is really hard, how can I continue doing that?* asks Kim in the extract quoted in Chapter Three. The self-confidence that is rooted in sustaining the painful *naegasinjang* develops through the discovery of an unexpected ability of the self. This ability, however, is

not limited to *naegasinjang* alone. As we have seen in Chapter Four, sustaining the position provides Kim with the confidence to accomplish other rigorous enterprises in life: *I could achieve anything!* The rise of self-confidence contributes to further self-discovery on multiple planes: w*hat I wanted to do, what I liked … I discovered things like the dream [of my future]*. Kim's self-assurance spreads toward other areas of her life, including social skills. *I did not talk to people first […]. But now I have approached them, asking "what is your name?"*. Arising in the bodily *naegasinjang* experience and extending toward various other spheres of life, Kim's self-confidence expands toward her social self, following the first vector of progression.

5.2 Kim Pohŭi: experiential modality of "hardship and boredom"

Kim Yŏnghŭi came to the GiCheon studio together with her sister younger by one year, Kim Pohŭi (not a real name). Unlike her elder sister Pohŭi did not report any remarkable changes in her life stemming from the GiCheon practice. I think she used her interview with me as a chance to voice her anger and resentment about being forced to participate in the training from the age of twelve till the age of seventeen. Most likely Kim Pohŭi perceived me as a representative of the GiCheon organization. A number of times she stressed how much she hated GiCheon because it is hard and painful. However, her negativity was not always clear-cut, and at times she was ambivalent. For her, the positive things gained by learning GiCheon were thinking more, opportunities for retrospection, becoming stronger physically, and feeling pride when GiCheon was shown on TV. She could tell her friends "I did that!". However, her general evaluation of GiCheon experience was rather negative:

[…] It was awkward and unusual. It was also hard. I was an elementary school student, but there were many grandfathers, adults. It was uncomfortable […] so I hated that. […] Socializing with Taekwondo children of our age would be better. But we practiced with

grandfathers. […] I hated that. I wanted to mingle with the children of the neighborhood […]. One should talk with friends with whom one has common points of interest, and play. Alone one gets the feeling of being a "loner". […] If I tell my friends […] that I did Taekwondo, they know Taekwondo. […] If I say "I do GiCheon", they do not know it, so […] …

- So also now you wish you did Taekwondo, and not GiCheon?

- […] Half-half […]. Sometimes I think like this, sometimes like that. Through GiCheon I learned self-defense.

I identify the major experiential modality of Kim Pohŭi's narrative as "hardship and boredom". Her difficulty and discomfort were grounded in the pain of the *naegasinjang* experience and the physically and emotionally uncomfortable association with *grandfathers* instead of children of her own age. GiCheon was difficult for Kim Pohŭi not just physically, but also mentally and socially.

Like her older sister, Kim Pohŭi is also a practicing Catholic. When asked to compare GiCheon and Catholicism, she portrayed Catholic practice as effortless and enjoyable, and GiCheon as problematic and demanding: *When I go to Catholic Church, my friends are there, I can hang out with them, I feel good, lots of people to talk to, I feel at ease. But GiCheon is hard for the body because you have to bend [the joints] …*

Kim Pohŭi contrasts Catholicism with GiCheon. The former is easy and pleasant, the latter is hard and painful. Interestingly, in the extract above the easy and pleasant experience of visiting the church involves her social self - *hanging out with friends,* while the hard and painful experience of practicing GiCheon involves her bodily self - *bending [the joints].* Yet, GiCheon was distressing to Kim Pohŭi on various planes of the self, including the bodily and social level. Equally, Catholic practice was agreeable for her both bodily and socially, and the above extract serves as a summary of that. However, the social element is a key element for

Kim Pohŭi. In her relation to Catholicism and to GiCheon Kim Pohŭi focuses on their social context, being happy about the former and frustrated about the later.

Kim Pohŭi's account is remarkably different from the narrative of her sister who is just one year older. As sisters Pohŭi and Yŏnghŭ lived in the same home, were brought up similarly and attended the same school and church. But my interview with the older sister lasted three times longer than the interview with the younger sister. The former had much more to say. The same circumstances were perceived by two sisters in contrary ways. Training together with adults was in retrospect an eye-opener for Kim Yŏnghŭi: *Through GiCheon I met many adults. I [saw their] ways of behavior. I got to know the way people should treat each other. ... "There is also an [adult] world like this" [I realized]*. However, for Pohŭi being with much older people was distressing and almost traumatic. The many benefits that Kim Yŏnghŭi named as resulting from the GiCheon practice, such as the tendency to wake up at dawn, the habit to organize her thoughts and future plans during regular meditation, growing self-confidence, a deeper perception of Catholic religion, improving relationships with family and friends – did not exist for Kim Pohŭi: she did not mention any of them. This is an example of how the same *ki suryŏn* practice can affect different individuals in totally dissimilar fashion.

The examples of other GiCheon practitioners show that the deciding experiential modality for each individual is partially conditioned by gender, social position, family situation and environment. Yet, the case of the Kim sisters demonstrates that at times the individual tendency might be decisive in defining the modality of the experience. The social

position, environment and gender of the two sisters were identical. In spite of that, their experiential modalities are almost contradictory.[76]

5.3 Sin Hyŏnju: the modalities of experiencing "softness and warmth", and "smooth and effortless passage"

In the autoethnographical dimension of the present text I study my own experiences of the GiCheon practice, together with the experiences of my interviewees. Verbal articulation of GiCheon experiences has always been difficult for me, and the diary held for the purpose of this research did not help much in my analysis. But when I listened to and read the interviews of women of an age similar to mine, of similar body types and similar personalities, I saw myself connecting to many points of their accounts. Focusing on an interview with Ms. Sin, in this chapter I will also refer to my own experiences of GiCheon practice which I recalled as I listened to her story. At the end of this section, I will briefly present a few extracts from the interviews of other trainees, which allude to some points brought up in Sin's narrative.

In my personal case, performing GiCheon positions did not pose a problem. It was the recognition of the sensations and perceptions brought to me by GiCheon practice through observing myself, which was difficult. I also appeared to forget quickly whatever I experienced. During my interview with Ms. Sin my impression was, that for her the reading of GiCheon text inscribed on her body was not difficult. Besides being orderly, logical and rich in detail, her narrative was smooth and clear, manifesting her ability for self-reflection and articulation. And that while at the time her GiCheon experience was one year only, whereas I had reached almost ten years of practice. I was also a GiCheon teacher, and thus trained to teach, but I had not learned to relate my own experience. As evidenced by her interview, Ms. Sin could register, remember, voice and analyze the sensations related to her

[76] A counter argument could be that the age difference, even of only one year, was an important factor. At such an age children can develop very quickly. This might explain why one enjoyed getting to know older people and the other found it awkward.

GiCheon training. It is for me, however, to attempt a second layer of analysis, this time not of the direct experience, but of Ms. Sin's articulation of that experience, which I recorded and here translate into English.[77]

[…] Sometimes [during GiCheon practice] I felt sleepy, I felt tired […]. […] I felt numb in my hands; sometimes three left fingers went numb. It was as if the blood did not circulate there. Or the fingers got very cold. […] First I felt pain in my back, legs, shoulders. After that I felt anger and annoyance. Like tickling. Strong tickling. Like itching. […] Sometimes I get angry, I think: "why do I do it?" [...] Once I had a very good feeling. While doing it [the position] I suddenly thought about very happy events. [...] Sometimes, it is funny, when the music was on, I wanted to dance, to the music.

From the beginning, we observe in the account of Ms. Sin a notion of diversity. She felt many different things. She mentions numbness, cold, tickling and itching in the body. On the level of the emotional and cognitive self she felt anger, but also happiness – she thought about very happy events. She also wanted to dance, which testifies to a sensitivity to music, a point to which I return later on in this section.

[…] In the middle [of my practice], I felt many temporary things [that later disappeared]: I could not sleep, or was not at all hungry, or I was very hungry, or very sleepy. The amplitude of the changes, of the ups and downs in my bodily sensations, has increased. And in my mind-heart, the same thing. In the beginning, when I started GiCheon, I always felt very good. I felt joyful and had a bright mood. Other people said that my personality became much brighter than before. Later, I sometimes felt in the mind-heart similar [things as I felt] in the body. After feeling very bright, I sometimes felt very gloomy. The rise and fall of emotions became very sharp. […] Usually, as we live in society, we have to regulate our emotions, not to show what we like or dislike. We have to keep up an

[77] Interview of 08.12.2010, Pusan, South Korea.

appropriate appearance. But the amplitude of my emotions became very large, to the degree that I could not manage my emotions sometimes.

The other theme central to Sin's account is contrast. She talks about insomnia and sleepiness, hunger and the absence of hunger, joy and gloominess. The rise and fall of these various contrasting sensations and feelings reached an amplitude that expanded to a degree that Ms. Sin was almost unable to control. The expanding amplitude is another chief motif of her narrative.

An important point in the narration of Ms. Sin is the connection she draws between the processes occurring on the level of the bodily self and the developments on the level of the emotional self. *The amplitude of the changes, of the ups and downs in bodily sensations, has increased. And in my mind-heart, the same thing.* The ability of Ms. Sin to note and articulate the similarity of the processes in the body and in the mind-heart has contributed greatly to my conceptualization of experiential modalities. Her account is a vivid example of how the experiential modalities manifest similarly on different levels of the self. I have applied my insights regarding experiential modalities from Ms. Sin's interview to the reports of other GiCheon practitioners. I have found that the mechanism of specific experiential modalities operating similarly on different levels of the self works equally well for analyzing the interview materials of other informants. Yet, the account of Ms. Sin is the most lucid and intelligible in this respect.

Up to now we have identified in the account of Ms. Sin an experiential modality of expanding amplitude of various sensations, both bodily and emotional. An additional experiential modality is articulated by Sin as *pain in my back, legs shoulders. After that I felt anger and annoyance. Like tickling. Strong tickling. Like itching. […] Sometimes I get angry, I think: "why do I do it?" [...].* Pain in the *naegasinjang* position, to which I dedicate Chapter Six, is a constant companion of the GiCheon practice. For most practitioners, pain in

naegasinjang is not evenly balanced, but wave-like, rising and falling as the minutes pass. Kim Wŏn'gyu, whose narrative I examine at the end of this chapter, is an apparent exception to this perception of pain. From my own experience I testify that the moments of stronger pain are accompanied by tickling or itching sensations, causing anger and annoyance. These are also the moments of self-doubt, when I ask myself, like Ms. Sin "why do I do it?". So the descriptive instances in the narrative of Sin that connect pain, annoyance, tickling, itching, and anger to self-questioning "why do I do it?" are not accidental. They manifest a particular experiential modality. This is a modality of certain unpleasant bodily sensations that on a level of the emotional self show as anger, while on a level of the cognitive or intellectual self they appear as self-doubt.

A different experiential modality manifests in Sin's account when she says *once I had a very good feeling*. Here she relates to the feeling in her body. I will attest from my experience that in the *naegasinjang* position, after the moments of tickling, itching, anger, annoyance and self-doubt, a good and peaceful feeling comes, of stability and relaxation. Ms. Sin, however, describes something a bit different. *While doing it [the position] I suddenly thought about very happy events. [...] Sometimes, it is funny, when the music was on, I wanted to dance, to the music.* Pleasant feelings in the body develop into happiness and joy, which evolve into a desire to dance. This is an additional experiential modality, occurring at several levels of the self: bodily, emotional and cognitive.

I find that some of the leading notions in Sin's account are warmth, softness and a smooth passage. This is how she articulates it: *[...] As the physical strength grows [...] I feel softness in my body, as if my bones are moving. ... I felt that my muscles were a bit stiff and hurt. But recently [my muscles] became soft and warm. My hands and feet are cold, and I am sensitive to cold. ... But [after starting GiCheon] there were times when I did not feel cold at all. Now I am less sensitive to cold. And now I sweat easily. Before I did not sweat much. ...*

And my skin became softer, better. And I have the feeling of lightness. My body became much lighter. And I sleep well now…

Ms. Sin talks about the softness and warmth of the muscles, as opposed to the stiff and hurt muscles of before, and about softness of the skin. She is less sensitive to cold, sweats easily, sleeps betters and her body feels light. I would like to divide these bodily sensations into two categories: the first category is softness (of muscles and skin) and warmness (of the muscles and the whole body, the second category is smooth and effortless passage (sweat appears and sleep comes with greater ease than before starting the practice). The following extracts of Sin's interview demonstrate that "softness and warmth" and "smooth and effortless passage" manifest also on other levels of the self.

[…] [As a result of GiCheon practice] my heart was getting larger.[78] *And when something was OK, I said "OK". And when it was not OK, I said "not OK". … In Korea the position of a woman is a bit different from that of a man […] At home I have to be a "good-natured daughter". […]. In my communication with other people, instead of checking myself and keeping silent, now, as I became much healthier, I tell them what I have to tell, and I can help them more, and I treat them better. I became calmer.*

Not only does the sweat appear with greater ease, but also words and feelings are expressed more freely and social communication is accomplished with greater straightforwardness and simplicity. Ms. Sin connects her physical strength to softness and a sense of movement in the body. *As my physical strength grows […] I feel softness in my body, as if my bones are moving*. This connotes motifs of transformation, echoing the experiential modality of *expanding amplitudes of contradictory sensations* in the body and the mind-heart, as discussed above. A dynamic process is occurring, bringing with it softness and warmth.

[78] *Maŭmi k'ŏjinda* (마음이 커진다), literally "the heart becomes larger", means being emotionally available, capable of connecting to others, not being engrossed with oneself.

After being stiff and hurt, the muscles become soft and warm. Also in her relationship with the people around her Ms. Sin now demonstrates a warmer human attitude: *I treat them better. I became calmer.*

I would metaphorically compare this process to the melting of the old self, and the forging of a new one. This half-melted self, soft, warm, and flexible is to a certain degree an ideal of GiCheon. It is contrasted with rigidness, ossification and coldness. Ms. Sin talks about the warmth of her skin, her muscles, her ability to better withstand cold temperatures, but also about her increased warmth and acceptance toward other people. The sense of warmth and softness of the skin, the muscles and the whole body develops into a mild and flexible attitude toward life, toward others and toward oneself. This is how Ms. Sin elaborates on her improved communication with the people around her.

[After beginning GiCheon] … my ability to accept grew. Before that, although I did not express it, I had different thoughts in my mind-heart. Sometimes when we say "OK" on the outside, actually inside we feel "not at all OK"… [You should say "OK"] without connection to how you feel inside. There is this standard, Koreans have it. …

Ms. Sin remarks on her growing ability to accept others, yet actually she continues to discuss not just acceptance, but also the expression of her feelings. She brings up a "two-way" communicative movement: from the others toward herself (acceptance), and from herself toward the others (expression). She voices criticism toward what she perceives as a social convention to say "OK" on the outside*, while feeling "not at all OK" inside.* If in the past she conformed to etiquette, this is not the case anymore:

When people feel hardship in the body, they become annoyed, without knowing it [...]. Then my relationships with close people, with my family, became more harmonious […]. As I became more relaxed […], instead of putting up with others and staying silent, I can accept

and understand other people, talk with them a bit more. After listening to another person […] I can find out what she wants, right? If I can do for her what she wants, I do that. If not, then not. Then the relationship, instead of being ambiguous, becomes a bit clearer. […] Making peace is easier [if you talk] […]. This talk does not turn into a dispute, but space is created for listening to each other and agreeing with each other.

GiCheon practice helps Ms. Sin to better carry out her familial and social duties as a woman and as a daughter of the family. *In Korea the position of a woman is a bit different from that of a man […] At home I have to be a "good-natured daughter".* Yet, Sin follows a new path in her attempt to conform to this standard. Before, she tried to be a *"good-natured daughter"* by *putting up with others and staying silent* in communicating with her parents and other people. She followed the principle of *saying "OK" on the outside,* while *feeling "not at all OK"* inside. Her new attitude, however, consists of *accepting and understanding other people* by *talking with them a bit more.* Sin is not silent anymore, she is expressive. *Making peace is easier [if you talk].* Her improved self-expression brings about harmonious communication and greater mutual understanding.

Sin Hyŏnju does not rebel against the existing familial or social order, nor does she openly challenge any social conventions. She does not argue with her parents or superiors. *This talk does not turn into a dispute, but space is created for listening to each other and agreeing with each other.* Her way of modifying the existing relationships lies in *making peace.* She achieves this by clarifying the ambiguous elements of the relationship by listening and talking.

The narration of Ms. Sin clearly connects bodily phenomena to mental, emotional, and social occurrences. Ms. Sin also links the uncomfortable feeling in the body resulting from ill health with annoyance and lack of patience in communicating with the people around

her. *When people feel hardship in the body, they become annoyed, without knowing it [...].* Her newly acquired methods of relating to others stem from her improved physical and mental-emotional condition. *So my relationships with close people, with my family, became more harmonious [...]. As I became more relaxed [...].* According to Ms. Sin, becoming more relaxed in her body and mind-heart contributes to better human communication. Other effects of relaxation are increased self-confidence and slowing down the pace of life:

[...] I became more relaxed in the mind-heart. I do not try to do things right now, immediately. I can wait until the right time to do things comes, and prepare. I am not hasty. Although it is not a perfectly calm mind, I can wait with tranquility. And something like trust. If I want something, I have confidence that I can achieve it. This is because my body follows [me when I want to do something]. For example, [if I plan] not to sleep at night but study for a few days, or whatever. I have thoughts like "I can do it!".

Besides Sin, many other practitioners comment on a growing self-assurance and self-trust resulting from the GiCheon practice. A classic example of self-confidence as a leading experiential modality is the case of Ms. Kim Yŏnghŭi described in Chapters Three and Four. Slowing down, which Sin expresses as becoming *not hasty* and *waiting with tranquility* is an effect of practice to which I strongly connect myself. I experienced increased *peacefulness,* and *slowed down the rhythm* of my life. I started listening to my body, ceasing working or studying when tired or sick. Within the dialog between the bodily self and an emotional-cognitive self, my bodily self started to assert itself. It obtained a voice in a decision-making debate on "what to do". As a result, my usual stress has decreased.

Ms. Sin describes a similar process when she talks about trust. *And something like trust. If I want something, I have confidence that I can achieve it. This is because my body follows [me when I want to do something].* The intentional-emotional-cognitive self of Sin trusts that the bodily self will be able to achieve the projects she planned. This has to do with

the greater strength of the physical self, but also with a better communication between Sin's intentional-emotional-cognitive self and her bodily self. In my case, the trust is related more to the demands of the bodily self, and the growing tendency of the emotional-cognitive self to agree to the requirements of the bodily self - to eat or to sleep, for example. Both in my own case and in the case of Ms. Sin GiCheon practice brings better accord and affinity between different selves. The general standing of the bodily self within one's personal hierarchy alters. The bodily self is acquiring greater significance and power.

I have mentioned previously that the feeling of happiness during the GiCheon practice connects in the narration of Ms. Sin to a desire to dance. She discusses this sensitivity toward music more explicitly in the following extract from her interview.

[…] I liked music, but it was not deep. But after GiCheon I started to perceive music more deeply, emotionally. My heart started ringing together with the music. … My ears have changed. […] music […] comes into me. […] Suddenly, when I listened to Korean traditional music, which I had not listened to before, I could really understand and accept it, could feel its value.

The openness to music mentioned by Ms. Sin demonstrates increased acceptance of diverse sensorial experiences. It echoes a better communication with nature reported by other adepts, although Ms. Sin gave it more prominence in her narration. They talk about a greater openness toward and awareness of nature, and how they perceive themselves as part of it. I interpret this ability to perceive and incorporate music smoothly and efficiently as an indication of "smooth functioning" on the level of the universal self. Feelings of cold are associated in GiCheon thought with blockages and hindrances in *ki* flow. Warmth and smoothness at various levels of the self reported by practitioners are explained by GiCheon instructors as improved flow of *ki*. In GiCheon thought, improved *ki* flow relates not only to the body, or the "self" but also involves greater openness toward the outside, or "intensive

exchange between *ki* inside the body and *ki* outside the body" (Kim Hŭi-sang and Kich'ŏnmun Ponmun ed. 2000: 153). Greater awareness of nature and of music could be examples of this.

The smoothness in communication and relationships with others is articulated in Ms. Sin"s interview as a "two-way street". It means being able to better express herself, and to better understand others. It helps her to better carry out her familial-social role of a good-natured daughter. She connects these developments to becoming healthier, more composed and self-possessed. This element of Sin's narrative has much in common with the accounts of other practitioners. Many report on modification of their familial self, which result from getting calmer and more relaxed.[79] This is how Mr. Kim Yŏngbo in his early 50s, working in retail business, expresses it.

I became calmer, more relaxed. [Before] when I talked with different people […] I felt annoyed, nervous. […] I tried to force people to accept my opinion, but not now. […] In the family, before, I had a very sharp character. […] I hated dirty things. […] My children and wife, it was hard for them. [...] After beginning GiCheon […] I changed. I hang the laundry, do a washing, cook rice, wash the dishes, fold the clothes, clean the room. […] I used to hit people, paid fines. Also in the family […] When I fought with my wife […] in the past […] actually [among] Koreans, an impulsive man who says that he never has hit his wife, it is a lie. I hit my wife in the past, but after doing GiCheon it is not OK. […] Also the children. But now - not anymore.

In the extract above Mr. Kim associates frequent annoyance and nervousness with hitting people. Greater composure is related to greater acceptance of others' opinions and of unpleasant circumstances, such as a messy environment at home. The changes brought by the GiCheon practice lead to a different perception of life and to a better functioning within the

[79] Interview of 09.12.2010, Pusan, South Korea.

family. *When people feel hardship in the body, they become annoyed, without knowing it [...]* says Ms. Sin, and Kim Yŏngbo would probably agree with her. Similarly to the narrative of Sin, in Kim's narrative GiCheon positions cause the mind to become calmer, and result in smoother familial functioning, following the first vector of progression from the bodily-emotional self toward the familial and social self.

The experiential modality manifesting in the above extract from Kim's interview can be identified as "lowering the level of conflict". Kim's old self often found itself in a state of conflict, which he explained was due to his edgy character. He was in conflict with himself and it manifested as an annoyed and nervous state of the mind-heart. He got into disputes with others and had difficulty accepting their opinions. By arguing he tried to compel people to agree with him. He was in conflict with the people he hit, including his family members. He had a problem with accepting an untidy environment at home. He had run-ins with the police and had to pay fines. These expressions of conflict lessened after practicing GiCheon. The relaxation of his previous sharpness and annoyance shows in Kim's narrative mainly through the description of his familial functioning, depicted in actions: *hanging the laundry, doing a washing, folding the clothes, making rice, washing the dishes, cleaning the room.*

When Ms. Sin talks about her familial functioning, she talks less about actions and more about feelings, attitudes and communication. Besides the alteration of her familial self, the important points in her narrative are developing self-confidence and a greater regard for bodily self. Yet, the shift in the hierarchal position the bodily self occupies within a personality does not always manifest in a peaceful way as it does in Ms. Sin's case. This is how Mun Chonghun, in his early forties, working in car sales talks about the changes in the way he perceived his body.[80]

[80] Interview of 09.12.2010, Pusan, South Korea.

My body became powerful […] my arms and legs got stronger, so I got confident in my relationships with people. […] Drunken courage […] provoking others […] verbal fights …showing off your strength in front of others […]. Mainly men are like that […]. A man without self-confidence, when he gets a bit stronger […] he acts with reckless bravado […]. When I drank, I made many mistakes like that […]. Recently I am not like that […].

Mr. Mun talks about drinking culture and how his newly found self-confidence found expression in his behavior as a drunkard. When his body gained power, Mun's behavior changed. He describes a process, seeing himself as not very confident at the outset. However, his body got stronger, and his level of confidence increased: *my arms and legs got stronger, so I got confident in my relationships with people.* The position that the bodily self occupied in the personal hierarchy shifted, and new types of behavior appeared: *drunken courage, provoking others, verbal fights, showing off strength in front of others, acting with reckless bravado.* It took time for Mun to get used to the changes and to integrate his newly acquired power into his personality. At the time of our interview he categorized a recent manner of behavior connected to *drunken courage* as *mistakes.* He noted that lately he is *not like that.*

As a result of GiCheon practice Ms. Sin became more tranquil and self-assured. She feels calmer and less hasty in her mind-heart. Now she does not have an urge to do things immediately, but can hold back. Feeling capable of achieving whatever she chooses to pursue is also related to trust and tranquility toward her bodily self. This translates into self-confidence and also influences her communication abilities. Mr. Kim became less conflictual and this can be seen in different areas of his life, but mainly in the family. Mr. Mun talks about an interesting aspect of his GiCheon experience that is connected to his short-lived tendency to engage in drunken fights. These three accounts demonstrate significant changes brought by GiCheon into the lives of these individuals. However, this is not always the case with GiCheon practice, the effects of which are sometimes very mild or almost non-existent.

In the following section I relate the story of Kim Wŏn'gyu. For him, the GiCheon experience was often, though not always, associated with disappointment.

5.4 Kim Wŏn'gyu: the experiential modality of "lack and disappointment"

The effects of the practice reported by Sin are articulated also by other practitioners. The accounts of many informants were less concise and systematic, but related similar phenomena. People talked about various feelings during practice, and the sensations of heat or cold while standing in *naegasinjang*. In this context, the interview of Kim Wŏn'gyu (not a real name) is interesting, because it stands out. I identify the leading experiential modality of Kim Wŏn'gyu as "lack and disappointment". Lack and disappointment relate to different aspects of his narration and experience of GiCheon, including the absence of sensations that are common for other practitioners. Let us now turn to a few extracts from his interview.

[…] That program [...] I was looking for something like that so ... not too well known, slightly mysterious […], it was shot at the Munmak [GiCheon Mountain Center], I do not remember the details [of the program] well, […] I just had a good feeling [when I saw it].

Kim Wŏn'gyu first learned about GiCheon from a TV program, shot at the Munmak GiCheon Mountain Center.

Also before that I thought that [abdominal] breathing […] should not be [result of] conscious [effort]. […] If […] abdominal breathing is important, then there should exist some postures […] that stimulate abdominal breathing. When I heard Pak Sagyu munjunim *explaining that in a position called* naegasinjang *the breathing naturally reaches down (till the abdomen), […] ... it agreed with me.*

By watching the TV program Mr. Kim discovered that GiCheon leaders saw eye to eye with him regarding abdominal breathing – it should be induced by the position of the

body and not just stimulated by the effort of the mind. Kim has been previously thinking about these kinds of practices, as he elaborates in the following extract.

Before that, for about ten years or so, […] I did ordinary things for health, you know, like mountain hiking or running on a regular basis. […] But […] when a friend of mine asked me "How about doing some exercises you could show [to others]?", in the beginning I was not interested. But on the other hand, if you exercise a lot, it shows somehow [in the way you hold yourself, on your body language, so other people notice that] […]. But not something too common, like Taekwondo ... […] if you practice something too common, […] it is easier to adapt [to this practice, because many people do it], but it feels a bit empty […], so I was thinking about doing something [not very common] […].

Kim wanted to practice something unusual, something that would differentiate him from other people, something that others would notice. Here we are reminded of the desire for self-promotion through one's performance as a marked characteristic of South Korean society, hinted at by Cho Chinsik in Chapter Four. From this point of view, GiCheon really suited Kim. Nevertheless, from the very beginning his GiCheon experience was marked by clear disappointment.

