

## EUI – AM

By James Simpson (II Dan)

**Eui-Am is the pseudonym of Son Byong-Hi,  
leader of the Korean Independence movement on March 1, 1919.**

**The 45 movements refer to his age when he changed the name of Dong Hak (Oriental culture) to Chondo Kyo (Heavenly Way religion) in 1905.**

**The diagram represents his Indomitable Spirit, displayed while dedicating himself to the prosperity of his nation.**

One of the requirements of the disciplinary martial art of Taekwon Do is a ‘pattern’. A pattern is a series of movements performed in combinations and sequences. These movements represent offensive and defensive techniques which, when displayed, show a student’s mental and physical ability. It is also part of an assessment and evaluation process used for competition and grading purposes. The founder of Taekwon Do, General Choi Hong Hi, states that there are a total of 24 ‘patterns’. The reasons for the 24 patterns are – *The life of a human being, perhaps 100 years, can be considered as a day when compared with eternity. Therefore, we mortals are no more than simple travellers who pass by the eternal years of an eon in a day. It is evident that no one can live more than a limited amount of time. Nevertheless, most people foolishly enslave themselves to materialism as if they could live for thousands of years. And some people strive to bequeath a good spiritual legacy for coming generations, in this way gaining immortality. Obviously, the spirit is perpetual while material is not. Therefore, what we can do to leave behind something for the welfare of mankind is, perhaps, the most important thing in our lives. Here I leave Taekwon-Do for mankind as a trace of man of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. The 24 patterns represent 24 hours, one day, or all my life.*

Accordingly each pattern symbolises a prominent person, event or philosophical idea, and the diagrammatic symbol of each pattern symbolises either heroic figures in Korean history or instances relating to historical events. General Choi Hong Hi’s selections were based on significant moral and ethical events that occurred in Korean history. Hence, these historic parallels became reference points for his teachings and philosophies. I think that his quote “the welfare of mankind is, perhaps, the most important thing in our lives”, is a challenge not just to exist, but to embody all that is ethical, moral and spiritual, not just for a moment, but for eternity. I chose the pattern ‘**Eui-Am**’ as an essay topic because I wanted to further my interest

in this area and I thought that it would be interesting to learn more about who the pattern was named after, and why he had a profound effect on General Choi Hong Hi.

### **Introduction.**

This essay explores the establishment and history of the Donghak resistant movement and the impact it had on Koreans during the 1800s-1900s. The movement's main objective was to restore equality and social and political stability to a country overwhelmed by outside influences and internal injustices. In 1897 Korean nationalist, Son Byong-Hi, was ordained as the new leader of Donghak. While entrenched in Donghak principles, Son Byong-Hi revised the doctrine to include elements drawn from various theologies, nationalism and ancient Korean belief systems. Donghak's pursuit of freedom and independence was outweighed only by their spiritual leaderships. The nature of these protestations exemplified the humanitarian ways in which these struggles were undertaken, along with the mental and physical discipline displayed. It is evident that these historic events formed the foundation on which General Choi Hong Hi based the pattern "**Eui Am**".

### **The Birth of the Donghak Movement**

Choe Je-Ue was born the son of a concubine in early 1824 and was raised in Gyeongju, a province in Southern Korea. Gyeongju was the capital of the Unified Silla Dynasty where formerly Silla's Buddhists influenced religion, art, philosophy and shaped East Asian Culture. Choe farmed his family estate while studying Confucian classics. He learned how former ruling dynasties had impacted negatively on Koreans, but more specifically farmers. Joseon rulers imposed unpaid labour and exploited illiterate farmers by acquiring ancestral land for little or no cost.

At this time foreign and internal policies were beginning to shape Korean culture to their detriment. The Chinese-English opium wars of the 1830s-1860s along with the introduction of Christianity by the British and French on foreign countries did nothing to restore any faith in nationalism. Choe asserted that social and government reforms were required to halt the assimilation of foreign influences.

Along with supporting a non immigration policy, a country free of outside interventions and equal opportunities for everyone, Choe believed that the introduction of democracy and human rights would prevent the systematic oppression by ruling parties. He was also aware that

current rule exceeded everything he could achieve on his own. However, these barriers did not deter him from challenging a system that negated everything he believed in.