And then I watched that TV program I told you about […]. People talk about karma a lot ... […] so it happened by chance when I was about 40 years old.[81] *By coincidence, someone told me there was a job, and I was free at that time. […] So I thought it was a paid job. […] I went there and that was [work related to] GiCheon. […] They needed someone to watch over the houses at the Munmak [GiCheon Mountain Center].*

A significant amount of time has elapsed between the moment when Kim watched the TV program featuring GiCheon and the moment he went to the Munmak GiCheon Center. The former has not induced him to seek GiCheon. His encounter with GiCheon occurred

[81] The Sino-Korean term karmic connection (*inyŏn* 因緣) signifies a chain of cause and effect. In the everyday speech it is used to indicate invisible connections between people and events.

much later, when he heard that there is work at Munmak, and decided to go there. Nevertheless, making money was not his sole motivation.

[...] The atmosphere was not that of discussing payment terms and the amount of money, […] I knew that it was [work related to] GiCheon, […] and I decided to go and stay there […] no matter how low the payment is […]. I stayed there for two months only. […]. On TV, they showed many things similar to martial arts. But when I came [to Munmak], there were almost no things like that. […] We did a lot of static positions, yukhap - *six basic positions […].*

Kim Wŏn'gyu went to Munmak to work and to earn money, but he also aspired to study GiCheon. He decided to work *no matter how low the payment is.* Yet, his hopes to earn money were disappointed, as there was no payment at all. The program carried out at that period at Munmak proposed free board, food and GiCheon training for young men and women, with the purpose of turning them into future GiCheon instructors. However, as a result of miscommunication and disinformation, Kim Wŏn'gyu found himself in the wrong place.

His other expectations related to the practice itself were not met either. He believed he would learn martial arts, but the training was focused on static positions instead, with emphasis on self-healing. Mr. Kim, as he told me later in the extract of his interview not quoted here, was not interested in healing. He found other elements of the program equally frustrating.

And then, Kim Hyŏnt'ae wŏnjangnim *... Enlightenment ...[…] I had no interest in such things […], because I started GiCheon [...] as sports* (undong) *and this talk was totally foreign to me […]. Kim Hyŏnt'ae* wŏnjangnim *said that one can reach enlightenment […] watching running water or falling leaves; this talk […] had nothing to do with me. […] I came because I heard there was a job, but later I saw that this work was not for receiving a*

salary. […] Besides that, I have not studied […] systematically. And I could not earn money. […] So I told Kim Hyŏnt'ae wŏnjangnim *that I was leaving. […]*

I will presently outline a few background facts related to the Munmak program in order to contextualize the narrative of Mr. Kim. The training of potential teachers at the Munmak Mountains Center was not systematic. Instruction was random and no teacher stayed at Munmak on a regular basis, with different teachers coming and going. This was in accordance with what the students of Lee Sangwŏn called his principle of "casting seeds and letting them grow". The seeds are a metaphor for future GiCheon instructors, while "letting them grow" refers to the lack of nurture for the seeds, or ordered and planned instruction for recruits. The strong and persistent seeds are supposed to grow by themselves, a metaphor for the talented and promising persons expected to bud independently of circumstances. The Munmak program for potential GiCheon leaders yielded just one success story, and was later abandoned.

In the extract quoted above Kim Wŏn'gyu complains about this unsystematic training, in addition to his dissatisfaction about the lack of payment for his work of guarding the houses. He did not connect to the speeches of enlightenment either, and saw the training as *undong* only. As I have discussed in Chapter Four, the distinction between *suryŏn* and *undong* is important for many Korean GiCheon practitioners. Those classifying GiCheon as *suryŏn* demonstrate a greater degree of affinity with GiCheon ideology, and display more trust and openness toward GiCheon instructors and their discourse. The instructors and the most devoted of the practitioners form the core of the GiCheon community, while those tagging it as *undong* are closer to the periphery. A similar division takes place in relation to the interpretation of *ki*. I have mentioned in Chapter Three that Sin had not previously believed that *ki* existed and she changed her mind after starting the practice. Also Kim Yŏnghŭi and Ha Tongju, as quoted in Chapter Three, view the GiCheon practice as

developing sensitivity for *ki*. The terms *suryŏn* and *ki* are indicators of a kind, measuring the level of dedication and commitment of a practitioner, the degree of her or his acceptance of GiCheon thought, and the estimated or assumed success resulting from the practice. Kim Wŏn'gyu sides with those who label GiCheon as *undong*. In a similar vein he voices his opinion on *ki*.

-*What did you feel in GiCheon?*

-*Almost nothing. [For me] it is still sports* (undong) *[...] There seems to be something beyond sports* (undong)*, but for me it is only an idea, I have never really experienced it. […]*

- *What do you think is* ki*?*

-Ki*? I do not know at all. […] When one stands in* naegasinjang *[…] there should be some feeling. I didn't have that feeling, I never experienced it. I was only thinking about it in my head … I am talking about something I do not know.*

Kim Wŏn'gyu does not argue with GiCheon theory, agreeing that *there should be some feeling* in *naegasinjang* or *something beyond sports* (*undong*) in GiCheon. Yet, he claims to never have experienced it. The experiential modalities connected with lack, disappointment and unfulfilled expectations color most aspects of his narrative. Sometimes his disappointment is articulated strongly and clearly, for example in the complaint about his unpaid work at Munmak. In other instances, the disappointment is mild and patient, as when Kim talks about his feelings, or the lack of them.

[…] Usually people say they have some feeling, some energy is circulating. […] After about five or ten minutes pass, it gets less hard […]. … […] If we stand thirty minutes in naegasinjang*, […] from the beginning till the end the degree of hardship alters […]. […] But for me it is [equally] hard from the beginning till the end. I forcefully make myself stand [in* naegasinjang*] […] as if I am doing something hateful. And when I stand [in* naegasinjang*] for two hours, I do not have any feelings, […] for me it is monotonous.*

Kim Wŏn'gyu sees himself as an exception to the rule according to which *naegasinjang* is experienced differently as the minutes elapse. For him *it is monotonous.* The lack of sensations that others report experiencing is an important factor, which is characterized by a somber surrendering to the reality of not feeling what others feel, with a slight hope that it might change in future.

*[*Naegasinjang*] is just painful. […] Through it we accumulate inner power. Actually, I never felt that through it I accumulated inner power. […] I think it is good. Not that I think it is good, but the others say it's good, so I think it should be good. [...] Personally, I do not know. I never felt anything special, so I don't know yet. […] One day I might know, so [for now] I just do it.*

Kim articulates a certain openness toward what is the consensus in GiCheon community: *others say it's good, so I think it should be good.* Simultaneously, he is disappointed because he *never felt anything special.* Yet, the disappointment of Kim is neither acute nor absolute. The lack of feelings others share is not a uniform feature of his story. When describing his practice of *tanbaegong* in the mountains, Mr. Kim accounts for sensations of energy and liveliness. In this respect his experience is in accord with the reports of other practitioners.

After his unsuccessful two months long GiCheon experience at Munmak, Kim Wŏn'gyu kept training at home for two years and a half. Then he went to the Kyeryŏng Mountain Center to practice GiCheon under Pak Sagyu *munju,* who advised him to take a teacher's course. Upon completion of the instructor's course, Kim Wŏn'gyu was about to pass the official teachers' test. The official test consisted of standing in *naegasinjang* position for two hours and performing *tanbaegong* one thousand times. In order to prepare for the test, Kim decided to try *tanbaegong* in the mountains alone.

I finished ten hours [of practice]. I was worried my knees […] might hurt, but after completing [the training] my knees did not hurt at all, I ran down the mountain […] feeling really alive and energetic. Yet, this optimistic moment is rather exceptional in Kim's narrative, the axis of which is continuous, though moderate and composed, melancholy.

Another rather positively colored period of Kim's GiCheon story took place immediately after the conclusion of his Kyeryŏng training: *[...] In the beginning, when I met Kim Hyŏnt'ae* wŏnjangnim *and heard the talks about enlightenment […], they were things I never thought about, but finally I realized that the spirit cannot be separated from the work of cultivating the body […]. Pak Sagyu* munjunim *also talked about the Way* (to 道) *[…]. So I thought that if I practice really hard […], and at the starting point of the way I don't know what lies at the end […], but after a while a road will split and a few offshoots will appear. Maybe I will develop power and the world will applaud […]. But in any case, I thought that I will see something, and […] I decided to practice as much as I can […].*

In the past, Kim Wŏn'gyu did not connect to the enlightenments talks by Kim Hyŏnt'ae. However, as time passed he opened up to this kind of discourse, and decided to train really hard. His hope to see something at the end of the way parallel similar articulations of my other interviewees, who expect some outcome out of the GiCheon practice, yet do not picture exactly what it could be. I have heard only male GiCheon practitioners talk this way, never females. A few devoted male practitioners articulated vague longing about the possibility of *the world applauding* when in the future they reveal their achievements. Kim Wŏn'gyu expresses this metaphorically: *after a while a road will split and a few offshoots will appear.* Still, the continuation of his narrative is not very encouraging.

But as I was alone now, it did not work out. Some days I trained for eight or nine hours a day, but after that I rested for a few days. In the past, for two years and a half, though for short hours, I have practiced continuously […]. However this time I made it into a

vocation […] and since then it became a burden. Because I attached too much importance to the necessity of practice. […] I wanted to practice harder, but I could not accomplish that.

After returning from Munmak, Kim trained for about one and half hours every day. This went on for two and half years. He then continued his GiCheon education at the Kyeryŏng Mountain GiCheon Center, but the location was a few hours driving away from his home, so he had to stop. Now, after returning from Mt. Kyeryŏng, his GiCheon resolve strengthened and he increased the intensity of his practice to eight or nine hours per day. Unfortunately, the results were not very positive. Too many expectations made him perceive his training as a burden, generating another disappointment. Kim Wŏn'gyu could not continue alone, so he joined yet another GiCheon group under a different leader. Despite the mellow pessimism of his GiCheon narrative, Kim does not harbor negative sentiments toward the GiCheon leaders or the practice.

- Why do you keep practicing GiCheon?

- In the old days I liked […] sports (undong). *[…] Now I do GiCheon instead [of sports]. […] I felt it is a bit similar to boxing. […] so I thought it suits me. […] I learn new things one by one, and I listen to the explanations, these are interesting, so I keep practicing.*

Kim likes GiCheon postures and their attendant explanations, finding them interesting and he intends to continue the practice. In our conversation, he referred to GiCheon as a product among other products, and he considers this product a good one.

I think it is a good product, so I continue doing it. […] When we select something, we cannot try everything before we select. […] Simply, I am satisfied with it now, and I think there are things to explore. […] If [GiCheon practice] really disagreed with me, I would probably look for something else, but it does not seem to be the case. […] I like different [GiCheon] positions. […]. It is not something practiced by many people, so it has a slightly mysterious feeling, I like that […]. So I will still keep doing it.

Though Kim Wŏn'gyu estimates his GiCheon experience satisfactory enough to continue the practice, many elements of his narrative indicate that the leading experiential modality of his narration is disappointment and lack. When he first arrived at Munmak, his discontent about not receiving payment for guarding the houses was accompanied by his perception of the bodily experience of *naegasinjang* – he did not feel what others felt and reported. His emotions are characterized by feelings of lack on the bodily level and on the economic level. GiCheon experience at Munmak lacked sufficient martial arts elements that he expected. Besides, he perceived talks about enlightenment as foreign to him, which strengthened his alienation and the sense of "this is not for me". On an educational level, Kim felt that the Munmak teachers training program lacked a system.

The lack of feelings in the *naegasinjang* position translates into the absence of practical knowledge of what *ki* is. Later, when Kim's affinity to GiCheon had strengthened, the experiential modality of lacking appeared as an unfulfilled hope to see something at the end of the road, and a perceived inability to train hard when he wished to do so. *I wanted to practice harder but I could not accomplish that.*

Social expectations require a Korean man to get a job and marry. The life story of Kim Wŏn'gyu shows that he has not fulfilled these social expectations, which might partially explain his experiential modality of disappointment and a lack of accomplishment. His engagement with GiCheon and acquiring qualifications for a GiCheon instructor might be interpreted as directed at maintaining self-respect and contacts with people, attempts to improve social communication, social belonging, and social integration, providing a partial answer to the question of why he persisted with his GiCheon training.

5.5 Pain as a common denominator of different experiential modalities

Experiential modalities are rooted in bodily experience. For example in the narration of Cho, the GiCheon instructor from Chapter Four, the experiential modality of understanding old behavioral patterns originated in that one moment when he was training under the guidance of Kim Hŭisang, and the conversation they had regarding the nature of the practice. For many practitioners mentioned in the present chapter this bodily experience relates to *naegasinjang* and the pain it brings. Kim Wŏn'gyu's experiential modality of lack and disappointment starts with his pain from *naegasinjang*. For his interlocutors, other trainees with whom he discussed the practice, the pain of *naegasinjang* was experienced as sporadic, irregular, ever-changing. Kim had expected his feelings of pain to have a similar dynamic, but they did not. Instead his sense of pain was constant and monotonous, and thus disappointing. Ms. Sin, in the extracts of her interview quoted in the current chapter, did not dwell on the subject of pain extensively. Still, *naegasinjang* itself is the basic bodily experience that grounds her experiential modality of warmth and softness and of smooth and effortless passage. The various sensations reviewed by Ms. Sin were felt by her while in the *naegasinjang* position. These sensations included warmness of the body and swift appearance of sweat, for example. For Kim Pohŭi *naegasinjang* was hard and boring; that is her characterization of the GiCheon practice in general and it defines her experiential modality. For Pak Kyŏngae pain in *naegasinjang* became, as mentioned earlier, a metaphor for the toils and trials of life. This gives rise to Pak's experiential modality of fortitude and persistent continuation despite the obstacles. Like Pak Kyŏngae, Kim Yŏnghŭi focuses a lot on the experience of pain in *naegasinjang*. Yet, for Kim Yŏnghŭi the pain holds a completely different meaning. It builds confidence, convincing her that if she could endure something as hard as that, she *could do anything!*

The experience of pain, its understanding and conceptualization by the practitioners, is the subject of the next chapter, Chapter Six. I will discuss pain as a characteristic of ascetic practices and question to which degree GiCheon can be considered one such practice. Another aspect of GiCheon linking it to other practices of asceticism is not pain per se, but the extremity of a particular practice. Interestingly, Kim Yŏnghŭi's declaration *I could achieve anything!* echoes similar sentiments of ascetic practitioners in contemporary Japan. They regard climbing the ladder of swords as the most difficult thing of all. *If you can do this, you can do anything!* exclaimed one Japanese trainee and the rest of the group nodded in agreement (Lobetti 2014: 47). Kim Yŏnghŭi used this same expression in regard to performing *naegasinjang*.

In this chapter and in previous chapters, in my discussion of various experiential modalities I have reiterated the presence of pain in GiCheon, but I have not addressed the notion of pain directly. If the present chapter is an entry point into the subject, then the next chapter accesses the experience of pain on a deeper level. I will present extracts from the interviews where my informants describe the pain they felt in *naegasinjang* and analyze the ways in which the pain is conceptualized by the practitioners and in GiCheon theory. In that discussion I will draw comparisons with the findings of Lobetti, who studied ascetic practices in contemporary Japan (2014).

Chapter Six: Pain in the narrations of the practitioners

6.1 Pain as experience

As mentioned in Chapter Two, this dissertation approaches *ki, suryŏn,* pain, and mountains as culturally shaped notions that mold and modulate experience. These notions manifest in the interviews of GiCheon trainees and anchor their narratives. After reviewing the notions of *ki* and *suryŏn* in Chapters Three and Four, I have discussed personally colored experiential modalities in Chapter Five. I presently proceed to reviewing the notion of pain in this chapter in a more concentrated fashion, before moving towards the image and concept of mountains in Chapter Seven.

As I have clarified in the Introduction and in Chapter Two, I suggest to view GiCheon and similar practices as mountain practices, contemporary offshoots of the Korean tradition of mountain worship. This manifests also in GiCheon lore and in the interviews with the practitioners. Viewing GiCheon as a mountain practice means perceiving the goal of GiCheon practice as the transformation of the body into an ideal body, the body of a mountain immortal. The path of this transformation is painful and difficult. In this chapter we consider different aspects of this pain experience. Using the accounts of other practitioners as a narrative axis, I will also relate to my own experience of GiCheon training and practice.

The notion of pain is central to GiCheon. The static positions (靜法 *chŏngpŏp*) are at the core of the practice, and their maintenance is painful. However, only the first among the six positions (六合 丹功 *yukhap tan'gong*), *naegasinjang* (내가신장), is maintained by the students in the studios for long periods of time, sometimes for thirty minutes or more. Most of my interviewees talked about this position and the pain it brings.

Naegasinjang has been described as the perfect application of *yŏkkŭn*, the principle of the maximal bending of the joints. The ankles, the knees, the spine, elbows, wrists and finger joints have to be bent to their maximum capacity. In GiCheon thought, joints are gateways, or passages of *ki*. Twisting the joints with *yŏkkŭn* is believed to open *ki* channels in the body and the mind-heart, thus improving the flow of *ki*. This is painful. The adepts conceptualize pain, its function and the mechanism of its origin, in different ways and to different degrees of intensity. Some of the insights of the GiCheon practitioners regarding pain correlate with the findings of anthropologists, made on the basis of their studying chronic pain patients.

The current chapter investigates how the self is created on the basis of the experience of *naegasinjang*. How is the body in pain perceived and approached? What kind of self is created therein, and by what means? GiCheon practitioners and people with chronic conditions both experience pain on a regular basis. As argued in the text below, their articulation and understanding of pain have much in common. According to anthropologist Arthur Kleinman, very little is known about cross-cultural similarities and differences in the ways the body is experienced. This is also true regarding the body in pain. Kleinman thinks that we have to learn how the self is created on a daily basis as a locally shaped experience (Kleinman 1986: 191, quoted in Del Vecchio Good et al. 1992: 198-200).

Anthropological studies of chronic pain patients, define pain as an "intimate inner experience" unifying the mind and the body, thus highlighting the inadequacy of the Cartesian dualism (Kleinman et al. 1992: 5-14). In *Pain as Human Experience: An Anthropological Perspective* edited by Mary-Jo DelVecchio, contributors consider what is learned through the experience of pain. How is the meaning of pain created, expressed and negotiated? How is it reflected in the stories people tell? (Kleinman et al. 1992a: 15). When in pain, the world is under the constant threat of dissolution, as the building blocks of the perceived world, such as time and space, begin to melt down (Good 1992: 41). Pain

experienced on a regular basis affects the way people think about themselves, their lives and their future, causing them to perceive their bodies differently. In interviews, chronic pain sufferers report having grown through their pain. Pain forces them to re-experience the body, to become self-conscious about eating healthy, getting enough rest, and avoiding excessive stress (Garro 1992: 104-105, 117, 126).

6.2 Pain as transforming

In GiCheon, pain is transforming. A close analysis of the interviews conducted with GiCheon adherents reveals a detailed perspective on how exactly pain in the *naegasinjang* position is perceived and articulated, and what kinds of changes it brings. We will start with an extract from an interview with Chŏn Sŏngho.[82] At the time of the interview Mr. Chŏn was 49 years old. He previously worked as a news reporter for the Research Institute of Korean Medicine Policy (Hanŭihak chŏngch'aek yŏn'guso 한의학정책연구소), and now engages in organizational activities for the same institute. This is how Chŏn Sŏngho talks about pain:

Pain and satisfaction (manjok 만족)*[…] and the sense of accomplishment* (sŏngch'wigam 성취감) *[…] come together. The greater the pain, the greater is the sense of accomplishment and satisfaction. It is only hard at that moment […], people who enjoy pain, are happy with it. For the people who are not like that … to adjust to it … at the end of the day […] they are hesitant. […]*

Mr. Chŏn talks about the satisfaction and the sense of accomplishment that come together with pain. After performing *naegasinjang* many practitioners experience pride in their ability to persist in spite of the pain, and joy due to its cessation. As I will elaborate

[82] Interview of 23.09.2010, Seoul, South Korea. Mr. Chŏn gave me explicit permission to use his real name.

below, a peaceful state of relaxation and almost enjoyment occur also during the performance of the position.

People who enjoy pain, are happy with it. GiCheon practitioners often joke that they are masochists, and that normal people would never engage in the self-inflicted pain of *naegasinjang*. This connotes an elitist element within GiCheon and other similar practices of self-perfection. These practices welcome everyone in theory, while in actuality only few can accept them (Foucault 2001: 109-112).

[Pain] confirms your identity, makes you confident in facing the world, considerate towards others […], develops endurance and the sense of sacrifice. […] Pain does not have just negative aspects. There is a difference between the pain you experience by yourself and the pain inflicted by others. The pain experienced by yourself […] elevates you. […] The pain inflicted by others brings frustration, anger, vengeance. […] What I have chosen by myself, I can accept. […] If there is a purpose directed at myself, the meaning [of pain] is different … [The other type of pain] is not pain, it is torture. One can turn into joy, the other one can turn into real pain. If you see that the martyrs could have themselves killed, then for them it was not pain.[83] *[…] It was pain from the point of view of the onlooker. From the point of view of the martyrs … […] they could accept it.*

Chŏn Sŏngho divides people into those who can accept pain and those who cannot. The former are GiCheon practitioners whom Chŏn Sŏngho compares to martyrs. They are those *who enjoy pain, are happy with it.* The latter are ordinary people *who are not like that, hesitant.* As there are two categories of people in Chŏn Sŏngho's narrative, there are two categories of pain. Mr. Chŏn defines pain in GiCheon as self-inflicted; he calls it *the pain you experience by yourself*. He places it in the same category as the pain felt by martyrs who died

[83] The term *sun'gyoja* (殉教者 martyrs) is usually utilized within a Christian context.

willingly. In the opposite category is the pain inflicted by others against the will of the self. When accepted, pain brings positive development of the personality. The pain inflicted by others, when not accepted, brings destruction. The second type of pain Mr. Chŏn calls torture. The first type of pain *can turn into joy*, according to Chŏn Sŏngho it *elevates you.* Chŏn Sŏngho's thoughts remind us of the experience of chronic pain patients, who have claimed to have grown through their pain (Garro 1992: 1176).

Mr. Chŏn thinks that the meaning of pain changes if it has a *purpose directed at myself*. The martyrs had this purpose, and this is why their pain was different. What is for Mr. Chŏn the purpose of pain in GiCheon? What does *directed at myself* mean*?* In order to answer this question, it may be helpful to remember that in GiCheon theory pain has concrete meaning and direction. It is not pain for the sake of pain. GiCheon positions might be compared to the recording of a text, or the inscription of "GiCheon letters" on the body. The process of inscription is painful, but this inscription provides sense and purpose to the pain. When a blank page is inscribed with text, it is transformed. In GiCheon thought, a body in the *naegasinjang* position is metaphorically compared to a piece of metal that is being forged into a sword by a blacksmith. The bending of the joints in *naegasinjang* subjects the body and the mind-heart to a harsh and severe process. At the beginning of practice it can be shocking for those who are not yet physically, mentally and emotionally prepared for this type of experience. The body is in pain, and heat is generated. This body in pain is allegorically compared to a piece of metal on an anvil, pounded by a hammer. The self must be altered, forged into something different, just as a piece of metal must be forged into a sword.

Now let us return to the metaphor of the body as a scripture, and *naegasinjang* as the text inscribed on the body. The mind-heart and body are like a book, in which all past life experiences are recorded, both positive and negative. Our past makes us who we are at

present. This past is our entire history starting from the time in our mother's womb and going on to birth, growth, education, work, actions, and relationships with others. Whatever we ate, drank, saw, heard, touched, thought, said, did or have undergone is documented in our body and mind-heart. This way, our yesterday influences our today and programs our tomorrow. This process shows the workings of the second vector of progression: the unconscious influence (mainly from the outside towards the inside) forming the self. GiCheon practice is believed to transform the present, thus healing the past and changing the future.[84]

In GiCheon thought, the traumas, shocks and illnesses of the past can be cured. But the negative past is not rectified easily. With conscious effort, a student has to willingly undergo painful training. This effort is a conscious and defined intention of the self, occurring along the first vector. Metaphorically speaking, the painful *naegasinjang* experience almost erases the old self, inscribing a new self instead. Of course the old self is not erased completely, but modified. This is what Mr. Chŏn calls *a purpose directed at myself.* He compares it to the willingly accepted pain of the martyrs, inviting comparisons with ascetic experience.

6.3 Pain as a characteristic of ascetic practice

GiCheon trainees are not the only ones willingly engaging in painful practices. Across cultures and historical periods, many individuals have voluntarily taken part in various painful activities. They sometimes are referred to as ascetics. In his recent work *Ascetic Practices in Japanese Religion*, Tullio Federico Lobetti discusses the meaning and the use of pain by the adepts of various contemporary practices. He uses the notion of Japanese

[84] Just as Buddhist practice could improve the karma.

asceticism as an umbrella term for a variety of bodily exertions undertaken for spiritual empowerment in Japan (2014: 1-2).

In the introduction to Lobetti's book, Hirochika Nakamaki suggests that the world of asceticism cannot be understood or described without personal experience. Without becoming a practitioner, we cannot understand the essence of the thing we are observing (Lobetti 2014: xiv). Lobetti considers his active participation in many of the ascetic practices as a necessary prerequisite for their theoretical analysis (2014: 6). He attempts to construct a theory for asceticism as a form of philosophy of the body. He defines asceticism as an embodied tradition inscribed as a text upon a body. The ascetic text is embodied because it is produced by the human body, which also becomes its recording medium (2014: 5-6). Analyzing the text thus means analyzing the body itself, its records of sensations and feelings (Lobetti 2014: 119). The body is used as a tool through which texts are enacted, similar to those enacted by other practitioners. This allows a translation of their bodily texts into terms that are immediately understandable by the body of the translator. When the practitioners Lobetti interviewed spoke about their feelings of gain, loss, exhaustion and so forth, he was able to critically evaluate their verbal translation of bodily sensations because he has accessed similar bodily text himself (2014: 6-7). In GiCheon a terminology is employed that is similar to that used by Lobetti in talking about letters and contents.

The practices serving as objects of Lobetti's anthropological study include walking in the mountains and climbing dangerous cliffs, cold water ablutions, climbing the ladder of swords, walking on burning coals, standing under a waterfall, enduring smoke produced by burning herbs and peppers, fasting and vigils (2014: 30, 36, 58, 61, 84). Often the same kind of practices are utilized by different and unrelated religious groups (2014: 30). Lobetti's focus is on the practices themselves rather than on their religious contexts. He looks also at the motivations of the practitioners, which include wishing for advancement within the

hierarchy of a group, or obtaining some other kind of benefit. The benefits might be desired for oneself only, for her or his family or group, or for the nation. Personal or familial benefits include getting a new job, success in business, finding a spouse, begetting a child, recovery from an illness, acquiring good luck, gaining strength, self-discovery, getting through a difficult period in life, reconciling with family after estrangement, or generally improving relationships within the family.

The motivations of the practitioners studied by Lobetti are at times congruent with the inspirations of the Beijing *yangsheng* adepts and *ki suryŏn* trainees in Korea. Also the types and elements of practices often coincide. Yet, due to the different focus of the investigations carried out for studying these cultural phenomena, comparison is difficult. The study of Farquhar and Zhang on the Beijing *yangsheng* focused on pleasurable practices, or the pleasurable aspects of various practices (2012). The research of Lobetti on Japanese asceticism centers on painful practices, or painful aspects of different practices. My own analysis, unlike that of Farquhar, Zhang and Lobetti's, concentrates not on a range of practices, but on one particular practice, GiCheon. Yet, I argue that *yangsheng* in contemporary Beijing, *ki suryŏn* in South Korea and what Lobetti calls Japanese asceticism constitute different developments of a similar East Asian cultural tendency toward self-cultivation and self-improvement, or, in Abayev's terms, a psycho-physical culture (1982, 1983).

As such, these cultural developments in different countries of East Asia provide terms of comparison for each other. There are, not by chance, linguistic ties. Japanese ascetics often refer to their activities as *shugyō* (修行 practice in general) (Lobetti 2014: 9). These two Chinese characters are pronounced as *suhaeng* in Korean; this word is used interchangeably with *suryŏn* by GiCheon practitioners, as I elaborated in Chapter Four. As pain is one of the

central themes of Lobetti's research on Japanese asceticism, I refer to his findings and conclusions, drawing parallels between Korean and Japanese contemporary practices, to clarify the place of pain in GiCheon and the ways in which it is experienced and articulated by the trainees.

GiCheon practitioners accept pain willingly and so do other ascetics. But what is the definition of "asceticism"? This term originates with the Greek ἄσκησις, askesis, meaning "exercise" or "training". Joseph Alter translates it as "disciplined practice". He sees in the askesis of ancient Greece a practice of virtue as an embodied exercise, an end in itself of a lived body of experience (2013: 124). Michel Foucault draws a direct connection between askesis and technologies of self, or techniques of self-formation in ancient Greece (1994b: 800). Richard Valantasis sees Foucault's work as the formulation of the theory of asceticism which proposes forming a subject through ascetic practices, what is called subjectivation. (1995: 546). Valantasis himself sets down his own theory of asceticism. According to him, asceticism initiates a practitioner into a new culture and into social and psychological systems associated with this culture. In order to engage this new alternative culture, an ascetic must retrain her or his senses and perceptions and acquire a new self, become a different person in new relationships and in a new society, which constitute a new culture (1995: 547-551).

Geoffrey Harpham defines the basics of asceticism as self-observation and self-criticism. He sees asceticism as a kind of "operating system" of cultures, the "cultural" element in cultures which makes them comparable, permitting their mutual understanding and communication. Harpham's findings stem from his analysis of Christian ethics and spirituality. Asceticism in a wider sense is any act of self-denial undertaken as a strategy for empowerment or gratification (1987: xi-xiii). In this Harpham draws on Max Weber, who was among the first European scholars extending an interpretation of asceticism toward non-religious spheres of life (Weber 2001 [1904]).

Scholarly attempts to define and represent various religious and non-religious practices in the East and the West as more ascetic or less ascetic can be portrayed as a spectrum or a subspace, in which the presence of pain and its degree constitute one of the axes. Building on examples from Christian and Buddhist textual narratives, Lobetti suggests a definition that emphasizes the malleative, transformative character of asceticism.[85] In Christian tradition the body has to be transformed through harsh labor in order to become the perfect temple for a perfect soul. The idea of the human body advancing towards a sacred body is equally present in Buddhism (Lobetti 2014: 15, 22). In East Asian traditions of nourishing life and immortality, often associated with Daoism, the body progresses towards immortality through a process which is often complex and demanding. As I have elaborated upon in the Introduction and in Chapter Two, I argue that GiCheon could also be analyzed as a contemporary practice of nourishing life and immortality. The next chapter, Chapter Seven, will discuss this aspect in greater detail.

The malleation of Lobetti does not necessarily have religious connotations. He compares it to sculpture, carving, polishing and other ways of alteration that reshape the object into a new form. An irregularly shaped log becomes a plank, a rough block of stone turns into a statue (2014: 124). According to Lobetti, if malleation is central to asceticism, athletes and other sportsmen might be included among ascetics. The quantity and quality of effort that is needed to reshape the self, to awaken new energies in the body, make a practice into an ascetic one. The pain that may ensue from a transformative practice is valuable in its contribution to the alteration of the self (2014: 9-11, 118). According to this view, pain is not

[85] Equally, in some branches of the Jewish esoteric teaching of Kabballah, a body has to be malleated through painful effort, in order to serve as a vessel for receiving god's radiance. In the years 1995-1996 I studied Kabbalah with the followers of Rabbi Baruch Shalom HaLevi Ashlag (1907-1991) in Israel. For instance the painful effort of waking in the middle of the night to study the texts was considered vital for the practice.

an indispensable element of asceticism, yet it is constructive for self-transformation. If more pain heightens the effect, then it could be said that the degree of pain strengthens the ascetic character of the practice. Pain that is conducive to self-transformation is a basic character of the GiCheon practice. We can thus pose the question of whether, and to what extent, can the GiCheon practice be called ascetic.

6.4 Body as text

The painful striving toward self-transformation in the *naegasinjang* position follows the motto of GiCheon "Do not cling to words and letters, just practice with your body" [말과 글에 집착하지 말고 몸으로만 수행해라]. This is an attempt to shift the emphasis from written or verbal articulation, which is considered useless, toward the bodily practice, which is believed to be efficacious for self-transformation. This antipathy toward symbols relates only to letters written on paper. "We write letters with our bodies" say GiCheon teachers. GiCheon stances themselves are compared to letters. As to the meanings conveyed in these "letters", there is a general unwillingness in the GiCheon community to put them into words. The official statement is that "these meanings are conveyed through the body only and read through the body only". When asked to introduce GiCheon verbally, the teachers usually reply "you cannot understand it until you try it yourself". This is slightly contradictory to the fact that GiCheon students and teachers have produced a number of books, as well as orally transmitting a body of knowledge. But then, these books and explanations are intended for those who already practice GiCheon. The major resistance of GiCheon representatives to the written word is directed at those yet unfamiliar with the bodily practice.

In GiCheon thought, the idea that the postures themselves are letters for writing and reading through the body has an additional aspect. Observing a student performing the *naegasinjang* position is supposed to give a teacher an understanding of the student's state of mind-heart and body, including knowledge of her or his illness and personal problems. Besides constituting a letter inscribed on the body, this position is believed to be the key for decoding the history inscribed on the body through previous life-experience. Through continuous practice, the teacher is expected to make her or his body acquainted with GiCheon texts. This gives her or him ability to read the bodies of others.

6.5 Pain is akin to death

Writing letters on the body, carving the body into the shape of *naegasinjang*, is hard and painful. As quoted in Chapter Four, Kim Yŏnghŭi says *it is so hard as if I am dying*. *Naegasinjang* is so painful that it is often compared by the practitioners to death itself. When I personally stood in this position for two hours, it was so terrible that indeed I was reminded of death. The dissolution of the world and of the categories of time and space, as experienced by chronic patients in pain (Good 1992: 41), are familiar to GiCheon practitioners. Control over the pain has to be maintained, which implies the ability to hold the position and fight the desire to release it before it is time. Sometimes one minute in *naegasinjang* feels like one hour, at other instants time passes by very fast. And after releasing the position the world looks different, as if the categories of space and time have shifted.

When alone, I found myself almost incapable of performing *naegasinjang* for long periods of time without setting an alarm – a method later taken up also by other practitioners. Once I had decided not to give up until the alarm rings, a secondary dilemma was "whether to look at the watch to see how much time is still left". Similarly to what chronic pain patients

report (Good 1992: 41), in *naegasinjang* time feels as melting, disintegrating, breaking down. I felt that looking at the watch interrupts this special flow of time, returning me to the usual time.

Naegasinjang is compared to death, but also to overcoming death. The *yŏkkŭn* principle of GiCheon with its seemingly unnatural twisting of the joints is viewed in GiCheon as "reversing the flow of life". "Life is a progress toward death" say GiCheon instructors. "The application of the y*ŏkkŭn* principle is painful. This is the price we have to pay for going against nature – against death. *Yŏkkŭn* makes us head towards life instead, towards youth, not towards old age".

In his discussion on asceticism, Lobetti notes that asceticism aims at putting the practitioner in a condition proximate to death, while still preserving a degree of self-control. An ascetic practice is an experience of death-in-life. By gaining power over death (2014: 126), the flow of life is reversed (Lobetti 2014: 126, Flood 2004: 15). Lobetti connects this structured and defined process of the reversal of the bodily flow with the ontological progression of the body of the practitioner toward a purer and holier state, which, as a consequence, produces power and benefits (Lobetti 2014: 136).

6.6 Benefits of pain

In an extract of his narrative quoted in section 6.2 above, Chŏn Sŏngho lists the advantages pain brings: it *confirms your identity, makes you confident in facing the world, considerate towards others […], develops endurance and the sense of sacrifice.* The idea that pain brings benefits is generally recognized within GiCheon circles. In the accounts of Pak Kyŏngae and Kim Yŏnghŭi below, their comments on the pain of *naegasinjang* continue the articulation of

experiential modalities central to their accounts, and the benefits stemming from these modalities. Let us look at some extracts from the account of Ms. Pak.[86]

[…]. Unfortunately, even very weak pain I feel strongly. […] In the perspective of a longer period of time, I gradually learned to endure (kamnaehada 감내하다) *the pain in the arms and in the shoulders […]. People say that every person feels pain differently. Another person, for example, feels it only a little bit, but my body feels it much. The degree of the sensitivity is different.*

Pak Kyŏngae sees herself as particularly sensitive to pain. This short extract from her interview follows the experiential modality of bearing the burden of life with fortitude, as elaborated in Chapters Four and Five. *Gradually I learned to endure the pain.* The benefits that Ms. Pak obtained through pain are greater perseverance and forbearance.

[…] It is hard, but after finishing, your body is very light. Also, wŏnjangnim *told us to accept pain. He said it is a healing process. And actually […] if we balance the pro and cons, we believe it is beneficial. […] It is painful at that moment, but later we feel good. […]. The pain is there in order to benefit us, to bring recovery.*

Ms. Pak accepts the authority of the teacher and the idea that pain is healing. In the last sentence of the interview extract quoted above she explicitly stresses the beneficial aspect of pain. She also remarks on the good feeling that comes after completing *naegasinjang*. Finishing *naegasinjang* stops the pain. This is a very special moment. Many GiCheon practitioners report feeling calm relaxed and refreshed after releasing this position. Myself I have a clear, light and peaceful feeling. It is also a sensation of stability, grounding and balance, as if everything falls into place. In this state, useless thoughts or worries do not

[86] Interview of 17.01.2011, Seoul, South Korea.

bother me, and I can easily fall asleep if tired. If I have to work at that moment, I can focus easily and work efficiently. When I look at myself in the mirror after *naegasinjang,* I notice that my facial expression is calmer and my eyes shine. A similar state of peace, composure and balance comes at times also during *naegasinjang*. Kim Chŏnghyŏn, quoted below in section 6.8, alludes to it as a *feeling of immersion.*

And these are a few extracts from the interview with Kim Yŏnghŭi: *Feeling the pain … not the pain brought by injury …[it is caused by using] the parts of the body we usually do not use. Feeling stitches of pain* (kyŏllinŭn 결리는) *… throbbing* (ssusinŭn 쑤시는)*… as if being pricked by a needle … the knees also – because we bend the knees all the time, they are aching, we have to stretch the back, so it hurts, we have to hold the arms [above the shoulders level], it is painful because it is hard.*

Like Ms. Pak, Ms. Kim felt the pain strongly. She explains the pain through bodily strain: the back hurts because it is stretched, the knees ache because they are bent, and the throbbing in the arms comes from the fact that they are held above shoulder level.

[…] At that moment I perceive it as something negative, but after completing the position it is a refreshing feeling. Adults call it "the feeling of awakening (kkaeunŭn kŏt 깨우는 것)*". Because [I did] such a hard thing for a long time […] other difficult things do not seem difficult to me. There isn't anything harder for the body than GiCheon, […] physically. If I do anything else, it won't be as hard as GiCheon.*[87]

Ms. Pak calls the feeling which comes after completing *naegasinjang* good*,* Ms. Kim calls it refreshing. This extract from Ms. Kim's interview accords with her experiential modality of self-discovery and growing self-confidence. She feels certain that she can

[87] Interview of 15.11.2010, Seoul, South Korea.

achieve any endeavor she wishes in life. *Because [I did] such a hard thing for a long time […] other difficult things do not seem difficult to me.* The claim of Ms. Kim that after completing something as hard as *naegasinjang* she is not afraid of future life trials is seconded by many other GiCheon practitioners. Though Kim Yŏnghŭi does not phrase it as such, it is clear from her account that for her, self-confidence is one of the benefits acquired through practice.

Lobetti categorizes two different kinds of power or benefits produced during ascetic practice: benefits for oneself and benefits for others (2014: 87). However, as elaborated in the Introduction, in my theoretical framework of multiple selves flowing into each other, the distinction between self and others is not absolute, but relative. If my individual body is myself, then the other is another person. If my family is myself, then the others are other families. In this conceptualization, the effects of the GiCheon practice begin with the inner layers of the self and expand toward outer layers, generally following the first vector of progression. For example, the ability of withstanding cold temperatures and an attribute of greater warmness in the body can be acquired through the practice, and on an emotional level this can translate into a milder, warmer attitude toward other people, which can bring about warmer and more harmonious relationships in the family. Warmness is one example of such benefits or results of the practice; it was explored in greater detail in the previous chapter on personally colored experiential modalities. The experiential modality of warmness relates both to oneself and to other people.

Yet, as reviewed in the previous chapter, experiential modalities are not always positive. I have examined the experiential modalities of Kim Pohŭi and Kim Wŏn'gyu, and identified the former's to be hardship and boredom, while the latter's is lack and disappointment. In the case of these two practitioners, their slightly negative experiential modalities do not match the benefits they acquired through the practice. In the case of

practitioners with more positive experiential modalities, the major benefits acquired in GiCheon often constitute the experiential modality itself, and cannot be separated from it.

6.7 Greater pain brings higher efficiency

As discussed above, in GiCheon, the pain comes with the application of *yŏkkŭn,* the maximal twisting of the joints. The degree of the bending can be modified, thus increasing or decreasing the amount of pain. When a certain level of *yŏkkŭn* is mastered, the student has to proceed to the next. *Yŏkkŭn* is bending the joints to a *maximal* degree, and this maximum is different for each person. As the joints acquire greater flexibility, the degree of the bending has to be increased. The practitioner is required to strive for the maximal bending continuously. If she or he does not do so, *yŏkkŭn* is not achieved.

During the session, the students are instructed "to put themselves into as much pain as possible"- that is to maximize the *yŏkkŭn* bending of the waist, knees and wrists. In practice, students follow these instructions sporadically, at times increasing but sometimes decreasing the degree of the bending of the joints, and thus the amount of pain that is felt fluctuates. After standing in the *naegasinjang* position for a few minutes, the joints start to unbend involuntarily. Therefore, maintaining a constant degree of *yŏkkŭn* demands focus and effort. Such focus and effort strengthen or weaken progressively, contributing to an increase or decrease of pain. This way the *naegasinjang* position turns into a little war with oneself, where one strives to perfect the position by optimizing *yŏkkŭn* on one hand, but at times gives in to the pain and unbends the joints, diminishing the degree of *yŏkkŭn* on the other hand.

Lobetti connects asceticism to the willing production of some degree of pain and physical exhaustion. When a certain practice starts becoming too easy because of the practitioner's experience and increased prowess, the practitioner has to wisely re-adjust the

practice to make it harder, thus retaining its effectiveness. Ascetic pain is not aimed at destruction, but it is a wise pain through which the ascetic malleates her or his body. Besides, the body is employed for the interpretation of the various sensations that arise through pain (2014: 117-118). The GiCheon definition of *yŏkkŭn* reverberates with the notion of avoidance of a practice that is too easy, as mentioned by Lobetti. The goal here is the perpetual striving for efficiency. The level of the difficulty of the practice is directly proportional to the level of pain and effort that the practice requires, and the benefits or powers obtained (2014: 126).

Lobetti argues that in an ascetic tradition the body demonstrates the possibility of being ontologically improved: it is a perfectable entity that can ascend toward something purer and holier (2014: 119). His comment on perfectability is consistent with my view of GiCheon and similar practices as representing technologies of self, aimed at transforming the self to achieve a different state. In GiCheon, this perfected state indeed involves benefits or abilities proportional to the effort invested. Interestingly, not only the greater bending of the joints in *naegasinjang* brings more sustainable gains and advantages to the practitioner. Similarly, the amount of money paid to the teacher is thought to contribute directly to the degree of benefits gained. Perhaps that is why a famous Korean Buddhist monk gave an expensive car to Lee Sangwŏn *sabunim* as payment for three days of GiCheon training. GiCheon teachers often tell this story to the students (probably attempting to prompt them to support the GiCheon organization financially). This perspective is based on the understanding that any investment, personal or economical, counts towards the outcome. Both investing in yourself during practice, and investing economically into your teachers and into the GiCheon organization are supposed to bring benefits. Personal effort and donating money are different forms of contribution, but both of them are viewed as increasing the chance for the practitioner to obtain the desired results from the practice.

6.8 Pain as restoring *ki* flow and as healing

This is how Mr. Ha, a doctor of Korean traditional medicine, talks about his pain experience.[88]

*It seems to me that pain comes when the channels are blocked. In Korean traditional medicine […] when it hurts, it means that the [*ki*] does not pass, does not flow […]. The [*ki*] tries to pass, it creates the strain and the heat comes. […] I have to send the* kiun (기운 *strength*) *to the tips of the toes through the shoulders […], concentrating [the strength] here, but here it cannot pass, so it hurts.*

Mr. Ha describes pain as something that occurs when the *ki* channels are blocked. GiCheon thought metaphorically compares this process to an old, unused hose tube, the walls of which stick together in some sections. Water is being pumped into the tube. First it is partially filled, then the tension increases and the hose starts shaking. The dried parts are soaked through, the consolidated mud starts to dissolve and finally the water begins to pass. In this metaphor the water is *ki* and the dried out hose tube is the body of the adept. GiCheon positions induce the pumping of water (*ki*) into the tube (the body). The whole process is marked by painful pressure and strain. In this metaphor, the pumping of *ki* into the body is likened to the *naegasinjang* position. Another metaphor is a bottle which is suddenly shaken. When the bottle vibrates, the liquid and its components inside the bottle are stirred. The dregs come up from the bottom, the layers of the liquid shift. Here the bottle is an analogy for the body, and the liquid a symbol of *ki*.

Performing the *naegasinjang* position is usually perceived as going through a number of phases – it is an absence of these phases that caused Kim Wŏn'gyu from Chapter Five to

[88] Interview of 07.10.2010, Bundang, South Korea.

complain, characterizing his own experience as monotonous. One of the phases is that of anger, annoyance and impatience, as we have seen in the extract of Ms. Sin's interview in Chapter Five. Pain is very strong during this phase, the arms and legs shake sometimes. When I experience this phase, I feel how sweat is appearing on my skin. It is to this stage of the *naegasinjang* experience that Mr. Ha relates in his comment on pain and *ki* flow:

When I just started GiCheon practice, the body part that hurt the most was my left shoulder. […] I was injured there in the past. […] I felt as if my shoulder was falling off, it was so painful, I felt an urge to put my arms down, but I endured the pain […] and the pain went away […] and my shoulder got a lot better. […] And then the pain transferred to another place, […] to my knee. The knee hurt a lot, […] and after getting through, the pain shifted to the back. […] When I practice GiCheon now, my back hurts the most, my back is not healed yet. […]

This part of the account of Mr. Ha conforms to GiCheon theory which considers pain to be part of a healing process. According to this view, the healing of a particular body part is perceived as pain. The healing is conceived as moving into a certain direction which is different for each practitioner and also differs for the same practitioner on different occasions, depending on the mood, the body condition, the weather of that day etc. However, the practitioners who subscribe to this theory notice a particular system in the pain/healing process that they pass through. They observe in their body a particular phenomenon for some period of time, which is often, but not always, perceived as pain. Later this feeling diminishes or disappears. Practitioners often report pain in the body parts that were hurt or unwell before.

I personally perceived performing *naegasinjang* in a low position as accompanied by a strong heartbeat. This continued for a few years of practice, then gradually lessened and receded. The strong heartbeat in *naegasinjang* position still comes back when I am tired or

sick. This might be an example of my acceptance and appropriation of the systematic healing theory as moving from one body part to another, sometimes returning to previous locations for additional treatment. To me it happened involuntarily, as if by itself. I did not direct this flow, I just performed the *naegasinjang* position as usual. However, the usual performance of GiCheon involves application of the *yŏkkŭn* principle with its maximal twisting of the joints. Exercised continuously, the maximal limit of *yŏkkŭn* shifts. The execution of *yŏkkŭn* changes, the *naegasinjang* position alters, and the pain experience is modified. This progressive transformation is likely to be imperceptible on a daily, weekly or even monthly basis, but when considered on a yearly basis it becomes noticeable and recordable. Mr. Ha describes this progressive healing metaphorically:

Long ago [Lee Sangwŏn] sabunim *told us to practice as if we go up the mountain […], in the mountains you see each time a new peak, it means there is no end to GiCheon practice […]. So I think [the pain] will emerge again. […] The weak body parts are continuously revealed […]. The problem [I have now] is my back. [*Ki*] does not circulate in my back, it seems. […] After the circulation in my back is restored, [the ailments] will be revealed in other points [in the body]. Maybe the wrists or the neck […].*[89]

As reviewed in the following chapter, the mountain metaphor is frequently brought up in the interviews. In the extract above Mr. Ha compares healing to ascending a mountain. Seeing new peaks is like discovering new points in the body which need therapy. I further elaborate on this motif in Chapter Seven. Similarly to Ha Tongju, Kim Chŏnghyŏn (not a real name), a businessman in his early forties, also stresses the healing aspect of pain.[90] If Mr. Ha compared the pain experience to mountain climbing, Mr. Kim compares pain to

[89] This does not really mean that ailment moves through the body, but that existing ailments successively become evident.

[90] Interview of 08.10.2010, Seoul, South Korea.

shouldering a burden. Both activities of ascending a mounting and shouldering a burden connote the motifs of endurance and persistence.

In the beginning I accepted pain as pain. But after some time passed, I started perceiving this pain as my burden that I have to shoulder.[91] *[…] Something that I need in order to practice GiCheon. […] From birth, the human body progresses toward death, the functioning continuously declines, gets worse. […] In order to return to a normal [state of functioning] this pain is needed. […] If we just lie in a comfortable position, this [restoration] won't happen. […] To normalize the declining physical functioning of the human body […] [pain] is needed. The functioning is declining, so naturally pain is generated […]. Shoulders, or neck, or back, or knees try to mend, so the pain comes.*

Mr. Kim emphasizes the necessity of a drastic alteration in the usual mode of being in order to achieve transformation. *In order to return to a normal [state of functioning] this pain is needed. […] If we just lie in a comfortable position, this [restoration] won't happen.* This attitude differs from the opinion of Chŏn Sŏngho above. Chŏn Sŏngho was inclined to divide all people into two categories. The first category is the *people who enjoy pain, are happy with it.* To the second group belong those *who are not like that.* His comment connoted a view that these two groups of people are inherently different. In contrary fashion, the account of Mr. Kim stresses the difference between two states of being, rather than between two kinds of people. The first state of being is the *declining physical functioning of the human body.* It is associated with *lying in a comfortable position,* letting things be as they are. The second state is the normal state of functioning of the human body. This can be restored only by a drastic alteration.

[91] Mr. Kim uses the word *mok* (몫 share, portion), which I decided to translate as "burden".

In GiCheon, this drastic alteration is accompanied by pain but also is a step toward immortality. *From birth, the human body progresses toward death, the functioning continuously declines, gets worse.* The usual, the normal and the comfortable is the way of nature, the way toward death. As mentioned earlier, *yŏkkŭn* twisting of the joints is painful and in a way unnatural. It is believed to constitute a drastic alteration of the normal, reversing the flow of life, turning this flow back, away from death.[92]

In this and in Mr. Ha's narrative pain is theorized to be an inevitable aspect of the practice, which brings restoration of the correct functioning of the body. Another point is that the pain is always there, but that the way in which it is perceived alters. *In the beginning I accepted pain as pain. But after some time passed, I started perceiving this pain as my burden that I have to shoulder.*

Similarly to the experience of Kim Chŏnghyŏn, what I perceived as pain in the beginning was not painful for me a few years later. I definitely recognize and remember a particular feeling in the body, and can testify that it was painful, but is not so anymore (or is still painful, but much less). The pain in GiCheon is severe in the beginning, but becomes moderate and bearable as you go on.

[…] In the state of complete immersion, the mind-heart does not feel the pain, and there is no pain. […] In a state of immersion, there are no thoughts and there is no pain. I have experienced this a few times. […] The pain of GiCheon training and ordinary pain are 100% different. […] This pain comes by in order to enable GiCheon practice, to bring relaxation, [while] ordinary pain is harmful, injuring […].

[92] Many practitioners accept the belief in GiCheon that becoming an immortal (*sinsŏn* 神仙) who live for a few hundreds of years is possible upon leaving society, entering the mountains and practicing *naegasinjang* for about ten hours per day, as the first GiCheon teacher Taeyang Chinin did in his legendary childhood. For themselves, though, GiCheon trainees attempt to take just a few steps toward immortality, which is to significantly improve the state of their mind-hearts and bodies. I discuss the legends and notions of *sinsŏn* in Chapter Seven.

Mr. Kim describes a *state of complete immersion* with *no thoughts and no pain.* This is another phase of *naegasinjang,* that of peace, tranquility and comfort, when the pain is almost not there. In my experience it involves a light and clear feeling, and also a sense of moral correctness. This state is similar to the feeling after concluding *naegasinjang,* though it comes sometimes during performing this position. I would compare it to the feeling of settling down, similar to the weather calming down after the storm has passed.

Like Mr. Chŏn above, Mr. Kim also compares the pain in *naegasinjang* with other kinds of pain. Mr. Chŏn distinguishes two types of pain, joy and torture. Mr. Kim talks about the pain that comes *in order to enable GiCheon practice, to bring relaxation,* as opposed to ordinary pain which is harmful, injuring. In his account, GiCheon pain comes to heal, while ordinary pain comes to abuse. However he does not stipulate what this ordinary pain is, whether it is pain inflicted by others, pain resulting from ill health, or both.

6.9 Pain in the narration of Ms. Sin

Let us look at a few extracts from the account of Ms. Sin.[93] A substantial part of her interview was discussed in detail in Chapter Five, but in this chapter I will address a few extracts where she talks about pain: *[...] From the start I felt pain in my shoulders, near my neck... Then in my back, knees, ankles, joints.* […] *[When I did* naegasinjang*] I felt pain in my back, and also pain in the knees. The upper spine also hurt. My arms also hurt. Sometimes all the parts hurt simultaneously. Sometimes I felt intense pain concentrated in one part of the body. When one body part hurts severely, the pain in the other parts is not felt strongly. Because that body part hurts so much. It seems that I felt these pains for a long period of time. Recently I feel less pain.*

[93] Interview of 08.12.2010, Pusan, South Korea.