Hence, in 1860 the Donghak movement was established to counter the policies that exploited and denigrated Korean farmers. This was not a conventional 'resistant movement'. Donghak ideologies were also centred on the ancient Korean belief of Haneullim (God of the Ultimate Energy), also known as The Lord of Heaven. Along with ideas based on Confucianism, Buddhism and Songyo (also known as the teachings of Sillas Hwa Rang), Choe created a following which adhered to traditional core values. The key principle of Donghak was 'equality for all', but just as importantl, 'respect everything and everyone'. For Choe, conforming to a life free of immorality and corruption was critical to upholding equality, democracy and nationalism.

Choe's activism gained support from peasant farmers disillusioned by the materialistic exploits and immoral behaviours of those in power. The soaring rate of poverty and disproportionate distribution of government resources highlighted a need to challenge those in power. Having suffered years of denigration, the Donghak Peasant movement rebelled against corrupt government officials during 1812. In adherence to the movement's core values, the nature of this rebellion was based on non-aggression, peaceful protest, and not armed warfare. However, although this approach upheld Choe's religious doctrine 'The Way', a successful outcome seemed far reaching. Nevertheless Choe's prolonged endorsement of cultivating a 'peaceful world' based on spiritual guidance, justice, humanity, wisdom and faith continued.

Joseon Dynasty rulers limited resources to farmers while alienating others from land. Farmers were working more for less as corrupt officials increased taxes. Along with a regime that ignored the plight of the destitute, droughts and floods also contributed to the demise of farmers. However, paradoxically, government policies did more to promote Choe's movement as their influence strengthened. Followers also included progressive yangbans, scholars and pro-nationalists. Additionally, Donghak ideologies were incorporated into poems, songs and literature and disseminated widely. This also created a form of pseudo-nationalism among farmers which increased Donghak membership further.

Regardless of Choe's spiritual and intellectual leadership, he was feared by government officials who believed the movement would unveil corruption and lead to further investigations

against the ruling parties. Officials also heard that Choe prophesised that the Josean Dynasty era would end after a 500 year reign. An insight that did occur with Japan's occupation of Korea in 1910. He was imprisoned, but later released after hundreds of his followers petitioned on his behalf.

As a result of Choe's increasing popularity corrupt officials falsely accused him of plotting to overthrow Le Ha Eung, Daewongun, a key political figure of the Josean Dynasty. The claim that Choe was practising Christianity was also supported by his accusers. However, contrary to reports that Choe was nothing more than a harmless spiritual leader, he was charged with treason and executed in 1864 by government officials.

Following his execution Choe Si-hyeong, Choe's distant relative, became the 2<sup>nd</sup> leader of the movement. He vowed to restore commitment to Donghak and ensure the retention of Choe's fundamental principles in line with the spiritual nature of the movement. In honour of his predecessor, Choe Si-hyeong published the Donghak Bible which comprised Choe's writings, poems, proverbs and proclamations of faith, reverence, honesty and virtue. This literary compilation was distributed throughout Korea after his death. For many Koreans Choe's practices and teachings became 'his legacy' and his martyrdom continues to be acknowledged in Korean history.

### **Son Byong-Hi (8 April, 1861 – 19 May, 1922)**

The pervasive nature of the Donghak movement clearly influenced the political leanings of Son Byong-Hi, an activist and nationalist of Cheongju, the capital city of Chungcheongbuk-do in South Korea. His readings and beliefs culminated in a study of Donghak at the age of 23 years old, and later he became a student of Choe Si-hyeong, the leader of the Donghak movement. Intense training included reading and reciting the Donghak 'Incantation of Twenty-One Letters', thirty thousand times a day. Combined with recitations, membership also included participating in rituals at certain times, locations and days. 'Pure Water' was the practice of evening prayer sessions. 'Service Day' was a formal ritual carried out on Sundays. 'Sincerity Rice' was a practice where rice was cooked daily and the uncooked rice was collected and presented in church once a month, Son's political awareness was now overtaken by a strong desire to enculturate himself in this new found doctrine. "In a place where there is a will, there is a road", is a Korean proverb that personified Son Byong-Hi's prevailing dedication.