Ms. Sin first describes where and how she felt pain. The pain of Ms. Sin does not have a specific location, it travels in the body from one part to another, sometimes relating to several, or all body parts, and the degree of pain varies as well. The location, degree and character of the pain fluctuate. Many practitioners feel that the pain gradually shifts from one location to another, as Ms. Sin, Mr. Ha and Mr. Kim narrate in the extracts of their interviews quoted above. Often the adepts talk about waves of pain rising and falling. In the case of Ms. Sin, the pain moved from her shoulders and neck towards her back, knees and ankles. Mr. Ha describes a progressive pain with a similar direction. As mentioned earlier, in GiCheon this fluctuation of pain is conceptualized as a healing process. However with time, the pain recedes. *Recently I feel less pain.*

Ms. Sin also offers an explanation for why the feeling of pain modifies. *When one body part hurts severely, the pain in the other parts is not felt strongly. Because that body part hurts so much.* She considers bodily sensations in their complexity, perceived in relation to each other. This view agrees with the opinion of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. He sees a particular bodily sensation as relative, measured and perceived against a background of other bodily sensations (1945: 93-95).

Other practitioners, for example Kim Yŏnghŭi, Kim Chŏnghyŏn and Ha Tongju above, also mention knees, back, wrists shoulders and neck when talking about pain. Most GiCheon students feel the pain in these locations of their body, rather than in others. That is not surprising, as the *naegasinjang* position puts the joints under strain. We can question GiCheon theory here, contesting why the pain is felt in the joints. If, according to GiCheon theory, the pain is identical with healing coming to an ailing body part, why doesn't pain come to the stomach, eyes or ears? Many people have problems there, rather than in the knees, wrists, shoulders or neck. The answer to this question again lies with GiCheon theory, from its understanding of the body as a conduit for a *ki* flow structured around the backbone and

the joints. It is believed, that any disorder or affliction starts or manifests through the body balance. *Naegasinjang* is aimed at correcting the general posture and the way the body lives, functions and moves in space. This is achieved through straightening the backbone and balancing the left and the right halves of the body. As the backbone and the joints, including knees, waist, shoulders, elbows and wrists are key points in this vision of the body, they manifest in the process of correcting the body by being stimulated. In GiCheon theory, this stimulation reveals itself as pain. This pain is hard to bear, but GiCheon students presume that there are compensations.

The testimony of Ms. Sin: *Now almost one year has passed. In my back I feel light pain, but it is rare. […] I did not think about it [pain] much. My body, the muscles, hurt … After releasing the position, I had a feeling of being refreshed. […] I bear pain well, it is in my personality. Pain is not very hard for me. […]*

Ms. Sin relates her attitude toward pain: *I bear pain well, it is in my personality. Pain is not very hard for me.* Acceptance of the pain or the lack of it, the degree and character of this acceptance or rejection, are another key issue in the discourse on pain in GiCheon. Most practitioners accept the pain. Within the GiCheon community, however, "funny" stories circulate about newcomers who dropped out of GiCheon practice after a few seconds of *naegasinjang*, leaving the studio with angry expressions on their faces. In group dynamics, I observed that the decisive factor is the presence of co-practitioners. Some students of mine barely accepted a few seconds of *naegasinjang* when practicing alone, but changed drastically when surrounded by co-practitioners. Together with others, they maintained the position for two or three minutes without apparent problems.

*But while doing [*naegasinjang*], I felt refreshed, and also after releasing the position. On the contrary, when I did not do GiCheon, I felt empty, I felt that I had to do [GiCheon*

exercises]. Should I say I felt sad [that I did not do GiCheon exercises]? Like a feeling of omission. I really had to do it, but it slipped away. So I did GiCheon every day for one year, almost without break, except weekends […].

Ms. Sin talks about a refreshing feeling during and after performing a position. As mentioned above in the text of this chapter, the special feeling of calmness and satisfaction usually comes after completing *naegasinjang*. Yet, a very similar feeling comes at times also during performance of the position. Ms. Sin and other adepts gradually got used to it and after some time they started needing it. As time passes, the GiCheon bodily sensations become addictive.

For myself, after ten years of practice I also started feeling a need for GiCheon on a regular basis. Without it, I sometimes cannot fall asleep or sense unrest in my back. My body has modified as a result of the practice and I often feel an insistent need to exercise my joints. Particularly I feel this on the days I have practiced GiCheon, as if my body becomes more alive on those days.

When I am standing in naegasinjang *position, it is very hard. First of all, when* wŏnjangnim *[the instructor] tells us [to do it], I was thinking: "I should not give up, I should do it till the end. It is hard, but I should endure a bit more". So I did it. Sometimes I did not want to do it. I wanted to stop in the middle, but I did not, it seems that my inclination to endure was stronger.*

Ms. Sin discusses her inner dilemma on whether to keep the position or to release it. Though outwardly peaceful, the acceptance of pain masks dramatic inner conflicts, confusions and contradictions. Ms. Sin puts it mildly: *when* wŏnjangnim *tells us […], sometimes I did not want to do it.* In *naegasinjang,* the relationship with the teacher and the feelings towards them can intensify. The position is assumed and maintained voluntarily, but

in a way the student lends her or his free will to the teacher for a while. The teacher decides the moment of releasing the position. Before that instant, the student often hates the teacher. The teacher becomes a torturer, the one who is responsible for my pain, as it is in her/his power to stop it, but she/he does not. I often heard instructor Lee Kit'ae say to his students "Don't hate me, I am helping you to get healthy". Speaking for myself, I feel unhappy and disappointed as an instructor when I see this expression of hatred on my students' faces. I feel it is unfair, as I invest so much and exert myself in teaching.

Though occasionally hated, a GiCheon teacher is usually trusted by the students. I recollect that during the first year of practice the pain in *naegasinjang* was so intense that I could not remember why I had to do it. While performing the position, I no longer knew what my reason was for doing it. I only remembered that there was some reason, but not the reason itself. At those moments I trusted myself – that self which has previously decided to perform *naegasinjang.* And of course I trusted the teacher.

6.10 Conclusion: is GiCheon an ascetic experience?

In conclusion, the question of pain in GiCheon, its character, or its acceptance, is controversial among different practitioners and complex. The extracts from the interviews discussed in this chapter demonstrate a variety in the sensitivity to pain, as well as different ways of appropriating GiCheon philosophy. Yet, there are common points in the discourse of the adherents. As elaborated earlier in section 6.2 of this chapter, many trainees comment on the feeling of satisfaction that comes after completing *naegasinjang.* But also pain can bring bodily satisfaction while maintaining the position, and then both are experienced simultaneously, as stated by Mr. Kim and Ms. Sin in sections 6.8 and 6.9 respectively. Besides pain, people usually feel heat in the *naegasinjang* position, as Ms. Ha remarks in

section 6.8 and as I have explained in the section 6.2. The body becomes hot. I turn off the heater and open the window while practicing.

As I have noted in section 6.8, pain in the *naegasinjang* position varies according to the circumstances. These circumstances may include the weather and the season, the physical condition and emotional state of that day, the social setting – the absence or presence and the number and type of co-practitioners. While holding the position, the waves of pain rise and fall, and the pain shifts within the body, a process described by Mr. Ha and by Ms. Sin. Besides these various spectrums of pain, another pain continuum is defined by the choice of the practitioner at any given moment. She or he can always increase or decrease the tension by strengthening or relaxing the degree of the bending of the joints, *yŏkkŭn,* as I have mentioned in section 6.7.

When adepts articulate their GiCheon experiences, the central theme is usually the pain of the *nagaesinjang* position. Many accounts accord with Lobetti's description that the pain voluntarily inflicted upon oneself is the key moment in ascetic practice, the agent bringing transformation. However, as I have mentioned above, the degree of acceptance or rejection of GiCheon theory in this respect varies in different interviews. For Ms. Sin pain did not constitute a big problem, but Ms. Pak cited in section 6.6 felt the pain very strongly. Ms. Sin does not emphasize the pain, she says *the pain is not very hard for me.* This is rather an exceptional case. The fact that sometimes one part of the body hurt stronger than other parts, Ms. Sin ascribes not to the healing process but to relativity: *when one body part hurt severely, the pain in the other parts is not felt strongly. Because that body part hurts so much.* Her explanation does not match the official GiCheon theory.

Another discrepancy between the practitioners' theories of pain and the way in which pain is categorized in GiCheon thought is the interview of Mr. Chŏn from section 6.2 of this

chapter. Official theory stresses the very particular bodily attributes of pain. It is the pain of *yŏkkŭn*, the twisting of the joints in a very particular way, and not any other pain, which is emphasized. It is this pain which is dwelled on, considered as healing, and glorified in GiCheon thought. Mr. Chŏn, however, equates his pain with the pain of martyrs, by defining it as self-invited. For him, that aspect of pain is central, not necessarily the *yŏkkŭn* pain. He can accept the pain of *naegasinjang* because it is self-inflicted. Because the pain is self-invited and thus accepted, pain can be not painful, but joyful.

GiCheon shares the self-inflicted character of pain with other ascetic practices. For Lobetti, pain is the specific marker of an ascetic experience. He talks not about the destructive power of the pain, but about its power to transform the practitioner and to awaken in her or him unknown energies. Lobetti thinks that the purpose of the ascetic is to grasp and control the power of pain and utilize it as a tool for her or his own benefit, or for the benefit of other people (Lobetti 2014: 11, 87). It is this creative, transformative and constructive experience of pain that Kim Wŏn'gyu was missing, when he described his pain as monotonous in Chapter Five. While absent in his own perception, he learned about its presence in the perception of other practitioners from conversations with them. The present chapter shows that examples of benefits acquired through pain in GiCheon include satisfaction and a sense of accomplishment for Chŏn Sŏngho in section 6.2, developing fortitude for Pak Kyŏngae and self-confidence for Kim Yŏnghŭi in section 6.6. The benefits for Ms. Sin from GiCheon practice have already been discussed in detail in Chapter Five.

If, as Lobetti argues, ascetic practice is characterized by pain that is willingly inflicted on the self for a particular purpose, then the cultural difference between ascetic and non-ascetic practices lies in the attitude toward pain. Non-ascetics usually avoid pain while ascetics seek it. According to Lobetti, willing acceptance of pain is one characteristic of

asceticism. In this way for Mr. Chŏn the willingly accepted self-inflicted pain of GiCheon is essential.

Another characteristic highlighted by Lobetti is the malleation of the body. As I have emphasized in this present chapter, according to GiCheon philosophy, the painful *naegasinjang* position malleates the mind-heart and the body, affecting her or his person, habits and life. GiCheon is a process of crafting the self, the self is malleated, just like a wooden block that turns into a plank, or as a stone that becomes a statue (Lobetti 2014: 124). In this chapter we have reviewed how different adepts describe malleation, the transformation of the body in pain. Mr. Ha sees it as a *ki* flow that heals the body, thus transforming it to a different state. Kim Chŏnghyŏn supports the healing interpretation by dwelling on the *naegasinjang* pain that restores the normal functioning of the body, as discussed in section 6.8.

As argued in section 6.4, GiCheon thought also accords with viewing the body as text and simultaneously as a recording medium, which is also common to ascetic practices (Lobetti 2014: 5-6). The painful GiCheon practice constitutes the price that people pay for going against the flow of life, a notion developed in section 6.5 of this chapter. This idea is shared by ascetics (Lobetti 2014: 126, Flood 2004: 15).

Lobetti's findings are useful for the analysis of ascetic experiences also outside of Japan, just as he intended them to be. He tries to identify common themes in Japanese asceticism that can lead to a better definition of asceticism so that it can also be applicable to other contexts (2014: 2). As I have shown in this chapter, many of Lobetti's conclusions regarding pain and asceticism are valid in the case of the GiCheon practice. So in relation to the question raised in section 6.3 of this chapter, I suggest that GiCheon and similar Korean practices could be classified as ascetic.

As noted in the Introduction and Chapter Two, GiCheon and other *ki suryŏn* practices are contemporary avatars of age-old East Asian techniques of nourishing life and internal alchemy. GiCheon practice is directed toward self-transformation. As I will elaborate in the following chapter, in GiCheon theory the goal of this transformation is defined as immortality. The Chinese character *sŏn* (仙 immortality) is a combination of a character *in* (人 a human being) with the character *san* (山 mountain). In East Asia, immortality denotes the immortality of mountain dwellers, related directly to *sŏndo* (仙道 the way of immortals) and *sŏnpŏp* (仙法 techniques of immortality). Accordingly, in the extract of the interview with Mr. Ch'oe quoted in Chapter Seven, he connects the yearning that makes him perform the GiCheon practice today with childhood fairy tales about *sinsŏn* (神仙 divine immortals) stepping on clouds and flying.

As evidenced in the interviews with the adepts and the orally transmitted and codified legends reviewed in Chapter Seven, the ideas of *sŏndo* and *sŏnpŏp* are resuscitated in the constructed tradition of GiCheon, thus constituting a part of contemporary Korean mountain culture and mythology. A perfect body, the ideal of self-transformation in GiCheon theory, is the body of a mountain immortal. In the opinion of Lobetti, ascetic practices aim at progressing from a human body towards an ideal body. The presence of the ideal perfect body contributes to this progression by defining its final theoretical goal (Lobetti 2014: 136).

The Korean peninsula is highly mountainous. Hence mountains are real spaces in the midst of which people live. As reviewed in Chapter Seven, GiCheon adepts often allude to mountains when talking about self-perfection. In their discourse, ascending a mountain is metaphorically compared to self-transformation, and reaching the peak of a mountain is

likened to an achievement of an important goal on this path. In the following chapter I will illuminate different aspect of this metaphor, examining mountains as a key site of GiCheon practice in myth and reality, the topography in which the perfect body is formed and enacted through the living experience of GiCheon trainees.

Chapter Seven: image of the mountain in the narrations of the practitioners

7.1 Mountains in East Asian and Korean culture

As we have seen in the previous chapter, one of the central notions in GiCheon, that of *ki* flow, is often connected to pain in the narrations of the practitioners. As Mr. Ha says, *when it hurts, it means that the [*ki*] does not pass, does not flow […].* According to the philosophy of the training, GiCheon positions generate pressure, which pushes *ki* through *ki* channels. As will be discussed in the current chapter, Mr. Ha likens *ki* channels in the body to mountain paths. The subject of this metaphor are the *ki* channels in a human body. In order to clarify the process of those channels opening, Mr. Ha brings up the image of a mountain path, the object of the metaphor. This way he ascribes the characteristics of a mountain to a human body, and qualities of a human body to a mountain, creating a new perception of both. In this metaphor *ki* movement through the channels is like the movement of people and animals along a mountain path.[94] This metaphor connotes the motif of communion with nature, providing a link with the universe.[95]

As we relate in detail hereafter, Mr. Ha in his interview further develops the images connecting pain in the human body with mountain climbing. In the *naegasinjang* position, the pain appears and disappears in different locations inside the body. Chapter Six has explored how, according to GiCheon theory, pain appearing in various organs is a manifestation of *ki* attempting to flow. Once the working of *ki* is restored, the pain will surface in a different

[94] In the interviews, the language of GiCheon adepts is often metaphorical. A metaphor, drawing parallels between two objects or experiences, is a strong statement that alters our notion of the subject of metaphor so that we can make sense of what it means to identify the subject of the metaphor with the object of metaphor. This leads to new meanings and observations and new ways of interpreting life. Interaction between the terms of a metaphor changes our perception of each term, infusing the one with the attributes of the other – and vice versa (Bernbaum 1990: 213).

[95] In section 7.6 of the present chapter I introduce an extract from the interview with Kim Chehŭi, who talks about *communion with nature* (*chayŏn kwa kyogam*) directly.

body part. Section 7.2 of the current chapter examines how Mr. Ha compares this process to mountain hiking.

Many GiCheon adepts liken walking in the mountains to the practice of GiCheon in a number of creative ways, some of which we explore in this chapter. Often the mountain imagery comes to signify a wider range of experiential content and connotations. When analysing the interviews, within them five conceptual themes which anchor mountain references become clear. All of them to various degrees rely on metaphor. The first of these themes is "mountain routes as *ki* channels in the human body", the second is "mountain routes as paths of religious or spiritual progress leading to the summit", the third is "mountains as *innun kŏt* (something that is there)", the fourth is "mountains as a hiking space", a space of fresh air, nature and relaxation. The fifth motif is "mountains as a space of immortality". These thematic motifs habitually intersect, and often more than one of them are activated in a particular narrative. Comparing mountain ascent to human body processes, to religious or spiritual progress and to nature are figures of speech often utilized by the adepts to describe their GiCheon practice. Mountain hiking figures in such descriptions as a metaphor. But also actual, not just metaphorical, mountain hiking is alluded to by the practitioners. The dynamics and processes occurring in a human body, in human life, and in mountain hiking are often conceptualized in similar ways. Sometimes they connect also to the ideas of mountain immortality, which I have outlined briefly in the Introduction and will discuss in greater detail in section 7.6 of the present chapter.

This chapter addresses the image of the mountain in the narrations of GiCheon practitioners according to the five thematic motifs I have traced. Their narrations build upon a vast East Asian lore with regard to mountains, and also connect with more widely held conceptions. In East Asian culture the mountain is a source of life, of renewal and a place of passage. Besides providing a shelter from political persecution, a mountain is a refuge from

civilization – a place of seclusion, liberation and transcendence. Adepts of alchemy seek herbs and minerals there, and encounter recluses and immortals (Verellen 1995: 268). East Asian paintings of mountains and rivers were traditionally believed to awaken the spirit and disclose the true nature of reality, and to be imbued with the power to transport and transform the person who views them (Bernbaum 1990: 226). In Korea, mountains are considered to be places of purity. Korean shamans pray in the mountains to renew their spiritual powers. Since ancient times till today mountains were considered tranquil places for personal cultivation, an antidote to the busy city-life (Jang-tae Keum 1996: 38). Buddhist temples, Christian *kidowŏn* (祈禱院 prayer centers) and various other shrines and establishments – including GiCheon centers – are found in the mountains. Most GiCheon flyers, books and web-sites abound with images of mountainous places and frequently bring up the term *sanjung suryŏn* (山中修練 training in the mountains), and retreats to GiCheon mountain centers are vital for the practice. This chapter considers many ways in which the adepts utilize the image of the mountain for the articulation of their experiences. I of course do not seek to throw light on the entirety of associations the mental image of the mountain evokes, nor aim to encompass Korean mountain culture in its totality. My purpose is simply to examine how the image of the mountains, employed literally and metaphorically, unfolds in the narrations of GiCheon adepts. The next section of the chapter starts with the image of the mountain routes as *ki* channels in the human body.

7.2 Mountain routes as *ki* channels in the human body

Mr. Ha compares the human body to a mountain in the context of discussing his practice of GiCheon in the following way: *[…]When people grow older or when the condition of the body is declining, we say that* ki *does not circulate well, right? That is according to the*

following principle: when we walk in the mountains, if we don't [use the mountain path] often, [that] mountain path vanishes […]. Similarly to this, we close the passages where ki *flows [in our body]. If the passage through which [*ki*] flows is not [continuously utilized and] cleansed, it gets blocked, the* ki *cannot pass on […] and we cannot use those muscles and joints.* [96]

First Mr. Ha equates the *ki* channels in the body to the pathways in the mountain. Just like mountain pathways disappear when untrodden for a long time, so the *ki* passages might close in a body. When this happens, the related muscles and joints cannot be exercised properly. However, untrodden mountain trails can "re-open". This happens if people or animals come back to tread them continuously. Gradually, mountain passages will appear again, become visible and functional. In similar fashion, *ki* passages in the body which are currently blocked, can be re-opened. As discussed in the previous chapter, in GiCheon this process is complex and painful. The pain, which signifies both a blockage of *ki* but also the "piercing", or the "drilling" of *ki* channels, travels through the body, opening new perspectives in this bodily self-learning process. Mr. Ha compares this process also to mountain hiking:

[…] Long ago [Lee Sangwŏn] Sabunim told us to practice as if we go up the mountain […], in the mountains you see each time a new peak, it means there is no end to GiCheon practice […]. So I think [the pain] will emerge again. […] weak body parts are continuously revealed […].

Mr. Ha brings together GiCheon practice and walking in the mountains, showing the former as, or in terms, of the latter. In hiking, we walk up the mountain, but the moment we reach the top, a new peak is revealed. We can ascend it, and then still other summits will emerge in front of our eyes. Similarly to this, in *naegasinjang* the attention often focuses on

[96] In this and the following sections extracts from the interview of 26.11.2010, Pundang, South Korea, are quoted.

the body part that hurts, the left knee, for example. However, after the left knee is healed and the pain recedes, the right knee starts to throb. As discussed in Chapter Six, Mr. Ha sees this as a continuous healing process. Here, saying that *in the mountains you see each time a new peak* Mr. Ha discusses the gaze turned upward toward a new goal. In a similar fashion, after one organ is more or less healed, pain moves toward the next body part. Pain indicates a problem, but simultaneously it is a sign of healing. This is a progressive, forward-looking description of the restorative process, oriented toward the future, and directed at constructing a new, perfected self. This is the gaze toward a potential - the future self one wants and aspires to.

However, in the extract of his interview analyzed further in section 7.3 Mr. Ha also says that climbing a mountain allows one to *survey the surroundings when one arrives at the top*. This is a gaze downward, toward the path walked so far. *When one arrives at the top,* one can look down and gain awareness of the local topography. Similarly, GiCheon practice increases one's awareness of one's past, of oneself and of one's body. Pain reveals the weak body parts one by one, thus contributing to self-study and bodily self-knowledge. This is a learning processes oriented toward the past, toward studying the old self as it developed up to a present moment. This gaze toward the old, pre-modified self contributes to self-study. Metaphorically depicted as a gaze downward from a mountain peak, it could be contrasted with the gaze upward, toward the future, potential self. However, as I have argued in the Chapter Four, the moment of consideration and gaining awareness of the quality of the old self often occurs simultaneously with envisioning the new self in one's mind. This is evidenced by the story of GiCheon instructor Cho from Chapter Four, who realized what his motivation for the training was when he heard the words of his teacher. At this moment the new self of Cho came into being, and his new motivation for training formed. If awareness of the old self actually comes simultaneously with the birth of a new self, the gaze downward

from the mountain peak and the gaze upward toward the next mountain peak are metaphorical depictions of these two aspects of self-transformation which happen together. The mountain peak itself then can be interpreted as a point of self-realization, a point of deliberation and reflection in our mental landscape.

Mr. Ha compares mountaineering to the processes occurring in the body during GiCheon training. Despite the fact that the practice is hard and painful, it challenges you to continue, because you actually observe your progress. Progress increases the desire for further progress, like each new mountain ridge invites a climber to proceed. In the interview extract analysed in the next section Mr. Ha says *when we go to the mountains, we always want to reach the mountain top.* Similarly, Kim Hyŏnt'ae, whose narration we examine in section 7.4 elaborates on mountains being a challenge.

7.3 Mountain routes as paths of religious or spiritual progress leading to the summit

In the narration of Mr. Ha, mountain routes relate not only to *ki* channels in the body, but also to different paths chosen in life: *[...]I think, everyone always aspires to a particular state. […] When we go to the mountains, we always want to reach the mountain top. A human being longs for a feeling of happiness at the highest peak, people seek that. […] There are many ways or methods to get to a mountain top. For example, there is a way up the mountain through GiCheon, there is a way up the mountain through Chinese qigong, there is a way up the mountain through Taekwondo. There are many ways; which way is a shortcut to the summit?*

Mr. Ha metaphorically depicts any project, any endeavor in life as directed at the summit, which he interprets as happiness. GiCheon, qigong and Taekwondo are examples of methods to achieve happiness. Ha Tongju sees the pursuit of happiness as competitive, and is searching for the most efficient technique.

[…] We have to reach a mountain top we do not [yet, currently] see. After starting ascending, some people cannot make it [till the top]. Some others can find answers to life questions [when they reach the summit] or survey the surroundings when they arrive at the top. Or, they think they have arrived at the summit, their final destination, but then and there they might perceive yet another possible summit [above it]… […] I call the people who arrive at the summit sŏngin (聖人 sages). *People like them become Jesus Christ, Shakyamuni or Muhammed. […]*

People aspire to future happiness which they *do not [yet currently] see.* What will this unknown happiness turn to be, when actualized? When arriving at the summit will they then discover another potential happiness as a new peak to conquer? Here Ha Tongju might be inspired by Korean expression *san nŏmŏ sanida* (after crossing a mountain you discover another mountain), despite the fact that he uses different wording.

Not everyone can *arrive at the summit,* those who do are rare. Ha Tongju calls them *sŏngin* (sages). *Sŏngin* is a general epithet Mr. Ha grants to those who arrive at the summit of a mountain, viewing Jesus Christ, Shakyamuni or Muhammed as particular examples of *sŏngin.* Who are these people who reach the summit? What kind of happiness do they discover at the mountain top? Do they *find answers to life questions*? Do they *survey the surroundings*? After *having arrived at the summit* do they *perceive yet another possible summit [above it]*? In any case, Ha Tongju compares them to himself, to other GiCheon practitioners, to hikers and to people in general.

Together with *sinsŏn* (神仙 Chinese: *shenxian*, divine immortal) and *chinin* (眞人 Chinese: *zhenren*, perfected man or woman), *sŏngin* embody perfection, often the goal of East Asian practices of inner alchemy and nourishing life. *Sŏngin* present a model of

complete humanity, their divine powers result from their practices; they actively and mystically participate in the natural workings of life (Robinet 2008b: 880-881). Not by chance the image of *sŏngin* is evoked by Mr. Ha in the context of ascending mountains. *Sŏngin, sinsŏn* and *chinin* represent perfection and immortality of mountain dwellers, or "mountain immortality", the notion I review in section 7.6 of this chapter.

Ascend the mountain through Christianity ... […] Ascend the mountain through Buddhism ... […] I think […] that we have to do our best utilizing one of the methods, it does not matter which one, and we will succeed according to the amount of effort invested ... […]. For example, a skilled practitioner of Chinese martial arts, or a well-trained Taekwondo adept […] - we wonder, which of them will win in a sparring? But the answer [to this question] is, that the better fighter wins. […]

An introduction of Jesus, Buddha and the prophet Mohammed into the narrative makes it focus on religious or spiritual progress, though it continues to relate to life and happiness in general.[97] Religious or spiritual progress here becomes a metaphor for life or a way for achieving happiness. And the discourse continues to focus on rivalry, or a confrontation of various practices of self-perfection. Mr. Ha compares the competition between the various climbers to sparring. Who wins the sparring between a Chinese martial artist and a Taekwondo adept? Which of these two martial arts is more efficient? Which way up the mountain is better, a Chinese martial art or Taekwondo? Concluding with the words *the better fighter wins,* Mr. Ha expresses his opinion that what matters is the amount of effort invested. The one who trained harder than others will win the sparring, she will ascend the mountain faster, she will beat the opponent. Generally speaking, what particular mountain

[97] In accordance with the methodology of this dissertation, which approaches GiCheon as technology of the self, I use the term "spiritual" in the meaning ascribed to it by Michel Foucault. While elaborating on different techniques of the self, Foucault defines *"spirituality" as the research, the practice, and the experience through which the subject carries out the transformations related to purification, asceticism and modification of existence (2001: 16).*

path or practice we choose, is of lesser importance, what is critical, is the dedication to training and exertion. That will decide who wins.

While ascending the mountain, something different fits each person. Some people think it is karma […], [some] people who did GiCheon later quit, many people started yoga […]. Other people got into Taekwondo. Because this [GiCheon] did not agree with them, it was hard and […] frightening, so they decided to ascend [the mountain] from a different side.

GiCheon practice is for many people *hard and frightening*. GiCheon, as a path to spiritual perfection, to happiness or as a way of life does not fit everyone. So some students quit GiCheon and go for yoga or Taekwondo instead, whether to achieve happiness or to spiritually progress, or both. In a different part of the interview (not quoted here) Mr. Ha says that after leaving GiCheon some people start marathon running or hiking on a regular basis. These are the people who decided *to ascend the mountain from a different side*, preferring other practices to GiCheon.

Not everyone climbing to the top of the mountain […] prevails. They stop in the middle […], because they cannot go on without guidance. But there are people who ascend [the mountain] without guidance. They are extremely rare […]. For example […], long ago […], [some people wondered] why they should come to the studio to practice. [They thought] "I will just practice at home". To get to the studio […] and back takes one or two hours, why waste time? […] This person practiced at home for three months, and then came to the studio. […] Would his level be similar to the [level of] those practicing for three months at the studio? […]. Of course [people who practiced at the studio with the teacher achieved] a much higher level [than those practicing alone at home]. The teacher knows, but the beginners, do they know what went wrong? When you train alone, you don't know. The teacher has to correct [your postures]. […] So since ancient times we look for masters like that. […]

Sŏngin in general, Jesus Christ, Shakyamuni or Muhammed in particular, are successful at arriving at a mountain summit. Some of them have themselves received guidance; others were the rare ones capable of *ascending [the mountain] without guidance.* But the merit of everyone who has reached the mountain top is her or his ability to show the way to others. Ha Tongju symbolically compares the mountain ascent to spiritual practice, to striving for happiness and to life. And the person who shows you the way is a mountain guide. Mr. Ha positions GiCheon in line with Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, qigong, Taekwondo, yoga, marathon running and mountain hiking. These various practices can help with spiritual progress, with obtaining happiness and in finding your way in life. This journey is in his opinion better effected under the leadership of a guide. Ascending the mountain is faster if you follow the shortcut indicated by the guide directly to the top.

[…] When we walk up the mountain […], we have to follow the shortcut, but we cannot [find it], so we stray and stray and get more and more exhausted […].We have to get to the top of Sŏraksan following the mountain ridge […], but we don't know where the path lies, for that reason we continuously [slip] sideways […]. So if someone leads us […] we can ascend [the mountain] without trouble and without delay. […] We have to advance [upwards] step by step […], a leader can push us one step higher […].

In this passage Mr. Ha utilizes the metaphor of mountain ascent to describe the relationship between a master and a disciple, in GiCheon and in other disciplines. The guide can show me the way, the instructor can push me up the mountain. Without a guide, the ascent is slow and difficult, if not impossible. In order to better communicate his message, Mr. Ha brings in an example of Sŏraksan, the most celebrated and special of South Korean mountains. Sŏraksan is most famous for its *tanp'ung* (autumn leaves). In fall, city dwellers haste to the mountains to gaze at the beautiful autumn colours. The sleeping facilities at

Sŏraksan are so popular that they are booked months in advance. This is indeed a mass hiking culture, as described section 7.5 of this chapter, and Sŏraksan is its embodiment and symbol.

By tying together such symbols as Sŏraksan, *sŏngin*, Jesus Christ, Buddha, Taekwondo and GiCheon, Mr. Ha is sketching a picture of modern South Korean life. Sŏraksan and *sŏngin* connote old and contemporary mountain culture. Christianity and Buddhism are the most popular South Korean religions. Taekwondo and GiCheon represent martial arts and *ki suryŏn* practices. An essential characteristic of this South Korean life is its ever-present rush and competitiveness: we have to ascend the mountain without delay.

Mr. Ha utilizes walking in the mountains as a complex metaphor with multiple meanings. As I have argued, this metaphor works on a number of levels. The mountain routes are like *ki* channels in the human body and walking in the mountains is similar to GiCheon practice. But a human body is much more than a human body. Following the analysis of the interviews, in this dissertation I have conceptualized self-transformation in GiCheon as working on multiple levels simultaneously, and the self as the site of complex multi-layered dynamics. The bodily self extends into a social self and then into a universal self. Yet, an extended analysis of the interviews has yielded the existence of an additional self – that of a mountain. The body of a mountain is an additional body, or an additional self, upon, within or with the help of which the process of self-cultivation occurs. The mountain makes up an additional space of the self and for the self, within which a core of the self progresses. The core of the self can be a bodily self, but also a spiritual-religious self, or a happiness-searching self, as evidenced by the narration of Mr. Ha.

In the current chapter I argue that the mountain appears in the narrations of the practitioners as a metaphor for life. In the narration of Mr. Ha the mountain is like a human body, a space within which the movement of *ki* can be traced through the medium of pain.

Pain stirring within the body indicates the manner and degree of a healing process. The mountain is also a religious or spiritual space, or a space of life where one looks for happiness. An individual progresses within this space, carefully choosing her or his path, searching for shortcuts to reach the summit. In the set of interview extracts we now proceed to analyse, mountains still symbolize life, but in a less concrete, and more abstract sense. Here mountains stand for *what is - innŭn kŏt*.

7.4 Mountains as *innŭn kŏt* (있는 것)

In the narration of Kwŏn Kuho, hiking is again a metaphor for GiCheon practice: *In Korean, we say "there are mountains, so I go into the mountains* (sani issŏsŏ sanŭl kanda)" *[...].Once Sabunim asked me: "Mr. Kwŏn, why do you practice GiCheon?" […] In* suryŏn*, the sense of purpose can be lacking – and it might be good ... […] So you just have people walking in the mountains … Nowadays there are lots of people hiking in the mountains ... In our time there were barely [people strolling in the mountains]... […] If we ask "why do you go to the mountains?"... It is expressed like that, actually you cannot express it otherwise […] There are mountains, so you go there ... […] It is better if you don't have a specific sense of purpose … [when you train] […].*[98]

Seventy percent of Korean peninsula is occupied by mountains. Mountains therefore are the background against which the spectacle of life is played out, and also symbolic of life itself. You walk in the mountains because the mountains are there, in front of your eyes, nearby your home. There is no specific reason for hiking, and not everything needs a rational reason. GiCheon practice is, or should be, like walking in the mountains. Mr. Kwŏn thinks that an absence of a particular goal in training is desirable. In a spirit very different from the competitiveness of Mr. Ha above, Mr. Kwŏn says that in *suryŏn the sense of purpose can be*

[98] Interview of 07.11.2010, Seoul, South Korea.

lacking – and it might be good. Just as I go hiking "without reason", so I should practice GiCheon "without reason". Mountains stand for something that is there, the unquestioned, given background against which human life unfolds. The image of mountains as something that is there and the parallels between GiCheon training and hiking come across in the interviews of many practitioners. This is how GiCheon instructor Kim Hyŏnt'ae develops these themes.[99]

Physical pain, after you overstep it once, can be overstepped twice, three times [and so on]. If you go beyond the limit, beyond the mountain pass (kogae)...[100] *Now, famous alpinists, mountain climbers, [if you ask them] "why do you go to the mountains?" [they answer] "there are mountains so I go there"* (kŏgi sani issŏsŏ kanda) *[...].*[101] *If we ask "until which point should we study? Until when should we do* suryŏn*?" [...] [The answer is] until we stop perceiving* suryŏn*, the mountains, as mountains. [...] Up to the moment when this mountain passage would seem as nothing to me, up to the moment when it would not seem a mountain pass for me [anymore]. Until [the moment when] this [mountain passage] becomes something self-evident for me. When we achieve this target state of the mind-heart, that is the end of* suryŏn*. Why? Because we already know everything.*

In the narrative of Kim Hyŏnt'ae the very existence of mountains expresses a challenge. Mountains are not just there. They are not just a background. Instead, they provoke us. I can cross the mountain pass. After I cross the mountain pass, I can overcome this challenge two times, three times and more. Then, it ceases being a challenge. For Mr. Kim, in a narrow sense, the mountain is an analogy for physical pain. Being sustained once, the pain

[99] Interview of 04.12.2010, Puch'ŏn, South Korea.

[100] In ordinary speech *kogae* is a metaphor for a difficult period of obstacles in one's life.

[101] It is possible that the comments *there are mountains, so I go into the mountains* of Kwŏn Kuho and *there are mountains so I go there* of Kim Hyŏnt'ae are inspired by the English mountaineer George Mallory (1886-1924). When asked why he wanted to climb Mount Everest, Mallory answered "Because it is there" (Bernbaum 1990: 238).

can be contained. Here, Mr. Kim echoes the narration of Mr. Ha. Both Mr. Ha and Mr. Kim connect pain experienced in the *naegasinjang* position with ascending the mountain. Mr. Ha links pain emerging anew in a different body part to a revelation of a new mountain peak while hiking. Mr. Kim likens pain to a mountain pass. Mountain passes can be crossed, and so the pain can be overcome. It is hard the first time, but the second, the third, the fourth time are easier. Mr. Kim continues his metaphor toward overcoming larger obstacles and difficulties in life and in study. Crossing the mountain pass is an allegory of mastering the pain of the body. Yet both the image of a mountain pass and of physical pain point toward different, deeper symbolism. Not just the pain of the body, but the pain and difficulty of existence in general and of *suryŏn* in particular could, and should be overcome.

In a wider sense, the mountain presents an allegory for *suryŏn.* As long as the mountain confronts me, I have to overcome it, I have to climb it. But when the mountain becomes nothing to me, it stops being a trial for me, and it is not a challenge for me anymore. Mr. Kim articulates this as "not being a mountain" any longer. *Until when should we do suryŏn?" […] [The answer is] until we stop perceiving* suryŏn*, the mountains, as mountains.* The mountain here is a symbol of *suryŏn*, of the study. When the training becomes too easy, it is not training for me anymore, and there is no need to continue the practice or the study. When that level of difficulty is overcome by the student, it is incorporated into her knowledge and ability: *we already know everything.*

Mountains are mentioned by the adepts not necessarily in direct connection with their GiCheon practice. Yet, even in those cases analysis of mountain concepts in their narrations is helpful for understanding the place of mountains in Korean culture in general, which of course impacts directly on the meaning of mountains in GiCheon. The following is an extract from the interview with Yi Ch'angu, the owner of a health products business, in his early

sixties. I have talked with Mr. Yi about different religions, and this is how he summarized our conversation.[102]

- *The best religion is* chayŏn (自然 nature).[103]

- *So, what is* chayŏn*?*

- Chayŏn, *as it is* (innŭn kŭdaero).

- *What is "as it is"?*

- *Simply as it is. There are the clouds in the sky, there are trees on the mountains, the water is flowing in the valley.* Chayŏnsŭrŏun (natural) *[…]*

- *The concept of* chayŏn *[was translated as] "nature" into English […]*

- *It is a bit different [from "nature"].*

- *People say it is very different. It was translated as "nature" in the past, nowadays many people disagree with that [translation].*

- *That's right. […] The meaning [I talk about] is a little different from that "nature". […] As it is, as it flows, that is the meaning. Nature which is visible [to an eye], like a landscape, is not that.*

Mr. Yi talks about religions, and for him, the best religion is *chayŏn.* And what is *chayŏn*? *Chayŏn* is *as it is*: *there are the clouds in the sky, there are trees on the mountains, water is flowing in the valleys.* Mountains, alongside with the sky and the valleys, figure in this description of the best religion. This definition of *chayŏn* presents a cosmological, ordered picture of the universe, in which mountains hold an important place. The sky is above, mountains and valleys are below. In the sky are clouds, on the mountains are trees, and in the valleys the water flows.

[102] Interview of 05.10.2010, Seoul, South Korea. Mr. Yi gave me explicit permission to use his real name.

[103] The word *chayŏn* was translated as "nature" in the past, but in recent philosophical translations is rendered as "so of its own" or "so of itself" (Robinet 2008c: 1302). In normal daily conversation, as opposed to philosophical texts, it just means "nature".

We have considered the extracts from the interviews with three GiCheon practitioners that allude to mountains as *innŭn kŏt* (what is). For Kim Hyŏnt'ae mountains stand for pain, difficulties and obstacles in GiCheon *suryŏn* in particular, and study in general. The term study he uses in a rather wide sense, pointing toward overall progress and development of life. Mr. Kim contrasts the existence of mountains in space with the possible or theoretical absence of mountains in space. A mountain is there, but it is possible to conceive of the mountain not being there. This approach differentiates between the presence of mountains (*sani innŭn kŏt*) and the absence of mountains (*sani ŏmnŭn kŏt*). Mountains are a provocation, a test. As long as mountains defy us, we should go to the mountains and accept the challenge they pose by their mere existence. This should be done until the presence of a mountain becomes like the absence of a mountain. When the mountains cease being mountains, stop provoking us, when ascending them becomes just nothing – at that moment the need to go the mountains disappear. The test was passed, the challenge conquered. Mountains disappear, not physically, but metaphorically. They are not mountains anymore.

Contrary to Kim Hyŏnt'ae, Kwŏn Kuho and Yi Ch'angu see mountains as ever-present. They do not conceive of mountains as "not being there". Particularly Yi Ch'angu sees mountains as an almost cosmological element of the universe.

7.5 Mountains as a hiking space

When Mr. Kwŏn compares hiking to GiCheon practice in the previous section, he mentions also the contemporary development of the hiking industry. *Nowadays there are lots of people hiking in the mountains ... In our time there were hardly [any people strolling in the mountains]*. Besides utilising hiking as a metaphor, he alludes to factual hiking in a literal sense. Many adepts mention actual hiking in association with their GiCheon training. And yet, the figurative usage of mountain imagery usually accompanies their recollection of their real

hiking trips. And ascending the mountain in the narrations of the adepts repeatedly pertains to the transformative process of the self.

In this section I analyse mountain imagery in the accounts of GiCheon adepts in connection with the hiking culture of South Korea. Korean and Japanese hiking culture is an example of how mountainous spaces are utilized for the hiking industry in East Asia, following the urbanization of the society (Knight 2005). "Nature", a concept brought into wider usage after industrialization, in the modern age is objectified, romanticized, commodified and consumed. There is no "nature" without industrialization, and "mountains" in contemporary East Asia are envisioned and established as an extension, neutralizer and cure for the "city," which is seen as the epitome of modernization and industrialization. As mentioned in Chapter Two, the industrialization of the South Korean society brought with it the rise of health awareness and of hiking, which were always parts of Korean cultural landscape, but came to the fore since the 1980s.

Health-consciousness in contemporary Korea is very high. A strong idea that you have to keep doing something for preserving or re-gaining health is a part of the general tendency for self-improvement, which, as I argue, is characteristic of the East Asian way of life. As I have mentioned in Chapter Six, the tendency to perfect whatever you do or whoever you are manifest in modern times as *yangsheng* practices in Beijing, as *ki suryŏn* in South Korea and as Japanese asceticism. Hiking activities based on health concerns are one part of this.

Hiking culture is booming in Korea today. In spring and autumn walks in the mountains, with portable radios and picnicking, are a favourite leisure activity. The mountains are crowded with families, couples, groups of friends and the members of various hiking clubs in colorful mountain gear. Hiking trips vary from a fifteen minute stroll in a nearby park to a day-long excursion for which food and drinks are packed.

Hiking trails can be generally divided into two kinds. The less arduous trails are frequented by many senior citizens walking in the mountains every day. Older people in their 60s, 70s and 80s with their rucksacks and hiking shoes, practice hiking in connection with health, which is emphasized by the ubiquity of exercise equipment at various spots in the mountains. Harder hiking trails are explored by younger people. Sŏrak mountain trails, for example, referred to by Pak Kyŏngae below, are quite difficult, long and steep. Also due to the lack of enough safety measures implemented on the mountain, a few people drop from the cliffs and die every year.

This is how Ms. Pak, a bank team manager in her early 50s, talks about walking in the Sŏrak mountains.[104] In her narrative focused on the ascent of a mountain she associates hiking with GiCheon practice: *At that time I had personal difficulties, it was really hard for me at the department where I worked. I got much stress from relationships with people. The more I got angry, the more I did GiCheon. […] I used GiCheon as a stress relieving method. When I stood in* naegasinjang *[position], […] I realized that those things are not as big as they seem.*

Many of my interviewees reported turning to GiCheon as they were searching for a stress-relieving method. They needed to find peace of mind, outbalance the hectic urbanism of their lives. Similarly to Ms. Pak, many students report that after encountering conflicts, performing GiCheon exercises helps them to put things in correct proportion and realize how small their worries really are.

[…] In my head [thoughts] were coming and going. […] Long ago […] when I was in my 20s, I went […] to the Sŏrak mountains. […] At dawn it was very cold, it was hard and difficult. […] I just walked one step [at the time]. I did not have any thoughts at that moment, really. I just knew that I had to take one more step […] If I go [to Sŏraksan] like that […] I

[104] Interview of 17.01.2011, Seoul, South Korea.

really feel that I come back with an empty, clear head. Different affairs of this world, small insignificant things of everyday life drop off completely.

The mountain escapade referred to by Ms. Pak is a one- or two-day long journey to Sŏraksan. Not just for Ms. Pak, but for many people a yearly pilgrimage to Sŏraksan is a way to relieve accumulated stress by disconnecting from the usual worries. However, in the comparison of Ms. Pak the effects of mountain hiking are extended toward the effects of GiCheon training. These effects were a result of the Sŏraksan trip and this is the reason for Ms. Pak to continue practicing the *naegasinjang* position.

[...] It is just one day that I was away, but I felt that I stayed there for a whole week […]. Each time I stand in naegasinjang *I have this feeling. I do not have to go [to the mountains] every year. […] My body gets into […] an almost extreme state, I feel […] this hardship. And at that moment I see in my mind snow-covered Sŏraksan, [I recall that] cold, hard […] moment. […] So trivial things like relationships worries … – I feel that I am distanced from them. Then again, when I come back to the everyday […] I confront new conflicts, and again I can recover.*

Ms. Pak says that she does not have to *go [to the mountains] every year* because she can relieve her stress through GiCheon practice. She compares her training to mountain hiking by way of explanation: referring to something very usual and well known (a yearly expedition to the mountains for one or two days) in order to interpret something unusual and unknown (GiCheon practice). Thus Ms. Pak compares standing in *naegasinjang* position to ascending Sŏraksan.

Each time Ms. Pak stands in *naegasinjang*, in her mind-heart she goes back to Sŏraksan. Why? What is it that connects her *naegasinjang* experience with her Sŏraksan travel? Sŏraksan excursion and GiCheon practice are united in the mind of Ms. Pak by the hardship and dramatic nature of these experiences. *Naegasinjang* is hard and painful to

sustain. It is difficult to maintain the position, just as it was difficult for Ms. Pak to keep walking up the mountain at night, in winter, under freezing weather conditions.[105] The only way to keep up was to concentrate on the next step: *just think about one more step*. A similar mental attitude of endurance and persistence in the "here and now" is essential for sustaining GiCheon positions. Ms. Pak calls it an extreme state: maximal exertion of bending the joints in *naegasinjang,* an application of the *yŏkkŭn* principle discussed in the previous chapter, coming together with the mental effort to carry on.

If I go to the mountain […] only if I practice GiCheon in the end, my body can really relax. […] On the day I practice GiCheon really well, I feel as if I have disassembled my whole body with a screw-driver, washed it well and then assembled it back. A really light feeling as if I could fly. When I do GiCheon for just one hour, I get a feeling as if I went hiking to the mountains for the whole day [...]. When we go hiking […] we get such a feeling, as if we take the body apart [cleanse it and then assemble it back]. GiCheon is like that. After we do GiCheon […] our faces become bright like the sun. A clean and transparent feeling. Your skin becomes clear, so you don't need cosmetics […].

Though Pak Kyŏngae sees ascending the mountain and GiCheon practice as parallel processes, she connects the two also in a literal sense. Hiking is not enough anymore. Each time she hikes, she has to practice GiCheon in the end otherwise she cannot really relax.

Mr. Ha in section 7.3 likens ascending the mountain with a spiritual path and with GiCheon practice. Ms. Pak, comparing walking in the mountains with GiCheon practice, describes in detail the process of spiritual purification and cleansing.[106] Interestingly, she utilizes engineering-related metaphors from contemporary life and culture: *disassembled my whole body with a screw-driver.*

[105] Ms. Pak told me that she started ascending around 2 or 3 AM and reached the summit around 7 or 8 AM.

[106] See note 97 on use the term "spirituality" in this text.

The sense of a light and clean body can be easily associated with spending time in the nature – in the mountains. Figures of speech like a *face bright like the sun, clean and transparent feeling* and *clear skin* evoke the images of lucid and fresh mountain air and an actual mountain sunrise – Ms. Pak started ascending at night and probably met the sunrise at the summit. As pointed out in the Chapter Six, a similar sense of lightness and cleansing is experienced by many adepts in *naegasinjang* position, or after its completion. In terms of personally colored experiential modalities reviewed in Chapter Five, a feeling of lightness and cleansing might be defined as constituting one of the major experiential modalities in Ms. Pak's account.

Remarkable is her relation to time. Ms. Pak practices GiCheon exercises today, but the vision she has in her mind is ascending Sŏraksan when she was in her twenties, that is thirty years ago. Holding the *naegasinjang* position for one hour is like a hiking trip that lasted a whole day. And the mountain excursion of one day was so absorbing and effective *as if I stayed there a whole week.* This perception of time may be to some degree also be inspired by GiCheon ideology. Similarly to Buddhism, GiCheon has a notion that "everything is in your mind" – but to this the teachers add "and the mind is in the body". As I have mentioned in the previous chapter, the painful *naegasinjang* stance makes the time stretch and shrink. Two minutes in this hard position often seems to an adept as an unendurably long time, but the teachers advise to make it even longer "into the length of two lives", in order to heighten the effects of the practice. The perception of time by Ms. Pak is one example of how the pain makes time dissolve, as we have discussed in the preceding chapter.

This feeling that I go up the mountain, it includes everything. It seems that my ability to control my emotions grew. We gather strength in our tanjŏn (丹田 cinnabar field) *and pull*

the breathing down.[107] *Like pulling the* ki *down, we pull our emotional center down. These effects come together […] So while my tolerance for stress increased, I could maintain continuously what was important for me and my strength to go forward grew...*

Tolerance, endurance, and the ability to keep climbing under harsh conditions are connected in the narration of Ms. Pak to her desired and achieved emotional stability. She could ascend Sŏraksan and stand in *naegasinjang* without giving up – and similarly she can maintain what is important for her and bear emotional pressure, because her strength has grown. The strength here has a double meaning of physical and mental-emotional power, it is the power to endure suffering, an ability to bend without breaking. Ms. Pak refers to it as *pulling the* ki*, breathing, and emotional center down*. In the *naegasinjang* position the gravity center of the body, *hadanjŏn,* must go as low as possible. According to the theories of "correct *ki* flow" in Chinese and Korean traditional medicine, Daoist alchemy and GiCheon, *ki* bursting up toward the head in the state of anger is wrong and should be prevented. Ms. Pak implies that she is now better prepared to do this than before, so she can more effectively *ch'amta* (bear with things) in her relationships with people, with less angry explosions.[108] Her proficiency in governing *ki*, breathing, emotions and stress as well as the potential to *retain what she wants* and the *strength to go forward* are all included by Ms. Pak in this *one feeling of ascending the mountain*. These are not multiple elements united together, but rather one feeling, one consciousness that manifests simultaneously on different planes.

Also the comparison of the body of the mountain, or a body of nature to the human body is implicated in the account of Ms. Pak. She mentions a *face bright like the sun, clear*

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[107] As briefly mentioned in Chapter Two, *tanjŏn* (丹田 Chinese *dantian*, cinnabar field) refers to three loci playing a key role in East Asian practices of internal alchemy and nourishing life. The three *tanjŏn* are located in the regions of abdomen, heart and brain (Pregadio 2008: 302). Korean *ki suryŏn* discourse relates to the three *tanjŏn* as *hadanjŏn* (下丹田 lower *tanjŏn*), *chungdanjŏn* (中丹田 middle *tanjŏn*) and *sangdanjŏn* (上丹田 upper *tanjŏn*). In GiCheon practice the lower *tanjŏn* is emphasized, and considered as a storage of *ki* and a center of a human body. Ms. Pak and most other practitioners refer to *hadanjŏn*, the lower *tanjŏn*, just as *tanjŏn.*

[108] I have discussed the term *ch'amta* in Chapter Two.

skin and *clean transparent feeling*, which reminds us of fresh mountain air and a clear mountain sunrise. In the account of Mr. Ha, the mountain paths are a metaphor for the *ki* channels in a human body. A mountain is brought into the narrative in order to illustrate the processes occurring in the body. But in the narrative of Ms. Pak it is the other way around: a human body is a metaphor for the body of a mountain. If the body of Ms. Pak was the core of her self when she was climbing Sŏraksan, then the mountain, the air and the sunrise were the space within which the self functioned. But a certain degree of identification of her own body with the body of the mountain, posits the mountain, nature and the universe as an additional self of Ms. Pak.

The self exists simultaneously on multiple planes, which following Confucian terminology I have portrayed schematically as intentions, feelings, thoughts, physical/personal actions and activities, familial and social involvement, and existence in the universal. In the narrative of Ms. Pak ascending the mountain is a metaphor for the transformative process of the self. This metaphor connects to intentional self (retain what one wants, strength to go forward), emotional self (stress, release), cognitive self (thoughts come and go), bodily self (walking), social self (relationships with others) and existence in the universe (comparing the body of nature with the human body). Although the selves are separate in their discursive representation, they are experienced and transformed as one, at the same time: *this feeling that I go up the mountain, it includes everything*. This feeling is articulated through the medium of *ki.* The key phrase here is *we gather strength in our* tanjŏn *and pull the breathing down. Like pulling the* ki *down, we pull our emotional center down. These effects come together.*

Though the account of Ms. Pak is full of metaphors, it is also very literal. Ms. Pak talks about her actual, real hiking trip to Sŏraksan which took place about thirty years before her interview. We will now turn toward another interview extract, that of Sin Hyŏnju, a

trading company employee in her early 40s.[109] Ms. Sin, similarly to Ms. Pak, talks about hiking in both literal and metaphorical ways, in connection with her GiCheon experience.

The thing I felt the fastest, is that my physical strength had […] grown. Let's suppose I went hiking, and could reach only half-way up the mountain. A few months after starting GiCheon [practice], reaching the summit was all right for me [...].

Later in her narrative Ms. Sin does associate GiCheon exercises with her actual hiking experience. But first she relates to the mountain image by way of example: her strength has grown. If supposedly she could reach only half-way before, now she can get to the mountain top. Similarly to the narrative of Ms. Pak, this metaphor creates the frame of reference of improving, advancing, progressing toward the goal. Ascending the mountain is a symbol of growing strength, and of transformation in a very literal way: you are not who you were anymore, because you are not where you were. The image of mountain hiking is employed by Ms. Sin both in a metaphorical way, and also literally.