Son Byong-Hi became increasingly concerned about the ongoing state of foreign intervention and occupation along with Josean government reforms. The French, Russians and Americans traded with Korea through the Treaty of Ganghwa in 1876. As a result, the Qing Dynasty's authority over the Josean Dynasty diminished, opening a corridor for European and Western influences. A call for Korean independence resonated throughout the country as resistance groups demonstrated to restore Korean nationalism and traditions.

Son Byong-Hi's devotion and perseverance was rewarded with Choe Si-hyeong appointing him as one of the commanders of the Donghak Peasant Revolution in 1894. However, their peaceful resistance did not match Japan's powerful armoury. In 1894 pro-Japanese Koreans joined Japanese forces and defeated the movement, albeit only temporarily. Realising the outcome of his fate, Choe Si-hyeong ordained Son Byong-Hi as the 3<sup>rd</sup> Leader of Donghak in December 1897. After living as a fugitive Choe Si-hyeong was captured and executed by government forces in 1898.

Following Choe Si-hyeong's execution, Son Byong-Hi was forced to reside in Japan in political exile. He returned to Korea in 1904 following the Russo-Japanese war, and established 'Jinbohoe', the 'progressive society'. This was also a reformist movement working for equality and social improvement, but more importantly, independence. Known as the Gapjin reform movement, they collaborated with Donghak and demonstrated nationwide. This continued throughout 1904, with Donghak members shortening their hair and wearing simple modest clothing in protest to years of oppression. Adhering to Donghak principles was paramount in ensuring the integrity of the movement. Social improvement through peaceful negotiation and non-aggression was practised with intent. However, this stance only served the Japanese government who slaughtered many members during 1905.

To legitimise Donghak under the Japanese regime, Son Byong-Hi revised Donghak and officially changed the name to Chondo Kyo, which translated means 'religion of the Heavenly Way'. He was 45 years old at the time and he ensured that Chondo Kyo continued to espouse Choe Je-Ue's teachings. While the new movement retained philosophies grounded in ancestral Shamanism, Buddhism and Confucianism, it also included Christianity. This multi-theological approach was broadly accepted by the masses. From a holistic perspective, the concepts embodied a high moral and social conscience. The interaction of 'self' with 'others' was a measure of one's humanity. Being of noble mind and of high moral conscience was likened to

‘wellness of the soul’. Therefore the parallels between these ideals and an ‘earthly paradise’ were inextricably linked according to followers of Chondo Kyo.

From the outset this new religious based movement created a nationwide swell of enthusiasm and support. An underground anti-Japanese support network endured throughout 1918, as many regarded Japan’s occupation of Korea as a loss of their traditional customs and rights. This was the catalyst that led to a group of 33 representatives, including Christian, Buddhists and Chondo Kyo, to prepare a declaration of independence for Korea. Son Byong-Hi was one of the 15 Chondo Kyo members present.

In March 1919 the independence group merged at Pagoda Park in Seoul for the public mourning of Emperor Gojong. The Declaration of Independence was read, creating a nationwide mobilisation of demonstrating members. This unprecedented reaction was known as the ‘March 1 Movement’, or the ‘Samil Movement’. Japan’s superior weaponry outscaled the movement’s non-violent resistance and despite peaceful rallying, many lost their lives while others were wounded and, or imprisoned by the Japanese police and army. Although Son Byong-Hi was imprisoned, he was released a few years later. He died at the age of 61 at his home in Sangchunwon in 1922 as a result of a long term illness.

## **Conclusion**

It is clear that Son Byong-Hi’s displays of national support and spiritual guidance was noted by General Choi Hong Hi. He nurtured and cultivated the mind and body through unity and dedication. He exhibited excellence and achievement while adhering to the fundamental principles of Donghak and Chondo Kyo. His selflessness and devotion to his country exemplified the legacy he left for others, thus he represented what General Choi Hong Hi termed ‘a good spiritual legacy’. Like other renowned Koreans, their histories and doctrines formed the foundations on which General Choi Hong Hi based many of his terminologies, teachings and philosophies.

I believe that the ancient Korean proverb “Through old things, we learn new things”, epitomises the value of looking back, when going forward.

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