In naegasinjang *I felt angry. [...] This anger, it was tickling in my whole body. I was very annoyed, and felt strong irritation. […] In the beginning it was just pain. […] In my legs, back, arms, shoulders, but at some point, probably six months after starting the practice, I started feeling angry. […] Itching inside the body, where I cannot scratch. [...] I often went to the mountains then, I was so angry […] During that period I walked much. […] My home is near the mountains. After finishing [GiCheon session at the studio] I went home through the mountains. I became really strong. […] This angry feeling, if I did that, was released, dissolved.*

Ms. Sin felt anger, itching and tickling in *naegasinjang*, the point we have discussed in Chapter Five. To release this anger and to calm down she employed the method of *walking through the mountains* towards her home. Walking through the mountains was a method of a

[109] Interview of 08.12.2010, Pusan, South Korea.

relief from unpleasant sensations, a problem-solving technique. In this part of her narrative hiking is literal, not metaphorical.

This part of Ms. Sin's narration is the opposite of the account of Ms. Pak. Ms. Pak felt that there was no more need to go to the mountains, because GiCheon practice brought results similar to the effects of hiking. For Ms. Sin, on the other hand, going to the mountains was needed in order to get rid of the unpleasant feelings GiCheon practice produced. Ms. Sin mentions mountains hiking in relation to GiCheon practice not by associating the two, as does Ms. Pak, but by contrasting them. Yet, in the narrations of both Ms. Pak and Ms. Sin GiCheon practice is linked to walking in the mountains. In the beginning of the interview extract Ms. Sin explicitly compares the two, stating later that walking in the mountains has healing effects. For Ms. Pak, both the *naegasinjang* position and hiking cause similar outcomes: they cleanse and purify the body-mind. For Ms. Sin, on the contrary, walking in the mountains soothes the feelings of annoyance and unrest caused by *naegasinjang*.

Trying to escape from the noises and smells of the city, urban South Koreans seek refuge in mountain hiking. These Korean hikers are not necessarily GiCheon practitioners. The life and death experiences of climbing the slippery rocks, culminating in reaching spaces high up, are expressed metaphorically by some Korean hikers of contemporary times as meeting the *sansin* (山神 mountain gods). People connect this emotional cathartic experience to enlightenment and spiritual growth. Besides, boasting that you have ascended Tobong peak the hard way heightens your social status (Pak Chŏngwŏn 2011). Similarly to GiCheon, hiking is a social practice, and achievement of difficult enterprises is conducive toward higher position within and without the practicing community.

7.6 Mountains as a space of immortality

Throughout Korean history, residents of the mountainous peninsula have believed that the peaks and slopes are spiritually alive, inhabited by *sansin.*[110] *Sansin* and *sinsŏn* exist in contemporary Korea also in the form of *sŏndo* culture, as explained in the Introduction. As mountain dwellers, *sansin* and *sinsŏn* have direct connection with hiking and mountain climbing. This section considers how the mountain immortality motifs unfold in the narrations of GiCheon practitioners. I will also briefly examine the importance of mountain immortality for GiCheon lore and legends.

This is how Mr. Ch'oe Hyŏngsu, the owner of a small business in his early 50s, evokes the concept of mountain immortality while taking about his GiCheon experience.[111]

- How did you know about GiCheon training, and when did you start practicing?

- […] since I was small […] as we, Koreans, grow up […] obscure (magyŏnhan) *ideas of traditional martial arts,* sanjung suryŏn (山中修練 training in the mountains) ... [112] *More than this vague idea of martial arts, how should I call it,* toga (道家 Daoism) ... *the stories we hear from elders, what we feel when we read books ... there is this kind of yearning. […] People of my age mostly have it […] during our childhood we heard many stories about stepping on clouds and flying. These stories are unscientific* (pigwahakchŏk)*, but we always*

[110] Mason 2015.

[111] Interview of 10.11.2010, Puch'ŏn, South Korea.

[112] Mr. Ch'oe makes a connection between GiCheon and martial arts. As mentioned in the introduction, Lee Sangwŏn, the head of Kichŏn Sangmuwŏn, has developed GiCheon as mind-body meditative discipline, and later other GiCheon instructors followed his example. However, up to the mid-1980s, GiCheon was taught and practiced mainly as martial art. This image of GiCheon is promoted also in GiCheon lore. The books insist that GiCheon is the oldest and truest of Korean self-cultivation practices and martial arts. The tale of a young Taeyang Chinin being the best martial artist ever and always winning in combat in the 1970s is presented as a proof (Kim Hŭisang and Kich'ŏnmun Ponmun ed. 2000: 76-77). Besides, according to legends, GiCheon is a basis and foundation on which Chinese and Japanese martial arts grew and flourished (Pak Taeyang, Ch'oe Hyŏn'gyu, unpublished manuscript).

had this longing, our generation [...]. So, when I heard that there is such a thing, immediately […] I thought that I have to study this. […]

Mr. Ch'oe called the stories about *stepping on clouds and flying* "unscientific," while alluding to *sinsŏn*, a concept I have briefly reviewed in the Introduction. In another part of his narrative (not quoted here) he relates also to GiCheon and to traditional acupuncture methods as *pigwahakchŏk*. Mr. Ch'oe mentioned with bitterness, that acupuncture was made illegal in the 1920s, that is during Japanese occupation of Korea, as it was considered *pigwahakchŏk*. In South Korea today only the doctors of Traditional Korean Medicine are legally allowed to practice acupuncture, though many people do it without permission. Mr. Ch'oe complains that in Japan acupuncture is currently licensed and practiced legally. It is not limited to medical doctors only. However, in order to practice acupuncture in Korea you have to receive a title of a Traditional Korean Medical Doctor, an expensive and complicated project, almost unattainable for ordinary people.

The term *pigwahakchŏk* was actively utilized in the discourse on nation building implemented in the era of Pak Chŏnghŭi (朴正熙 1917–1979), the South Korean military dictator from 1961 till 1979. This discourse in fact repeated Japanese colonial discourses about backwardness of Korea and the need to "catch-up" with Western civilization. This aspect of Japanese colonial discourse, reproduced by Pak Chŏnghŭi, included viewing various elements of Korean traditional culture, for example shamanism, as superstitious and *pigwahakchŏk* due to be overcome by science, as Mr. Ch'oe exemplifies when recounting how Korean acupuncture was considered *pigwahakchŏk* under Japanese rule.[113] The term "obscure" Ch'oe Hyŏngsu used in relation to traditional martial arts and *sanjung suryŏn* echoes the term *pigwahakchŏk.*

[113] A certain degree of contempt toward some elements of traditional Korean culture was not invented during the Japanese occupation but was already discernable in the attitude of the nobility towards shamans, in Chosŏn.

The good point of naegasinjang*, if we do it at a cold mountain top, is that although it is cold, if we stand in this position for five minutes, we sweat, right? [...] Not only GiCheon, in our country there are different kinds of Korean … should I call it martial arts? There are different kinds of* sŏndo (仙道 the way of immortals), sŏnpŏp (仙法 techniques of immortality) *and the basis of all of them is breathing. That is* tanjŏn hohŭp [tanjŏn breathing]. *Through* tanjŏn hohŭp *we purify our body, organize our thoughts, increase and cultivate* ki.

When Mr. Ch'oe says *we purify our body, organize our thoughts, increase and cultivate* ki*,* we are reminded of Ms. Pak who says *like pulling the* ki *down, we pull our emotional center down.* Both Mr. Ch'oe and Ms. Pak connect cultivating *ki* with cultivation of the self, bringing out the notion of *ki* in the context of effort and intentionality. Similarly to Mr. Ch'oe, other trainees also connect increasing *ki* with the ideas of mountain immortals. This is how Kim Chehŭi, an events planner in his late 40s, talks about *toin* (道人 persons who follow the Way, a term used by different creeds). Mr. Kim counts Wŏnhye Sangin, the teacher of Taeyang Chinin, among the *toin* who possess special magical abilities.[114] He uses the term *toin* in the sense of *sinsŏn*:

I think it is indeed possible that toin *exist somewhere in the world […]. They have accumulated* naegong (內功 internal power) *through continuous training. It is possible to build up different kind of energy through communion with the nature* (chayŏn kwa kyogam)*. […] I think that there are many* toin *like that in Korea, apart from Wŏnhye Sagongngin.*[115]

The different kind of energy Kim Chehŭi mentions is what Mr. Ch'oe and Ms. Pak call *ki*. According to Mr. Kim, this energy is developed by *toin* (or *sinsŏn*) through communion with nature. In fact, a *sinsŏn* who has accumulated *naegong* through continuous

[114] I relate the legend about Wŏnhye Sangin below in the text of this section.

[115] Interview of 11.01.2011 Seoul, South Korea. Mr. Kim gave me explicit permission to use his real name.

training is an embodiment of such a communion with nature, a perfect immortal depicted on Korean paintings as a part of a mountain landscape, a model for emulation for GiCheon practitioners, who of course want to train GiCheon in the mountains, just as Mr. Ch'oe and Ms. Pak do.

The connection between mountains and *sinsŏn* is embedded in Korean culture, and is manifested also in vernacular Korean. Flat rocky cliff-tops or clearings in the high mountains with a grand view are sometimes referred to as *sinsŏndae* (神仙臺 *sinsŏn* terrace). In people's minds *sinsŏndae* is associated with spiritual enlightenment, as evidenced by Korean temple-wall paintings, depicting Sakyamuni Buddha as meditating seated on a *sinsŏndae.* Another example is a word *sinsŏnbong* (神仙峯 *sinsŏn* peak). This term is used for a few Korean rocky peaks, all of which offer grand scenic views, despite not being the highest peaks (Mason 199: 56-57, 121 note 46).

Although some people might think that a belief in *sinsŏn* is a thing from the past, the narratives of Mr. Ch'oe and Mr. Kim demonstrate the relevance of *sinsŏn* for contemporary Korea. The way Mr. Ch'oe and others talk about GiCheon and Korea reflect the nation building discourse from the Pak Chŏnghŭi era and from Japanese colonial times. As mentioned in Chapter Three, Ch'oe Hyŏngsu and the trainees of older generation group together GiCheon, traditional culture of Korea and the notion of the "unscientific". According to Mr. Ch'oe, also mountain related beliefs and practices such as *sŏndo, sŏnpŏp* and *sanjung suryŏn* belong to this group. He associates them with the stories about stepping on clouds and flying, martial arts, Daoism, *tanjŏn hohŭp* and the cultivation of *ki*.

Against the background of the colonial past and the Pak Chŏnghŭi era which fought "superstition", the *sinsŏn* beliefs and practices with their *pigwahakchŏk* flavour provide a counter-narrative, taken up and developed by Korean nationalists. As I have briefly outlined

in the Introduction, *chaeya* nationalist historians attempted to reconstruct Korea's ancient glory, a tendency developed within the *sŏndo* culture of contemporary immortality. Mr. Ch'oe connects the yearning that makes him perform GiCheon practice today with the childhood fairy tales about *sinsŏn*. This kind of yearning Ch'oe Hyŏngsu talks about is shared by many people. It provides a context and a reason for the re-invention and revival of the nationalist *sŏndo* tradition, of which *sinsŏn, ki suryŏn* and GiCheon are one part.

The revival or re-invention of mountain immortality traditions includes not only *sinsŏn,* but also *sansin,* who are equally important in the GiCheon legends introduced below. As mentioned in the Introduction, *sansin* are much more central to Korean culture than *sinsŏn. Sansin* can be male or female, one or more per mountain, integral with it, alternatively either manifesting it or being manifested by it. The number and the size of *sansin* paintings in South Korea is increasing in recent decades (David Mason, personal communication). David Mason stresses that mountain worship is evolving new roles in twenty first century Korea (1999: 14-15), as evidenced by the growing body of research on the ancient and contemporary *sansin* cults and practices. Korean academic scholarship discusses *sansin* in the context of *sansin sinang* (山神信仰 religious beliefs in mountain gods) or *san sinang* (山信仰 religious beliefs in mountains) (Yi Kyŏngyŏp 2000, Yi Yohan 1987) and *sansinje* (山神祭 festive sacrifice to mountain gods) (Kang Sŏngbok 2011, Pak Chongik 2009). *Sansinje* are performed in many Korean villages on a regular basis, in spring or autumn (Kyung Yup Lee 2015).

Mountain worship became systematized under Silla dynasty (57 B.C.E. – 935 A.D.). In his article on five mountains and Buddhist beliefs in mountain spirits, Ch'oe Chin'gu examines both the conflicts between *sansin sinang* and Buddhism and their subsequent fusion (Ch'oe Chin'gu 2013). The examination of ancient and contemporary mountain worship in Korea includes the studies of the rites (Kim Chŏngha 2007), *sansin* paintings (Kim Yŏngja 2005), and various types of *sansin* legends as well as their transmission (Im Chaehae, Pak

Chongsŏng 2005) and structure (Kim Sŏnp'ung 2003). Yet, the relevance of *sansin* for contemporary Korean society reaches beyond the ritual sphere of regular offerings to local deities. In Korea, mountains are traditionally regarded as a meeting place between humans and gods, an idea accepted by adherents of different religions. For example, some Korean Christian researchers on *sansin* suggest that a few pastors acquired spiritual powers through mountain prayer. These spiritual powers are expressed as leadership skills within the Christian community, conclude these Christian scholars (Yi Yohan 1987).

Sansin worship today is connected to a number of contemporary projects, such as the Noksaek Han'guk (Green Korea) environmental movement, and nation-branding (Mason 2012), and the South Korean hiking culture discussed in this chapter in connection with GiCheon. As evidenced in the interviews with the adepts and the orally transmitted and codified legends, the ideas of *sansin* and *sinsŏn* are revived within the constructed mind-body tradition of GiCheon, thus constituting a part of contemporary mountain culture and mythology.

GiCheon mountain mythology draws on such deeply-rooted mountain beliefs. GiCheon claims to originate on Mt. Paektu, and to "have been passed down secretly […] amidst the mountains in Korea" (as explained at the website www.gicheon.org managed by Lee Kit'ae), presumably by nameless sages and immortals. The role of Mt. Paektu in GiCheon mythology is one example of the importance of this mountain for contemporary Korean culture, and precisely because of this importance Mt. Paektu was incorporated into the newly invented tradition of GiCheon.

Mt. Paektu was considered an ancestral mountain during the Koryŏ and Chosŏn dynasties. In the beginning of the 20th century the theory that this mountain was the birthplace of Tan'gun, the legendary founder of Kojosŏn, the earliest state considered to be Korean, gained currency in Korea. In the 1920s and 1930s, Korean newspapers started

referring to Mt. Paektu as a *yŏngsan* (靈山 sacred mountain). Today, photos and paintings of the mountain are frequently seen in South Korean governmental offices, in the lobbies of universities and business buildings, and in restaurants and cafes. They are found in offices of some Buddhist temples, and in shrines dedicated to mountain gods. Mountain Paektu is often discussed in contemporary South Korean scholarship and is equally important for North Korea. According to North Korea's mythology, Kim Chŏngil was born to Kim Ilsŏng and Kim Chŏngsuk, his first wife, in a secret camp at the base of Mt. Paektu. The semi-mythic struggles of Kim Ilsŏng and Kim Chŏngsuk with the Japanese soldiers around Mt. Paektu have generated a memorial architecture on the mountain which reflects this mythology and informs North Korea's wider cultural production. North Koreans are expected to visit the mountain and its sacred sites as part of a process of deep ideological education with work or army units (Winstanley-Chesters and Ten 2016: 152-156).

Besides providing one example of the centrality of Mt. Paektu to contemporary culture, GiCheon mythology equally demonstrates the relevance of mountain immortality notions. As mentioned in Chapter Two, a legend has it that the GiCheon initiator Taeyang Chinin was raised in the mountains by an immortal, Wŏnhye Sangin (元慧上人), who taught him the art of GiCheon. According to Taeyang Chinin, Wŏnhye Sangin could run faster than the wind, created a magical boundary in the mountains from which Taeyang Chinin, as a child, could not stray, and, to some extent, communicated with birds and animals. As a child, Taeyang Chinin also used to share his playground and sleeping spaces with mountain tigers (Pak Taeyang, Ch'oe Hyŏn'gyu unpublished manuscript).

These legends are taken seriously by many practitioners besides Mr. Ch'oe. Impressed by these legends, some adepts venture into Korean mountains looking for Wŏnhye Sangin, whom Taeyang Chinin first declared dead, but later changing his mind, pronounced to be alive again. Some GiCheon adherents maintain that they have met Wŏnhye Sangin,

whom they describe as an old man who can turn into a tiger.[116] This is how the legends are experienced and lived again by the adepts, who re-enforce the value of these narratives through personal bodily practice in mountainous spaces.

The importance of mountain immortality in official GiCheon ideology is also demonstrated by the fact that the highest known GiCheon grandmaster goes under the name of Ch'ŏnsŏnnyŏ (天仙女 Immortal Woman of Heaven). The popular legend about the meeting of Bodhidharma, the founder of Chan Buddhism in China, and Ch'ŏnsŏnnyŏ at Mt. Paektu is often told to newcomers to GiCheon. This legend attempts to place GiCheon within a broader context of East Asian historical and mythological heritage, constituting a part of more general East Asian Bodhidharma lore and of East Asian mountain immortals mythology. The legend inscribes GiCheon in a narrative tradition which gives GiCheon cultural capital, showing that mountain worship and mountain practices are a living tradition of Korea. GiCheon lore claims its place as a part of this legacy. I will quote here the version of the Ch'ŏnsŏnnyŏ legend as it appears on the web-site www.gicheon.org.[117] "According to GiCheon forklore, Bodhidharma (the 18th generation heir of Mahakasyapa, the founder of Chan Buddhism and the developer of Shaolin kungfu) learned *yŏkkŭn* from the female GiCheon grand master named Ch'ŏnsŏnnyŏ (Woman of Heaven).[118] […] Bodhidharma heard about the great strength and wisdom of the female GiCheon grand master known as Ch'ŏnsŏnnyŏ (Woman of Heaven). He sought her out in the northern mountains of Korea and asked her to spar with him. It didn't take Bodhidharma much time to realize how formidable

[116] As I heard from Lee Kit'ae. This motif probably follows a traditional belief that *sansin* can turn into a tiger. On the paintings *sansin* is usually depicted with a tiger (Mason 1999: 77).

[117] Lee Kit'ae, "Yeokgeun," GiCheon, A Korean Tradition for Self-Healing and Self-Awareness, http://www.gicheon.org/ (accessed November 26, 2016). The legend is reproduced here with a few slight changes, such as romanization and spelling. Another version of this legend says that prior to meeting Ch'ŏnsŏnnyŏ Bodhidharma prayed to the *sansin* of Paektu mountain, and on Mt. Paektu the meeting took place (Kim Hŭisang and Kich'ŏnmun Ponmun ed. 2000: 53).

[118] *Yŏkkŭn,* the principle of maximal bending the joints in GiCheon, facilitating the flow of life energy (*ki* 氣) while enhancing physical, moral and mental well-being, has been explained in more detail in Chapter Six.

Ch'ŏnsŏnnyŏ was. He begged her to teach him the art of GiCheon. She offered him one lesson in GiCheon, but only if he could show her something: a bouquet of red flowers in a pure red sky. And so, one snowy day in the mountains, Bodhidharma cut off his left arm to prove his sincere desire to learn GiCheon. When he threw the arm in the air, the snow all around him became soaked with blood, forming a crimson bouquet. The grand master was appeased. She saw that Bodhidharma possessed a passionate will to learn, and so she taught him the great secret of GiCheon: *yŏkkŭn*."

While distinct in time and space but involving the same protagonist, the Ch'ŏnsŏnnyŏ legend borrows important motifs from Bodhidharma-related Buddhist legends: Huike (慧可), the disciple of Bodhidharma, cut his arm to prove his sincerity, thus becoming the second Chinese patriarch of Chan after Bodhidharma (Maguire 2001: 58). According to a different version, Huike's arm was cut off by scoundrels (Broughton 1999: 62). The narrative structure of the GiCheon legend here clearly follows the Chinese legend as a story of a disciple and a master. Huike cuts off his arm in order to prove his sincerity to Bodhidharma, and as a result becomes his successor, but in the GiCheon legend Bodhidharma is the disciple and the Woman of Heaven is the master. Bodhidharma cuts off his arm in order to prove his sincerity to the Woman of Heaven, and as a result becomes the next acknowledged master after her – or at least, within the constructed legendary time and space, he becomes a "GiCheon propagator dispatched to China". He will transmit the secret teaching there, while the Woman of Heaven will continue teaching GiCheon in Korea. This legend clearly shows the progress of Bodhidharma upwards on the hierarchal ladder. From a "stranger coming from afar" he upgrades into a disciple and then into a potential master. Implicit in the story is that through his mastery of GiCheon Bodhidharma acquires a chance of becoming a *sinsŏn*, just like his teacher, the Woman of Heaven.

Bodhidharma comes to Mt. Paektu, and in order to become a GiCheon disciple he has to undergo transformation, to cut off his own arm. The Woman of Heaven is a GiCheon version of a *sinsŏn*. Understood this way, this legend, visualising the progressive self-cultivation, or a transmutation from mortal into immortal, reconstitutes mountains as a space of and for bodily and spiritual transformation. The deeds and demeanour of the Woman of Heaven translate and transpose GiCheon practice onto a heavenly, transcendental plane, as GiCheon is her attribute and an art that she teaches. The legend builds and confirms the status of the practice as a technique of immortality. In reality, not daring to hope for final immortality, the actual practitioners aspire to advance at least a few steps upon this road, a journey of improvement of their physical-moral-mental state and life. This is how the idea of GiCheon practice as self-transformation is portrayed within the legend of Ch'ŏnsŏnnyŏ.

Ch'ŏnsŏnnyŏ links the concept of the mountains to that of femininity. In vein with other practices of inner alchemy (Schipper 1993), GiCheon ideology gives a certain preference to females. Scholars concur that the *sansin* were held to be female in ancient times, and have mostly transformed, changing their gender into male under the prevailing patriarchal norms during the last half-millennium (Mason 1999: 37). Nevertheless, female mountains spirits are still actively worshiped in South Korea today, sustaining old traditions and evolving new ones. One example is Mt. Unje northeast of Kyŏngju. Today many female pilgrims frequent this Korean mountain to pray to the Unje Yŏsansin (雲帝 女山神 Unje Mountain Goddess), the wife of the second Silla king (Peter H. Lee; Wm. Theodore de Bary ed. 1997: 51). This worship goes back in historical record for at least a millennium (Grayson 1996: 126-130).[119] Other examples of contemporary female-oriented Korean myths include the developing cult of "Mago, the Mother Goddess of the Korean people" advanced by

[119] For research on other Korean mountain goddesses see, for example, Kwŏn T'aehyo 1998 and Ch'oe Unsik 2004.

adherents of the mind-body movement Dahn World. Mago (麻姑 Chinese: Magu), one of the most important female immortals in China, was allegedly born under Emperor Ming of the Han (57-75 C.E.), and her cult in the regions of Anhui and Jiangsu had anactive following until at least the 13th century (Despeux, Kohn 2003: 94-96). She became a Mountain Goddess from Korean folktales and is promoted in Dahn World mythology into a "mother of all humans", living in the "highest spot on the face of the earth" (Baker 2007b: 511-513). The image of Mago is becoming linked in recent years with a generalized conception of female *sansin*, an association even spreading beyond Dahn World circles (David Mason, personal communication July 2014).[120] Another important female *sansin* is Sŏndo Sŏngmo (仙桃聖母 Immortal Peaches Holy Mother), the goddess of Sŏndo mountain west of Kyŏngju. According to the legend recorded in *Samguk Yusa*, she gave birth to Pak Hyŏkkŏse (박혁거세), the first king of Silla. Later she became a promoter of Buddhism (Mason 1999: 38).

In GiCheon, the notion of feminine mountain immortality is embodied in a figure of the legendary Ch'ŏnsonnyŏ. Male teachers often add that "men are stronger physically, but women are stronger spiritually. Women are better at GiCheon." However these assumptions are not shared by male trainees, who represent more than half of all GiCheon practitioners. For example Mr. Ch'oe, whom I have quoted previously, while supporting the ideas of mountain immortality, does not support the idea of feminine superiority: *When we do GiCheon we have to bend knees, elbows, wrists. [...] In the beginning it is very difficult for men. People who started training with me, all felt like that.[...] But women's bodies are soft so even persons who just start [practicing] achieve correct positions. [...] I am not saying*

[120] See also Kwŏn, T'aehyo 1998.

that women are doing better, or that men are doing better. It takes time until you can build a correct posture. [121]

Mr. Ch'oe does not think that women are better at GiCheon. In his opinion women can achieve correct positions with greater ease simply because *women's bodies are soft.* GiCheon theory views things differently; a particular state of the body is never "by chance". The state of the body reflects the state of the mind, so if a woman's body is softer and more flexible, it means that a woman is closer to the "GiCheon ideal" than a man. However, the majority of male adepts do not share this view, displaying a disparity of opinion between the students and the teachers, with whom the Ch'ŏnsŏnnyŏ legend is a favourite.

7.7 Conclusion to Chapter Seven

The reports of GiCheon practitioners weave into the general human experience of mountains over time and space, resonating with the meaning of this experience. Edwin Bernbaum, a scholar who has dedicated his life to the study of sacred mountains of the world, compares those who hike and climb for sport and recreation with those seeking spiritual awakening within traditional cultures. Across geographical regions and historical periods, mountains have been perceived as mysterious and splendid, evoking wonder and fear. Mountains are often revered as places of sacred power, spiritual attainment and pilgrimage, of revelation, transformation and purification, as centers of the universe, pathways to heavens, abodes of the dead, temples of gods and expressions of ultimate reality. In his book *Sacred Mountains of the World* Bernbaum talks mainly about mountaineers who use special gear for climbing steep rocks. Korean hikers rarely use this kind of gear. Nevertheless, the experiences described by Bernbaum have much in common with the experiences of Korean hikers, including those taking dangerous paths high up in the mountains. A previously unknown

[121] Interview with Ch'oe Hyŏngsu, 10.11.2010, Puch'ŏn, South Korea.

landscape unfolds around us as we climb up. Reaching a mountain summit permits one to gain greater knowledge of the surroundings – of the topography of the mountain one is climbing. The view from the summit of a mountain opens us to a fresh vision of ourselves and the world around us, and in doing so gives our life a new meaning and direction. Professional mountaineers also compare climbing to a temptation, to a challenge. The valleys and peaks conceal what lies hidden within and beyond them, beckon to us, holding out a secret promise. In contemporary mountaineering the struggle, the effort to reach the summit, often ends in a quiet understanding that leads to deeper insight and wisdom. Many climbers notice that the extreme conditions encountered on mountains – wind, clouds, fatigue and altitude – predispose them to awakening of the spirit and focus of the mind. They force the climbers to concentrate on what is important and real, to dispense with trivial concerns that often fog our vision and distract our attention. In the mountains, we see what lies around us with a sharper, brighter awareness. Experienced hikers say that from contact with forest and stream, rock and snow, come health and peace of mind, as well as fresh perspective that can lead to new ideas and ways of seeing things. Exposure to mountains and practice of mountaineering develop character and instil self-confidence. Climbing high mountains requires great effort and concentration, even self-sacrifice, and can transform the climber's perception of herself and the world around her, move her to the depth of her being, as the encounter with mountains often does. Some mountaineers notice that in the mountains they lose awareness of time, and enter a state of timeliness. (Bernbaum 1990: xiii, xv, xviii, xxi, xxiii, 223, 225, 236, 238, 242-247, 255). Similar motifs come up also in the interviews with GiCheon adepts when they talk about mountains.

The centrality of the mountain image for spiritual progress, in GiCheon and in other old or newly invented Korean traditions, has a rich historical and religious background. In this chapter I shed light on the experiential and bodily aspect of the imagery related to

ascending a mountain, which grounds the mountain as a metaphor of life. Some adepts talk about their actual hiking experiences, others utilise the mountain image only metaphorically. In any case the image of the mountain itself has a strong experiential aspect, as for the majority of the citizens of South Korea walking in the mountains is a part of life.

This chapter has examined the variety of mountain images as articulated by GiCheon adepts in the interviews. Starting with the mountain paths as a metaphor for *ki* channels in a human body in section 7.2, this chapter continued toward the ascent of the mountain as a symbol of religious or spiritual progress in section 7.3, relating to the account of Mr. Ha. The metaphorical connection between a human body and the body of a mountain, or the body of the universe comes up also in the narration of Ms. Pak discussed in section 7.5. In the narration of Kim Hyŏngt'ae in section 7.4 we have considered climbing a mountain as an allegory of study and overcoming the challenges of life. The mountain image is a symbol of life, reality or the universe also in the descriptions of Mr. Kwŏn and Mr. Yi, discussed in section 7.4. The three thematic motifs connected with mountain imagery: the human body, spiritual progress and life or reality relate to GiCheon training in both a literal and metaphorical way. As reviewed in the previous chapters, GiCheon exercises, performed by the human body, are regarded by many adepts as spiritual progress, and of course they are part of life. Besides this literal connection of the images to GiCheon, there is also a metaphorical connection between them: human body, spiritual or religious body, a body of life, or a body of the universe. These three bodies are identified with a body of a mountain, and ultimately, with GiCheon practice. Mountains constitute an additional body, or an additional self, both the core and the space of the practice.

In Chapter Four, we have seen that Ms. Pak interprets *suryŏn* as a hard practice, but one that makes the burden of life bearable and possible. This is the leading experiential modality of her account. The extract from her interview brought up in the present chapter

follows similar narrative direction: it is hard to go on, but you have to endure the pain and the difficulty. The extreme effort should and could make the progress possible. If you persist, you will prevail and reach a mountain top. In section 7.5 of this chapter, Ms. Pak evokes the factual memory of a concrete mountain hiking trip, which took place in real time 30 years ago, and also alludes to mass hiking culture in contemporary Korea. This is an association of mountains with fresh air, nature, health and relaxation, positioning "mountains as a hiking space" in opposition to South Korean hectic urbanism.

In the section 7.6 we have discussed the immortality motifs in GiCheon lore. We have examined extracts from the interviews with Ch'oe Hyŏngsu and Kim Chehŭi that demonstrate the importance of immortality theme for contemporary adepts, and discussed two legends that anchor the leitmotif of mountain immortals in contemporary GiCheon mythology. I have demonstrated that the ideas of mountain immortality, *sinsŏn* and *sansin* are deeply rooted in traditional and contemporary Korean culture. GiCheon and other *ki suryŏn* movements draw on these ideas, reinforce and develop them, constructing and constituting mountain immortality and mountains in general as a living tradition of Korean peninsula.

Like Mr. Ch'oe, many adherents say that they like performing GiCheon exercises at a mountain top. On one hand hiking and practicing GiCheon in the mountains constitute their active participation in hiking culture of contemporary Korea. On the other hand, this is their attempt to partake in mountain-related spirituality and purification, and in a way repeat the legendary explorations of Wŏnhye Sangin, Taeyang Chinin, the Woman of Heaven and Bodhidharma, discussed in section 7.6, thus contributing to the construction of the *sŏndo* tradition. GiCheon practice is the *sŏnpŏp* of contemporary adepts. For many of them, like for Mr. Ch'oe, mountains and GiCheon practice themselves are symbols of *sinsŏn,* of immortality, of childhood fairy tales and the whole way of life in old Korea when people did not lead busy lives [like today] (*pappŭge an saratta*). This reclaiming, reassessing and re-

evaluation of mountains as spaces of reconstructed tradition occurs against the background and in the context of urban society.

Chapter Eight: Conclusions

The subjects of my research live in a society that is radically different from that of their parents and grandparents (who in turn had also seen great changes). To understand present-day Koreans in general and more particularly to understand how the practitioners of GiCheon, who mostly belong to modern urban middle class, live and use their practice strategically to improve their lives, some attention needs to be paid to these changes.

From the late 19th century onwards Korea has experienced a process of dramatic and almost continuous change in all sectors. The Chosŏn dynasty (1392-1910) came to an end with Japanese colonization (1910-1945), and after the devastating Korean War (1950-1953) the nation was divided into North and South Korea. In the 1950s, South Korea was one of the poorest nations in the world, with an income per capita of about 80 USD/year. Yet, Koreans were determined to succeed in the modern world. Per capita income grew to 1,342 USD in the 1960s, to 19,227 USD in 2008, and to 31,750 USD in 2011 (Long Le 2016: 253). Over a short period of time from the end of the Korean War to the late 1990s South Korea achieved rapid economic development, and significant social changes continue to come. The legal status of women became equal to that of men, and schools opened their doors to them. The population increased from around 20 million in the 1950s to 43 million in the late 1980s, and to around 51 million today.[122] Accompanying this was a major population shift to the cities from the countryside, so that the rural population of about 18 million in the 1960s decreased to 8,8 million in 2015 in spite of a substantial general growth in population.[123] Such a shift entailed changes in occupation: production workers and manual laborers accounted for only 13% of the labor force in 1960, but their ranks increased to 22% by 1970, 28% by 1980 and

[122] Statistics Korea, "Population Trends and Projections of the World and Korea," Statistics Korea, http://kostat.go.kr/portal/eng/pressReleases/8/8/index.board?bmode=read&bSeq=&aSeq=347597&pageNo=1&rowNum=10&navCount=10&currPg=&sTarget=title&sTxt= (accessed September 18, 2016).

[123] The World Bank, "Rural population," The World Bank, http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.RUR.TOTL (accessed September 18, 2016).

35% by 1990. Professional, technical, administrative, managerial, clerical and sales workers made up only 20% of the labor force in 1960. Their numbers increased to 27% in 1980 and to 36% in 1990. By 1990, the huge increase in industrial labor during the mid-1960s to mid-1980s was giving way to the growth of a middle class of white-collar workers. Higher education also strode forward, illustrated by a rise in the number of tertiary students from 90,000 to over one million in 1990 (Wells 2015: 216, Lett 1998: 37-38) and 3,3 million in 2013.[124] In 2015, craft, machine operating, assembling and elementary workers amounted to about 35% of the labor force in the cities and 27% in the countryside, while professional, managerial, clerical and sales workers amounted to 58% in the cities and 34% in the countryside.[125]

From the mid-1960s an outward-looking, export-oriented economic policy successfully drove the industrialization of South Korean society. Under Pak Chŏnghŭi's stern rule (1961-1979) South Koreans experienced the equivalent of Europe's industrial revolution in a matter of two decades. For South Koreans, economic growth was and still is not without its costs. For a time, during the 1970s and early 1980s South Korea had the highest industrial accident and death rates in the world (Wells 2015: 216). According to the findings of the McKinsey Global Institute from 2013, GDP has nearly tripled between the years 1993 and 2013, but this growth has become decoupled from the real wages of ordinary citizens, as the wages have grown by less than half this rate. By 2013 more than 50% of middle-income households were spending each month more than they earned. One of the reasons for this is because South Koreans invest more in private education than almost any society on earth,

[124] WENR: World Education News and Reviews, "Asia Pacific: Education in South Korea," WENR, http://wenr.wes.org/2013/06/wenr-june-2013-an-overview-of-education-in-south-korea (accessed September 18, 2016).

[125] Statistics Korea, "Characteristics of the Employed Persons by Industry and Occupation according to the Local Area Labour Force Survey in the Second Half of 2015," Statistics Korea, http://kostat.go.kr/portal/eng/pressReleases/5/4/index.board?bmode=read&bSeq=&aSeq=354718&pageNo=1&rowNum=10&navCount=10&currPg=&sTarget=title&sTxt= (accessed September 18, 2016).

which is related to characteristics of Korean society that will be dealt with below (Wonshik Choi, 2013: 3).

8.1 Striving for upward mobility and self-improvement

As indicated above, when the scale of the South Korean economy expanded, large numbers of people became wage or salary workers. Thus in the course of three decades leading up to the early 1990s a new urban middle class emerged. One of the defining characteristics of this class was a desire for upward mobility. New ways of asserting status have also emerged in the urban, industrialized society, but both old and new ways of acquiring and maintaining status involved occupation, education, material wealth, marriage strategies and lineage claims.

Traditional ways of asserting high status included, for example, lineage claims and the exemplary performance of ancestral worship. Most South Koreans claim today that they have descended from the yangban (兩班), Confucian scholar-officials and their descendants, the aristocracy from whom the state bureaucracy was recruited during Chosŏn dynasty.126 The Confucian legacy of the yangban reemerges, sometimes in new and altered forms, as an active factor in contemporary South Korean life (Lett 1998: 31, 39; Asakura 1998: 198). Confucian influence has been diffused in Korean society and permeated all kinds of practices and religions. One example is the Christian modification of chesa (祭祀), a memorial ceremony for ancestors, commonly performed by most South Korean Protestant believers twice a year (Grayson 2009).

Probably as a consequence of its history, South Korea is a very status-conscious society, and the assertion of status has become an important element in both the formation and the definition of its new urban middle class, a project carried out by families rather than

[126] *Yangban* were the social, cultural, political and economic elite of Chŏson society (Lett 1998: 14-17).

by individuals (Abelmann 2003). Denise Lett argues that South Korea's contemporary urban middle class exhibits a culturally inherited disposition to seek high status. Lett sees the legacy of the yangban and their concern with high status as the driving force behind the development of South Korea's new middle class and the country's rapid emergence as a global economic player (Lett 1998: 1-2). Today, middle class status is built and maintained by families (Abelmann 2003), just as in the past the maintenance of the yangban status was a family affair. Today's middle class families, and those aspiring to become middle class, make great sacrifices trying to give their children a college degree. A university degree is a prerequisite for most jobs of middle-class status, including government officials, corporate managers and administrators, educators, doctors and lawyers (Lett 1998: 44).

Housing, dress, lifestyle, and behavior in general, along with literacy in Chinese, knowledge of Confucian classics, the passing of civil service exams to earn a degree, holding governmental offices, landholding, adherence to Confucian ethical norms, Confucian rituals and proper family behavior, an extended kinship system, intermarrying among elite lineages, the performance of lineage rituals, maintenance of genealogies, association with those of good social standing and a life of leisure rather than one characterized by labor were all marks of high status and culture in Chosŏn. Many of these behaviors, in more or less adapted form, are aspired to in South Korea, and constitute the marks of the contemporary middle class. The requirements to adhere to them are consuming and exhausting. While these behaviors demand investments of various kinds of economic, cultural and social capital, education is considered the key element to their achievement.

In South Korea education of individuals is funded and driven by families, but that is not the only reason for familial pressure. Urbanization often broke up the extended family structures, so that whereas 27% of families were living together as extended families in the 1960, by 1980 16.7% did so, and by 2000 only 7.9%. Yet although extended families were

thus physically separated, extended family culture remained reasonably strong in the sense that family authority, decisions about marriage, the naming and number of children, mutual support in times of difficulty, inheritance agreements, funeral arrangements and commemoration of ancestors to a large extent continued to follow extended family practices (Wells 2015: 240, Gyesook Yoo 2006: 60). Also significant is that income from salaries in South Korea has been insufficient to support a middle-class lifestyle. Thus for Koreans dependence on kin is not just a manifestation of the traditional culture of the extended family, but is essential if a family is to maintain middle-class status. Services such as day care for children and care for the elderly remain largely unavailable outside of the family. People live with their parents until they marry, and sometimes also after marriage (Lett 1998: 29, 39, 46-60, 80-81, 159, 182, 223). The cases of Ms. Sin and Mr. Kim from Chapter Five, both unmarried adults older than thirty years old living with their parents, are examples of this social situation.

The Korean obsession with education has not started in the modern era. During the Chosŏn dynasty, education, the hallmark of *yangban* status, was one of the means to achieve upward mobility. Commoners hoped to improve the social standing of their families by educating their children (Walraven 2007: 244). In the Chosŏn dynasty, education was mostly Confucian, run privately or by local officials, and consisted of village schools, local schools and Confucian academies. Following the Kabo Reforms of 1894, in 1895 a new Ministry of Education was established to reconstruct a state education system. A curriculum for new public and private schools included mathematics, geography, history, foreign languages and physical education. Reading and writing were stressed, but the first topic for both elementary and higher grades was *susin* (修身), self-cultivation in social mores. By the summer of 1910, just before the annexation by Japan, a state survey listed 10 state-run schools, 50 local primary schools and 2,082 licensed private schools that offered modern education. Under

Japanese colonial rule the number of students who received a modern education continued to increase. (Kyung Moon Hwang 2016: 170-176).

After Liberation, modern education has spread in South Korea with disproportional speed. By the end of the Korean War (1950-1953) school enrollments in elementary, middle and high schools and colleges for respective age groups were 59.6%, 21.1% and 3.1%. By 1975 enrollment increased to 107,6%, 74% and 8,6% respectively.[127] Since the late 1990s, almost all Koreans of school age are able to finish high school.[128] Within two decades from 1980 to 2000 the proportion of males going to universities increased from 37% to 45%, while that of the female population increased from 17% to 58% (Wells 2015: 238).

In his book *Korean Spirituality* Donald Baker talks about the Korean tendency for moral self-improvement (2008: 6). I suggest that this tendency toward self-advancement and self-cultivation, which during the last six hundred years was primarily embodied in the Confucian institutions of the Chosŏn dynasty, stands behind the pursuit of status which Lett sees as a force driving the development of modern South Korea. I view personal self-improvement, the striving for status and for material wealth on the individual and familial levels as various expressions of this tendency for self-advancement. It also has a direct link with the modern Korean obsession with education.

According to the Confucian ideal, moral perfection stemming from self-cultivation on the levels of intentions, desires, thoughts and actions is expressed through the harmonious functioning of the family and productive service in the government bureaucracy. In Chosŏn, *yangban* aristocrats studied Confucian classics and tried to put into practice Confucian

[127] Children who are older than elementary school age are now also enrolled in elementary school, thus the percentage is over one hundred.

[128] StateUniversity.com, "South Korea - Educational System – overview," StateUniversity.com, http://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/1400/South-Korea-EDUCATIONAL-SYSTEM-OVERVIEW.html (accessed September 18, 2016).

principles. In order to obtain the position of a scholar-official, *yangban* men were required to demonstrate mastery of Confucian classics by passing the civil service exam (kwagŏ 科擧). [129] Education of today manifests the continuity of Korean tendency for self-improvement and aspiration to rise to a higher status. While Confucian education was pursued during the Chosŏn dynasty in order to be appointed as a scholar-official, the only suitable position for a *yangban*, a modern university education is pursued to obtain various white-collar jobs, all suitable for those concerned with status. As opportunities for education spread among the masses, any education, regardless of content, continued to confer status in Korean society (Lett 1998: 35-36). This pursuit of education continues to create more and more stress.

A study released in 1990 stated that 20% of all secondary students contemplated suicide due to university entrance exams pressure, and 5% actually attempted it (*Korea Newsreview*, January 13, 1990, 30, referenced in Seth 2002: 166). An article published in 2013 indicates that suicidal thoughts in youth aged 15-24 were steadily increasing from 2009 to 2010 and 2011 (Ch'oe Chŏnghyŏn 2013: 37). One study of 1996 found that 97% of all children reported being beaten by parents and/or teachers, treatment that was attributed to the pressure to do well in school (*Korea Newsreview*, January 27, 1996, 34, referenced in Seth 2002: 168). By the late 1990s, 93% of all South Korean parents expected their children to enter university or college, preferably in Seoul, as provincial universities provide minimal status advantages. Yet, there were only 300,000 student positions available for about 900,000 annual applicants for admission to an institute of higher learning (Lett 1998: 161, Seth 2002: 168, 170).

[129] The hereditary *yangban* elite consisted of career bureaucrats in the capital and local landlords, landowners in the countryside. Most *yangban* never passed the civil service exams, and even fewer became scholar-officials in the central government (Lett 1998: 21).

Preoccupation with the future job of their children is not the only reason behind the educational pursuits of parents. In consistence with traditional Confucian ethics that equate education with moral worth and ultimately with prestige and social rank, Korean parents see education as improvement of personal character and nature, a cultivation of the self. Various private academies and extracurricular classes that children are made to attend since very early pre-school age aim at academic excellence but also at culture- and character-building (Lett 1998: 161, 173). The obsession with education drains most of the family resources, constituting one of the major causes of stress in South Korean society.

As a college or university education has become one of the most important markers of middle-class status in Korea, education connects directly to marriage strategies. In Korea a suitable marriage implies marrying someone with the proper status. Marriageability is defined by education and occupation, occupation itself being dependent on education. In contemporary South Korea the number of arranged marriages has declined and nowadays marriages are often results of self-selection of one's partner. In the 1958, 62% of marriages were arranged by parents, in the 1980, only 18%. But the grounds for choosing one's partner have not changed greatly. Introductions are frequently made by parents or their agents. The traditional regional, occupational, financial and educational criteria of the arranged marriages remain decisive in most cases (Wells 2015: 241).

The new middle class of white-collar employees of the government bureaucracies and large business corporations developed in South Korea between the 1960s and 1990s along with urbanization and industrialization. These people enjoyed a guaranteed income without many of the anxieties connected to independent businesses and farming (Lett 1998: 2-3, 37-38), which allowed them to engage in activities for self-improvement. In the South Korea of the 1980s industrial growth and the development of the new middle class went together with increased consumption and leisure culture, and growing concerns with health and personal

self-cultivation. Accordingly mountain hiking, *sŏngin undong* (成人運動 sports for adults), and *ki suryŏn* for example, were on the rise.

8.2 Reactions to Westernization and modernization

The middle class matured in South Korea in the 1980s. Its development since the 1960s was accompanied by two seemingly contradictory phenomena, both of which constitute an expression of national culture. One is the *yangbanization* of the society, which affected almost the whole population (Asakura 1998: 200). The other phenomenon is the *minjung* (民衆) movement, which associated Koreanness not with the ruling elite, but with the culture of the poor, suffering under-privileged. The term *minjung* appeared in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, referring to the masses as a social category. By the mid-20th century it had become more ideologically laden and defined as the wellspring of authentic Korean values assumed to be held by poor rural and urban laborers (Wells 2015: 218, 254). The supporters of the *minjung* movement, students and intellectuals, however, came from amidst a new middle class of South Korea. As a political movement, *minjung* populism gathered force and determination after the Kwangju Uprising in May 1980 (Wells 2015: 255) and ultimately contributed to the June 1987 protests of students and the new middle class that led to the declaration of the end of military rule.

Korea's independence from Japan was achieved without Koreans' direct participation, despite their persistent struggles, and for the South, liberation brought new forms of dependence on the United States. The particular path of modernization as rationalization and Westernization along with growing anxiety over South Korea's perceived neocolonial status gave rise to two overriding concerns among critical intellectuals: overcoming the colonial mentality and recovering or creating historical subjectivity. Within the *minjung* project,

which was a characteristically postcolonial phenomenon, intellectuals and university students critically reevaluated and reinterpreted major events in Korean history, identifying the *minjung*, the common people, to be the true subject of historical development and the true agent of social change (Namhee Lee 2007: 2-5). The ideals and aspirations of the *minjung* movement were defined in opposition to foreign powers, corporate conglomerates, and military dictatorship (Namhee Lee 2007: 6). The *minjung* movement was a nationalistic movement which opposed neocolonialism and the anti-democratic regime, contributing to toppling it and achieving democracy in the 1987. The Nationalist pro-Korean character of *minjung* movement connects to and/or is one expression of the intensified interest in Korean identity and history of the 1980s, which is visible in various aspects of life and culture (Asakura 1998: 198).

The revival of folk culture was a widespread phenomenon after WWII among newly independent countries. In South Korea the state initiated a series of projects and institutions that gave rise to the revival of folklore as an academic discipline and a popular project (Namhee Lee 2007: 189). During the Pak Chŏnghŭi regime of the 1960s and 1970s the government revived some elements of folk culture as a resource for national identity, while denouncing other traditional cultural elements as unscientific, irrational, impractical and thus a hindrance to modernization. Students and intellectuals who opposed Pak Chŏnghŭi saw these elements as embodiments of an indigenous Korean spirit, capable of resisting the negative impacts of modernization and Westernization. In the 1980s these elements came to be considered parts of valuable Korean cultural tradition (Lett 1998: 39, Namhee Lee 2007: 189). The rise of *sŏndo* culture and *ki suryŏn* in the 1980s is one part of this return to things Korean, in an attempt to realize and shape an alternative, non-Western modernity.

In South Korea and in other places people evoke their own childhood as a touchstone of cultural authenticity. A longing for a place of memory, or imagined memory, as a feeling

of loss and mourning is seen sometimes as an inevitable consequence of modern conditions. This longing is often for things "folkloric" and "traditional" (Kendall 2009: xviii, xxiv), and it actively contributes to constructed histories, mythologies and traditions. It has shaped and colored the lives of people of older generations who have lived through Korea's dramatic transformation from a mostly rural society to an industrial one. Their yearning for the past, in which the "past" is idealized and imagined anew, is mentioned explicitly by Ch'oe Hyŏngsu in his interview. He talked about *sinsŏn,* connecting his longing for the past to childhood tales about fairy mountain dwellers. The mountain culture I have discussed in the Introduction and at greater length in Chapter Seven, together with an image of rural "old Korea" in the minds of contemporary people, becomes a source of inspiration in constructing and re-inventing tradition in the spirit of nationalism.

In Chapter Seven I briefly touched on the notion of *pigwahakchŏk* (unscientific), which for Ch'oe Hyŏngsu and for many others has become symbolic. This term is a code word for a particular attitude towards some elements of Korean traditional culture, which were considered unscientific during the Pak Chŏnghŭi era and before that during the Japanese colonial occupation of Korea. The invented traditions of *ki suryŏn* and GiCheon should be understood against this historical background. The creation and support of these invented traditions constitute a reaction against the way of thinking of the modernizers who were inclined to equate modern with Western, and against the sense of Korean inferiority implied in such a way of thinking. This reaction becomes a leading force in the creation of the building blocks of a new Korean modernity.

In South Korea modernization and Westernization came to signify economic prosperity of the new middle class. Prosperity and modernity, however, also brought with them the stress of urban life, augmented by the exaggerated pursuit of education and status. Korean traditional spirituality, in its old and new forms, has been mobilized to deal with the

stress of contemporary urban life. One form of spirituality new for Korea was Christianity. It quickly became one of the most popular religions, and one of the reasons for this lies in its assumed connection with modernization and Westernization.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries the advent of modern times also stimulated the emergence of a number of new religions, such as Tonghak/Ch'ŏndogyo, Chŭngsan'gyo and Wŏn Buddhism. They resemble Christianity in the ways they define themselves, such as a unique god they worship or scriptures they alone hold sacred (Baker 2008: 78-91). These new religions emerging in the period when Korea entered a new era served as pillars to fortify Korean identity in times of change and crisis, and they continue to provide spiritual inspiration and support in contemporary times. The term the *minjok chonggyo* (民族 宗教 national religions) is used to describe such religions. *Sŏndo* culture theorists view these new religions as a part of *sŏndo* culture (Na Kwŏnsu 2012). Christianity and the Korean new religions popularized from the 19th century onward constitute innovative and recent forms of the Korean tendency for self-improvement and self-advancement. As elaborated upon in the Introduction, this tendency is expressed in even newer religious and spiritual movements that matured toward the 1980s. *Ki suryŏn* in general and GiCheon in particular are examples of these spiritual-social phenomena.

Social changes that came with industrialization, such as mass migration to cities, created a total change of environment that allowed free choices with regard to social life absent in a traditional village society. A great variety of facilities are offered in a city, such as churches, temples, clubs and gyms. Commercialization and competition between different forms of religious and spiritual life have intensified in the contemporary era. *Ki suryŏn* practitioners consider monthly payments required from them as natural as entrance fees to gyms and swimming pools, while many among them choose to follow several paths toward

self-improvement simultaneously, combining *ki suryŏn* for instance with Buddhism or Christianity, as I have mentioned in the Introduction.

Commercialization and branding bring both diversification and standardization. As mentioned in Chapter Two, GiCheon has contributed to a generation of a number of practices, some of which were marketed and promoted under names different from GiCheon. Such is the case, for example, with Haidong Gumdo (海東劒道 Haedong Kŏmdo) developed by Kim Chŏngho and Na Hanil, two students of Taeyang Chinin, in the 1980s, on the basis of GiCheon positions. Also in the 1980s GiCheon itself got standardized, systematized and classified into practices of warming-up, static and dynamic disciplines, breathing techniques and decorum training, which helped greatly in teaching large numbers of students. Internetization and globalization lead to yet another stage in the development of *ki suryŏn,* with multi-lingual websites advertising various practices and promotion DVDs being sold to an international audience.[130]

8.3 Social pressure and *ki suryŏn* as a mechanism of survival and method of self-improvement

In this dissertation I have analyzed the experiences of contemporary South Korean *ki suryŏn* practitioners, and the ways these experiences are conceptualized and articulated by them. How do the practitioners understand GiCheon, reviewed here as one example of *ki suryŏn*? How and in which forms does *ki suryŏn* alleviate the stress of the complex urban life?

As briefly outlined in the Introduction to this dissertation, I approach *ki suryŏn* in general and GiCheon in particular as contemporary avatars of East Asian age-old practices of internal alchemy and nourishing life. In the context of South Korea, *ki suryŏn,* which is also referred to as *sŏndo suryŏn,* is a part of a larger *sŏndo* culture. The constructed tradition of

[130] As is the case with GiCheon DVDs released by Lee Kit'ae in 2002, and by Lee Sangwŏn and Kim Sanghwan in 2004.

1980s *sŏndo* is projected back to such new religions as Ch'ŏndogyo, Chŭngsan'gyo and Wŏn Buddhism (Na Kwŏnsu 2012), to the ancient states of Silla, Koguryŏ, Paekche and even to Tan'gun (Sondŏ munhwa yŏn'guwŏn 2006). *Sŏndo* culture has a direct connection to *chaeya sahak*, alternative versions of history promoted by populist nationalist historians. The representation of *sŏndo* as the original Korean religion coming from ancient times constitutes one example of creating identity through history, and of historiography as a social activity involving attempts by social groups to formulate their own identity vis-à-vis others (cf. Walraven 2001: 157-158). History and historical records have always been important for Koreans as a kind of mirror within which good and evil competed. Anchoring their teachings in history is a common characteristic of Korean invented traditions, including *sŏndo* culture and *ki suryŏn* in general and GiCheon in particular.

As I have mentioned in Chapter Two, and briefly outlined in Chapter Seven, the contrast between "city" and "nature", brought about by the industrial development and the rise of the middle class speaks to the health concerns of urban Koreans, manifested in the growth of hiking culture and a rising interest in *ki suryŏn.* Indeed, health concerns are one of the major reasons that bring people to *ki suryŏn* and GiCheon. Health concerns link to the stress of contemporary life. *Ki suryŏn* and GiCheon provide important coping mechanisms for dealing with these issues.

The operational terms of the constructed tradition of GiCheon come from the ancient East Asian culture of internal alchemy and nourishing life. Yet, these terms are utilized by contemporary practitioners in a way that reflects the problems of modern times. As discussed in Chapter Three, when I asked Kwŏn Kuho what *ki* is, his answers expressed his discontent and dissatisfaction with the Westernization of Korean society. As briefly outlined in this Conclusion, ideas of Westernization and the resistance against it have significant antecedents in Korean modern history. Kwŏn Kuho found himself bound by Western ways of thought,

which left him unable to access and fully articulate the meaning of *ki*, an East Asian concept. He was only capable of explaining *ki* in terms of Western science, a fact he was unhappy about. An extract from the interview with Mr. Kwŏn quoted in Chapter Three exemplifies how this dissatisfaction with Western values and way of life is one factor attracting Koreans to *ki* practices associated with "Eastern culture". Mr. Kwŏn is not alone in his negative estimation of Westernization.

Adepts construct GiCheon tradition through written texts and oral mythology. They also may incorporate Christian insights into GiCheon tradition. Kim Yŏnghŭi, whose interview has been discussed in the second half of Chapter Three, is another, and alternative, example of how contemporary Koreans perceive "Oriental thought" and *ki*. Ms. Kim explains *ki* in connection to God and the relationship between her GiCheon and Catholic practices.

The story of Kim Yŏnghŭi also demonstrates how GiCheon practice is woven into the texture of the daily affairs of the practitioners, and how the story of their training is actually the story of their life. In Chapter Four I have traced the meaning of *suryŏn* for the trainees. While they were talking about *suryŏn* their life values and attitudes surfaced in their narratives. As discussed in Chapter Four, the distinction between *suryŏn* and *undong* was important for many GiCheon adepts. For those close to the core of GiCheon community, GiCheon practice constitutes more than just *undong* (sports), and for many people it connects to their spiritual or religious progress, as Mr. Ha describes in Chapter Seven. Christian practitioners such as Ms. Kim from Chapter Three develop their Christianity through GiCheon. And it is through GiCheon that the Buddhist trainees briefly discussed in Chapter Four develop their Buddhist aspirations. Non-religious adepts find other ways to enhance their lives through GiCheon, as described in previous chapters. For those situated at the top of the GiCheon institution, such as masters and instructors, GiCheon itself provides a main route

toward spiritual enlightenment and self-perfection, the acme of happiness which Mr. Ha metaphorically situates at a mountain top in Chapter Seven.

Cho Chinsik, the first protagonist of Chapter Four, described the stress of contemporary South Korean life as his perceived need to constantly create a good impression with others. He felt that to some measure GiCheon practice helped him to free himself from this compulsion of impressing others, allowing him to live for himself. GiCheon practice also had a similar effect on Kim Yŏnghŭi, as discussed in Chapter Four. She was under very strong familial pressure to act in certain ways. Through practicing GiCheon she started conceiving of her own desires and goals, separate from those dictated by her family. As for Pak Kyŏngae, the third protagonist of Chapter Four, she used GiCheon practice not as a means to liberate herself from social and familial pressure, but as a method to make peace with it. Social and familial duties are heavy, and GiCheon helps her to deal with them successfully, to become an efficient worker and member of the society. Ms. Sin from Chapter Five also felt pressed to perform the duties of a "good natured daughter". She used GiCheon as a technique which helped achieve that.

The stress and competitiveness of contemporary South Korean society are also reflected in the story of Kim Wŏn'gyu from Chapter Five. Though Mr. Kim does not mention them directly, it is clear from his narrative that he experienced strong social pressure to show his worth. It is in pursuit of this socially required self-worth or self-image that he has undertaken and continued his GiCheon Odyssey. This competitiveness is also clearly manifested in the words of Ha Tongju from Chapter Seven, for whom spiritual progress became almost like a contest or a sparring match.

As a technique for self-perfection, self-development and self-craft, GiCheon belongs to a wider culture of similar practices, which I have conceptualized on the basis of the technologies of self developed by Michel Foucault. On the basis of Foucault's technologies

of self and Confucian self-cultivational schema I have developed the concept of the self as entailing multi-layered dynamics, unfolding into two opposite directions, which I have called vectors. The direction of the first vector is intention, emotion, cognition, actions and activities on the personal, familial, social and universal planes unfolding from inside the self toward the outside, toward the world. The direction of the second vector is from the outside toward the inside, as the outside world forms and transforms the self.

In a narrow sense, technologies of self mean formation of the self undertaken by the self. In a wider sense, technologies of the self include formation of the self by others. In the text of the present dissertation I have focused on technologies of the self in the narrow sense. I suggest that *ki suryŏn* in general and GiCheon in particular constitute subjectivation – that is the transference from the second vector to the first, by virtue of developing a strong self capable of withstanding outward pressures. The examples of most GiCheon practitioners described in this dissertation demonstrate the ways they utilize GiCheon in order to withstand and/or adapt to the pressures and stress of the contemporary Korean family and society.

When Cho Chinsik, Kim Yŏnghŭi, Pak Kyŏngae and others talk about their GiCheon *suryŏn* in Chapter Four, their narratives show activation of such motifs as the intervention of the Other, returning to the source, freedom, hardship and purification. These elements, common to many spiritual traditions of the world, are important components in the constructed tradition of GiCheon, as lived and experienced by the practitioners. In my vectors model, they are the mechanisms activating the first vector of progression, strengthening the self against external influences.

I suggest that my two vectors scheme can serve as a useful tool for social science research in general, and for the research on technologies of the self in particular. It can be utilized by other researchers in different forms and to different ends. First of all, existing research can be classified into following either the first, or the second vector. I have

attempted this kind of classification in the Introduction. I suggest that the late work of Michel Foucault (2001, 2008), and the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1945) and Thomas Csordas (2002) follow mostly the first vector, as they focus on the creative input of a man upon himself and upon the world, a man projecting himself onto the world. The earlier work of Michel Foucault (1961, 1963, 1975) and the work of scholars such as *Marcel Mauss (*1966 [1934]) *and* Pierre Bourdieu (1980) follow the second vector, as they study the way an individual life is shaped by society. This type of classification can facilitate an understanding of a great variety of research projects in the social sciences and assist in their comparative analysis.

Secondly, my two vectors scheme can be utilized in the philosophical discourse on the self. To which degree does the self manifest outward movement of intention, emotion, cognition and action? To which degree is the self constituted by familial and social influences? Which one is the real me – the one who imagines, hopes and desires? Or the one who accepts, submits and gives in? I suggest that application of the two vectors scheme in the study of various anthropological material and in philosophical discourse may further develop our understanding of the self, forming a link with the continuing history of subjectivity of which Foucault speaks.

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Index

A

An Chaehong 20

B

Bodhidharma 225, 226, 227, 232, 253

C

ch'amta 73, 120, 121, 214
Ch'oe Namsŏn 20
Ch'ŏndogyo 245, 247
Ch'ŏnsŏnnyŏ 225, 226, 227, 229
chaeya sahak 20, 21, 247, 261
chagi 84, 109
chayŏn 193, 207, 220
chesa 236
chinin 17, 58, 59, 199
Chŏng Inbo 20
chŏngpŏp 160, 284
Chosŏn dynasty 234, 236, 238, 239, 240
chuch'e 105, 106, 114
chungdanjŏn 214
Chŭngsan'gyo 245, 247

D

Dahn 12, 13, 15, 22, 58, 228, 253, 273
Dao De Jing 48
Daxue 33, 281

E

epimeleia heautou 28, 30

G

gnothi seauton 29

H

habitus 39
hadanjŏn 214
Haidong Gumdo 58, 246
Han'guk chŏngsŏ 98
Han'guk sŏndo ŭi yŏksa wa munhwa 19, 271
Han'guk sŏndo wa hyŏndae tanhak 19
hanbok 60
hanŭihak 81
Hanŭihak chŏngch'aek yŏn'guso 162
hanŭisa 75
hanŭnim 87
Huangdi Neijing 48, 82
Huike 226
Hwadam Sŏ Kyŏngdŏk 22, 80, 91
Hyŏn Sangyun 20

I

innun kŏt 194
innŭn kŭdaero 207
inyŏn 150
ipsi hakwŏn 62

K

kampō 82
kangdan sahak 20, 21
khresthai 31
ki 8, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 19, 21, 22, 23, 24, 26, 27, 33, 34, 35, 37, 38, 40, 41, 42, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 55, 57, 58, 59, 62, 65, 68, 69, 74, 75, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100,102, 106, 107, 122, 123, 129, 131, 136, 145, 152, 153, 157, 160, 161, 167, 178, 179, 184, 190, 191, 193, 194, 195, 196, 198, 203, 209, 214, 215, 220, 221, 222, 225, 231, 232, 242, 243, 244, 246, 247, 248, 250, 268, 273, 280, 281, 282, 283
ki ka ppajyŏtta 80
ki ssaum 81
Kich'ŏn Chungang Hyŏphoe 64, 65
Kich'ŏn Sangmuwŏn 65, 265
Kich'ŏn Sŏnmujang 58
Kich'ŏndo 59
Kich'ŏnmun 59, 99
kidowŏn 195
kiun 82, 83, 107, 178
kkaedarŭm 108
kkaeunŭn kŏt 174
kogae 205
kŏgi sani issŏsŏ kanda 205
Kojosŏn 20, 223, 268
kong 62, 68, 69
Kouksundo 15, 21, 24, 58
Kukcharang 64
kwagŏ 240
Kyeryong 63
Kyeryong Kich'ŏn 63
kyŏllinŭn 174
Kyŏngju 66, 227

L

Leib 38, 267
Lunyu 48

M

Mago ... 227
makhida ... 80, 81
manjok ... 162
melete ... 32
minjok chonggyo ... 245
minjung ... 242
mok ... 181
mom esŏ ŭi chindong ŭi p'adong ... 83
mun ... 69
munju ... 63, 154

N

nae chasinŭl pparaganŭn kŏt ... 123
naedan ... 12, 17, 22, 281
naegasinjang. 8, 56, 61, 68, 73, 82, 88, 90, 114, 115, 123, 132, 133, 135, 139, 140, 149, 153, 154, 157, 158, 159, 160, 161, 162, 163, 164, 165, 170, 171, 172, 173, 174, 176, 177, 178, 179, 182, 183, 184, 185, 186, 187, 188, 189, 190, 193, 196, 206, 210, 211, 213, 214,216, 217, 220, 284
naegong ... 62, 68, 220
Noe Hohŭp ... 13
Noe Kyoyuk ... 13
Noksaek Han'guk ... 223
noryŏk ... 93, 271, 276

P

p'ullida ... 81
pae ... 69
Pak Hyŏkkŏse ... 228
pappŭge an saratta ... 232
parrhesia ... 32
perestroika ... 8
pigwahakchŏk ... 99, 218, 219, 221, 244
pisŏn ... 18
pŏmsa ... 65
Pukch'ang Chŏng Yŏm ... 22

Q

qigong ... 14, 16, 22, 24, 26, 27, 47, 198, 202, 256

R

ryŏn ... 102, 123

S

sabu ... 63
saengch'e enŏji ... 83
saengmyŏng ŭl yujihanŭn ponjiljŏgin kŏt ... 83
saengmyŏng ŭi wŏnch'ŏn ... 83
san ... 44, 79, 191, 199, 222, 276
san nŏmŏ sanida ... 199
san sinang ... 222, 276
Sangin ... 59, 220, 224, 232
sani innŭn kŏt ... 208
sani issŏsŏ sanŭl kanda ... 204
sani ŏmnŭn kŏt ... 208
sanjung suryŏn ... 195, 218, 219, 221
sansin sinang ... 222, 254, 275
sansindang ... 18, 255
sansingak ... 18
sansinje ... 63, 222, 255, 260, 261, 262, 268
Shiji ... 18
Shuemun ... 79
sin ... 20, 87, 91, 264
Sin Ch'aeho ... 20
sinch'im ... 61
sinsŏn ... 16, 17, 18, 19, 59, 182, 191, 199, 218, 219, 220, 221, 222, 223, 226, 227, 232, 244
sinsŏnbong ... 221
sinsŏndae ... 221
Sŏn ... 59
sŏn'gyŏ ... 20
sŏndo ... 18, 19, 20, 21, 70, 191, 218, 220, 221, 222, 232, 243, 245, 246, 254, 267, 271, 276
Sondŏ munhwa yŏnguwŏn ... 19, 20
Sŏndo Sŏngmo ... 228
sŏndo suryŏn ... 19, 246
sŏngch'wigam ... 162
sŏngin ... 16, 24, 57, 199, 203, 242
sŏngin undong ... 24, 57, 242
sŏngŭi chŏngsim susin ch'ega ch'iguk p'yŏngch'ŏnha . 33
sŏnnyŏ ... 18
sŏnpŏp ... 191, 220, 221, 232
Sŏrak ... 210
Ssanggyesa ... 18
ssusinŭn ... 174
suhaeng ... 102, 106, 108, 167
sunhwan ... 81
suryŏn ... 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 19, 21, 22, 23, 24, 27, 28, 33, 34, 35, 37, 40, 41, 42, 44, 45, 46, 47, 50, 55, 57, 58, 59, 78, 81, 89, 93, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 101, 102, 103, 104, 105, 106, 107, 108, 109, 111, 113, 115, 117, 118, 119, 120, 121, 122, 123, 124,126, 128, 129, 131, 136, 152, 160, 167, 191, 203, 204, 205, 206, 208, 209, 214, 222, 231, 232, 242, 243, 244, 245, 246, 247, 248, 250, 260, 268, 273, 275, 280, 281, 282, 283
susin ... 33, 97, 238, 281
suyang ... 102

T

Taeyang Chinin ... 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 182, 218, 220, 224, 232, 246
Taeyang Hagwŏn ... 62

tan 22, 24, 67, 69, 160
tan'gong 68
Tan'gun 16, 19, 20, 70, 223, 247, 254, 262, 268
tanbaegong 69, 73, 88, 123, 154
tangnŭn 122
tanhak 19, 22
Tanhak Sŏnwŏn 58
Tanhakp'a 22
tanjŏn 22, 67, 213, 214, 215, 220, 221
tanjŏn hohŭp 220
toin 62, 220

U

uju enŏji 83
ŭmp'agong 100
un'gi 79
undong .. 99, 103, 106, 117, 118, 151, 152, 153, 156, 248, 254
Unje Yŏsansin 227

W

Wŏn Buddhism 20, 245, 247
wŏnbanjang 8
Wŏnhye Sangin 59, 224
wŏnjang 65

X

Xiulian xuzhi 102

Y

yangban 236, 237, 238, 239, 240
yangbanization 242
yangsaeng 12, 17, 82, 281
Yi Nŭnghwa 20
yŏngsan 224

Z

Zhang Zai 80, 91, 272
zixiu 49

Summary in Dutch

Lichaam en *ki* in GiCheon: oefeningen ter zelfvervolmaking in hedendaags Korea

In dit proefschrift onderzoek ik het sociale fenomeen van *ki suryŏn* 氣修練 (praktijken ter bevordering van *ki* - wat ik provisorisch omschrijf als "levensenergie") als een uitgevonden traditie en onderzoek hoe dit functioneert in de hedendaagse Koreaanse samenleving. Ik benader *ki suryŏn* als een vorm van "self-craft ", waarin het lichaam als onderwerp een set van vaardigheden en technieken toepast op het lichaam als een object, en ik bekijk hoe *ki suryŏn* leerlingen hun praktijk conceptualiseren, met de vraag welke betekenis en inhoud deze praktijk voor hen heeft, om uiteindelijk te komen tot een beter begrip van het huidige Korea. Ik betoog dat beoefenaars *ki suryŏn* ervaren als een proces van zelf-formatie, waarbij het zelf tegelijkertijd een onderwerp van wensen, gedachten en handelingen van zichzelf, maar ook een object van de wensen, gedachten en handelingen van anderen is. Deze benadering benadrukt de relevantie van *ki suryŏn* voor de vorming en ontwikkeling van de belevingswereld van hedendaagse Koreanen.

Mijn onderzoek wordt uitgevoerd door middel van een case study van GiCheon (氣天), één van de *ki suryŏn* praktijken die in Korea zijn ontwikkeld in de jaren 70. Als een set van oefeningen bedoeld om het lichaam en geest-hart (*maŭm*) te transformeren, behoort GiCheon tot een groep van praktijken die zijn gekarakteriseerd als innerlijke alchemie (內丹 *naedan*) en het bevorderen van vitaliteit (養生 *yangsaeng*). Als basis voor mijn onderzoek, gebruik ik een serie van interviews met eenenzestig GiCheon beoefenaars, afgenomen tussen september 2010 en april 2011 in Zuid-Korea. Ik maak bovendien gebruik van mijn eigen

zestien jaar GiCheon ervaring als een adept en een instructeur, en de kennis die ik daardoor verworven heb.

Oost-Aziatische praktijken van innerlijke alchemie en het bevorderen van vitaliteit zijn technieken geworteld in fysiologische, psychologische en gedragsmatige principes. Zij omvatten gymnastiek, massage, ademhaling, seksuele hygiëne, voeding, geneeskunde, meditatie en visualisatie, alsmede regels voor het dagelijkse gedrag. Ik focus op de manieren waarop deze tradities worden uitgevonden of opnieuw ontdekt voor de doeleinden van vandaag. Hun hedendaagse Koreaanse avatar *ki suryŏn* is een van de methoden van omgaan met de druk van de moderniteit. In hedendaags Zuid-Korea zijn de praktijken van *ki suryŏn* geïntegreerd in de routine van het stedelijke dagelijks leven en dus houdt de studie van de *ki suryŏn* cultuur ook onderzoek in de manier waarop stedelingen leven en zich tot elkaar verhouden.

Foucault's begrip van de “technologieën van het zelf” dient als uitgangspunt voor mijn analyse van *ki suryŏn* als het bewust cultiveren van lichaam en geest-hart. Het benaderen van *ki suryŏn* in het algemeen en GiCheon in het bijzonder als technologieën van het zelf draagt bij aan inzicht in deze culturele fenomenen en helpt hen te plaatsen in een context van wetenschappelijk onderzoek. Dit sluit aan bij de pogingen van de Russische sinoloog Abaev om psycho-fysieke cultuur an sich als onderzoeksonderwerp te erkennen. Ik heb ook gebruik gemaakt van het confucianistische schema uit de *Daxue*, *sŏngŭi chŏngsim susin ch'ega ch'iguk p'yŏngch'ŏnha* (誠意 正心 修身 齊家 治國 平 天下 "authenticiteit van de intentie, het corrigeren van geest-hart, het cultiveren van het lichaam, het reguleren van de familie, het regeren van het land, het brengen van vrede in de wereld"). Op basis van dit schema heb ik een begrip van het zelf ontwikkeld als zich ontvouwend op de niveaus van de intentie, de emotie, de cognitie, het lichaam, de familie, de maatschappij en het universum. De manifestaties van het zelf in deze verschillende contexten bouwen op elkaar en vertrekken

van elkaar. Zij kunnen worden samengevat in een tweevectorenmodel. De eerste vector beschrijft een proces van opzettelijke beïnvloeding, het ontvouwen van het zelf in de richting van het externe. De tweede vector beschrijft de niet-opzettelijke invloed waarin het zelf wordt gevormd door externe factoren die uitwerken op de interne. Ik kan de vectoren als volgt schematisch in beeld brengen:

de eerste vector:

intentie → emotie → cognitie →

lichaam → familie → samenleving → universum

de tweede vector:

universum → samenleving → familie →

lichaam → cognitie → emotie → intentie

Dit schema draagt bij tot het begrijpen van de processen van zelf-constructie en zelfontplooiing in *ki suryŏn* en soortgelijke praktijken.

Voortbouwend op de theorie van de belichaming van Thomas Csordás, heb ik ook gebruik gemaakt van het methodologisch instrument van "belevingsmodaliteiten", die ik ontwikkel als narratieve sporen waarneembaar waarlangs het verhaal van iedere beoefenaar verteld wordt. Ik gebruik het vectorenmodel en de notie van belevingsmodaliteiten voor de analyse van het interviewmateriaal. Ik heb gemerkt dat de woorden *ki*, *suryŏn*, pijn en bergen terugkerende woorden in de verhalen van mijn informanten waren en ik heb besloten om de tekst van mijn proefschrift daaromheen te structureren. Begrippen als *ki*, *suryŏn*, pijn en bergen zijn vitale culturele opvattingen, sleutelwoorden die beelden, gevoelens en ervaringen genereren, die ervaringen van het intentionele, emotionele, lichamelijke (of individuele), familiale, sociale en universele zelf genereren.

In hoofdstuk 1, de inleiding, presenteer ik een overzicht van eerder onderzoek en mijn methode, en in hoofdstuk 2 introduceer ik GiCheon en haar geschiedenis. Aangezien de

concepten van *ki* en *suryŏn* centraal staan in GiCheon, bespreek ik wat ze betekenen voor de beoefenaars in de hoofdstukken 3 en 4. De Koreaanse woorden *ki* en *suryŏn* zijn zowel moderne als oude woorden, elk met meerdere betekenissen. Ze zijn bij iedereen bekend, maar toch bezielt iedereen ze met zijn of haar eigen persoonlijke interpretatie, puttend uit een groot cultureel reservoir. Hoofdstuk 3 bespreekt de verschillende betekenissen toegeschreven aan de term *ki* in de Koreaanse spreektaal en in de verhalen van GiCheon beoefenaars. *Ki* is een van de basisprincipes van de Oost-Aziatische kijk op het leven, en organiseert, regelt en toont als kernbegrip ervaringen en hoe zij uitgedrukt worden. Hoofdstuk 4 onderzoekt het begrip *suryŏn* en hoe dit wordt opgevat door zijn beoefenaars. *Suryŏn* is een gemeenschappelijk concept van de Oost-Aziatische cultuur, maar elke leerling legt het anders uit. Deze zeer persoonlijke kijk op *suryŏn* sluit aan bij de individuele "narratieve richting" van elke GiCheon adept. Hoofdstuken 3 en 4 laten de lezer technieken en processen zien van zelfvervolmaking in GiCheon, en tonen de diversiteit van individuele ervaringen. Deze diversiteit wordt verder onderzocht in hoofdstuk 5. Het doel van hoofdstuk 5 is de verduidelijking van het theoretische kader van belevingsmodaliteiten, waarbij ik me concentreer op die belevingsmodaliteiten die persoonlijk gekleurd zijn. De verhalen van de vele GiCheon adepten brengen verschijnselen en ervaringen met betrekking tot de geest, het lichaam, de familie en de maatschappij, in clusters van gewaarwordingen, gevoelens, indrukken en ideeën. Deze clusters bevatten vaak de vectoren van progressieve vooruitgang van het lichaam naar de familie (lichaam → familie of individu → familie), van het lichaam naar de samenleving (lichaam → samenleving, of individu → samenleving) of van het lichaam in de richting van het universum (lichaam → universum, of individu → universum). Ze zijn afkomstig van het lichamelijke zelf, maar gaan naar buiten, in de richting van het familiale, sociale en universele zelf. In het geval van GiCheon beoefenaars zijn de tonaliteit,

de richting en het patroon van hun verhalen geworteld in de lichamelijke ervaring van GiCheon posities, waarbij pijn een belangrijke rol speelt.

Hoofdstuk 6 bestudeert de pijn van *naegasinjang*, de centrale GiCheon positie, als een essentieel kenmerk van de praktijk. Ik stel voor om GiCheon en soortgelijke praktijken als praktijken te zien die zijn ontwikkeld op basis van de tradities van bergasceten. Dit manifesteert zich ook in de legendes van GiCheon en in de interviews met de beoefenaars. Het bekijken van GiCheon als een dergelijke praktijk houdt in dat het doel van de GiCheon praktijk de transformatie van het lichaam naar een ideaal lichaam is, het lichaam van een *sŏnin* ("bergonsterfelijke"). Het pad van deze transformatie is pijnlijk en moeilijk. In dit hoofdstuk beschouw ik verschillende aspecten van deze pijnervaring. De notie van pijn is centraal in GiCheon. De statische posities (靜 法 *chŏngpŏp*) vormen de kern van de praktijk, en ze zijn pijnlijk. Ik onderzoek hoe het zelf wordt gecreëerd op basis van de ervaring van *naegasinjang*, hoe het lichaam in pijn wordt ervaren en benaderd, en wat voor soort van zelf daardoor wordt gecreëerd.

Hoofdstuk 7 gaat dieper in op de culturele achtergrond van GiCheon als een deel van wat beschreven kan worden als de bergtradities van Korea. Bergen zijn ook de ruimte voor het uitvoeren van *naegasinjang* en andere GiCheon posities, en de achtergrond waartegen het ideale GiCheon lichaam, een onsterfelijk lichaam, gecreëerd door *naegasinjang*, wordt voorgesteld en gearticuleerd. De oefeningen in de "zuivere" ruimte van de bergen worden voorgesteld en uitgevoerd als een tegenwicht tegen de "vervuiling" van moderne stedelijke ruimtes. Mijn conclusies worden gepresenteerd in hoofdstuk 8, waar de plaats van GiCheon en soortgelijke praktijken in de hedendaagse Koreaanse samenleving is geschetst. Deze praktijken worden gebruikt als technieken voor het omgaan met de veelvuldige uitdagingen en stressvolle situaties van het hedendaagse leven, en ze functioneren voor elke persoon op een andere manier, op basis van persoonlijke behoeften. GiCheon en soortgelijke praktijken

bieden verschillende manieren voor het vinden van betekenis in het leven, niet per se in plaats van godsdiensten zoals het boeddhisme en het christendom, maar vaak beoefend in combinatie daarmee. Ondanks de (al dan niet reële) wortels in de oude traditie van de innerlijke alchemie, is GiCheon al met al een eigentijds, voornamelijk stedelijk fenomeen, en niet een overblijfsel uit het verleden. Als zodanig is het een onlosmakelijk deel van de realiteit van het eenentwintigste-eeuwse Korea dat als zodanig studie verdient.

Curriculum Vitae

Yeonhwa Jeon (Victoria Ten) was born in Leningrad, Soviet Union, in 1975. In the years 1983-1991 she attended elementary and middle school #179, and then The First Hebrew School of Leningrad, Russia. In 1991-1993 she attended grades 11 to 12 at Neveh Channa Yeshiva High School for Young Women, Jerusalem, Israel and received a graduation diploma. In 2000 she received an LL.B, at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel, and in 2010 – an MA in Korean Philosophy at Sungkyunkwan University, Seoul, South Korea. Yeonhwa Jeon's professional career consisted of working in the fields of law, business, education and translation. In 2010 she started her PhD in Korean Studies at LIAS, Leiden University, the Netherlands. In the years 2014-2017 she taught Korean language and culture and also Russian language and culture at the Hague University of Applied Sciences.