Some Issues in the Study of the 1894 Peasant War

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1. The Development of the Peasant War

To facilitate understanding, the development of the 1894 Peasant War\(^1\) will be given in brief summary.

In 19th-century Korea, peasant rebellions broke out continuously due to corruption of the ruling class, passivity of intellectuals, and increase in the already deep-rooted socioeconomic problems. These rebellions had their geographical centers in kun (provincial administrative unit), which in fact shared the common grievance of unjust taxes and levies. The aim, therefore, of such rebellions lay in the administrative reform of kun by the populace. It was impossible to bring about anti-feudal\(^2\) movements to a national scale.

The organization of a religion called Tonghak played a key role in expanding the

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1. The 1894 Peasant War is variously called "Tonghak Rebellion," "Tonghak Peasant War," "1894 Peasant War," "Tonghak Peasant Revolution," etc. The basis of such variety lies in the relationship between Tonghak and the Peasant War and in the way revolution and war are to be viewed. In this thesis, the term "1894 Peasant War" will be used

2. There has been a great deal of controversy over the feudality of Korea during the Middle Ages. It has been the general tendency to accept the term "feudal" in its broadest meaning with respect to Korean history. Korean society during the Middle Ages is characterized by the combination of a centralized power structure and a land-based economic system, whether such socioeconomic structure may be termed "feudal," however, is open to question. In this thesis, "anti-feudal" may be construed as signifying "criticism against the ancien régime"
peasants' rebellion from a local kun level to a full-blown, national scale. Tonghak, a
religion newly founded in 1860 with a basis on Confucianism, Buddhism, and
Taoism, maintained a critical stance toward “Sŏhak”, or Christianity. It was with the
rapid spread of the faith in the late 19th century that the Tonghak order finally came
to possess a resistance organization beyond the level of kun.

At first, both Tonghak and Christianity were persecuted as heresy by the
government. While Christianity was at last granted right to proselytization in 1886
with the signing of the Korean-French Treaty, Tonghak, however, was still banned.
Thus believers of Tonghak, in the autumn of 1892, initiated a movement to win
approval for their faith and to end all persecution. But the question as to which
direction the movement should take eventually caused a rift among the believers.
While the Tonghak order (Northern Assembly) per se opted for the acquisition of
the freedom and right to propagate their faith and thereby remained on a more or
less religious level, the Southern Assembly (the progressive of Tonghak) insisted on
outright resistance against both socioeconomic injustices and foreign invasions. The
nationwide uprising of 1894, with Southern Assembly forces in the lead, resulted in
the Peasant War.

To turn one's view outwardly, Korea had been faced with the national crisis of
encroaching foreign capitalism ever since the opening up of the country in 1876.
Korea had concluded treaties not only with Japan but also with the Western powers
such as the United States, France, Great Britain, Germany, and Russia, thereby
opening her doors to them. During 1876 - 1894, the scramble for domination over
Korea between China and Japan was escalating. In addition, Great Britain cannot
but be keenly interested in Korean affairs, what with her fear of Russia's southward
expansion. Overall, the stakes of Western imperialism were also being played out in
Korea.

The 1894 Peasant War unfolded amidst such internal and external turmoil, in the
following four stages: Kobu Uprising (January 11-March 3, 1894, in lunar
calendar); First War (March 20-May 8); Chikangso (the local peasant
government) Period (May 8-early October); Second War (mid-September-
December).

Kobu Uprising was a brush-fire local resistance demanding a reform in the
management of local taxes and levies, headed by Ch'ŏn Pong-chun, an Assembly
Leader of Tonghak as well as the greatest leader in the Peasant War.

The government's ruthless suppression of Kobu Uprising only aggravated the
already outraged peasants. Leaders of the Southern Assembly, i.e., Ch'ŏn Pong-chun,
Kim Kae-nam, and Son Hwa-chung, appealed to the peasants of Chŏlla province to
rise in arms. The peasants, heeding this call to battle, rose in each kun and conquered Fort Chŏnju, the seat of the Chŏlla provincial government. This First War of the Peasant War came to a conclusion on May 8 with the signing of a peace treaty between government forces and the peasant army, under a heightened sense of national crisis brought on by the landing of both Chinese and Japanese armies.

After Chŏnju Truce, the peasant army established Chipkangso throughout Chŏlla province and assumed the rule of regional government. The peasant army attempted to implement anti-feudal reforms, which in fact were greatly successful in some districts.

The situation took a sudden turn for the worse when the Japanese army seized Kyŏngbok Palace on June 21. They ousted the Min faction and installed the pro-Japanese Progressives so as to implement internal reforms favorable to Japan. Moreover, on June 23, they incited the First Sino-Japanese War by attacking the Chinese army and won the Battle of P'yŏngyang. Faced with such pending national crisis, the peasant army prepared for another war. This time, however, they rose against the Japanese, thus expanding their aim to that of struggle against foreign aggression. The peasant army, worn out by many difficult and disadvantageous combats against the combined forces of government and Japanese armies, steadily declined in morale and competence after the Battle of Kongju in Ch'ungch'ŏng province, finally to lose out all over Chŏlla province, the Tonghak foothold. The Second War naturally came to an end with the arrest and execution of many Tonghak leaders, including Chŏn Pong-ch'ún.

2. Some Issues in the Study of the Peasant War

With the centennial of the 1894 Peasant War approaching, there has recently been a series of activities and events in commemoration of it. Numerous research institutes and historical societies are planning symposia and publishing collections of theses on the Peasant War. Painters and sculptors are portraying the war through a variety of media. The government itself is supporting the dedication of statues of the historical figures involved, and is designating related sites as monuments and memorial halls. Such a flurry of activities is the evidence of today's historical consciousness paying tribute to the revolutionary effort of the populace a hundred years ago.

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3 For accumulated data on the 1894 Peasant War, the following theses have been referred to: Chŏng Ch'ang-ryŏl, "Tonghak and the Tonghak Rebellion," *An Introduction to Research on Koreanology*, Association for Korean Historical Studies, ed., Chishaksanôpsa, 1981; Han Woo-kôn, "Tonghak and the Tonghak Rebellion," *An Introduction to Koreanology*, Korean
years ago to overcome feudal dysfunctions and national crises.

Researches on the 1894 Peasant War hitherto have displayed great accomplishment, dealing with a variety of subjects including the background, development, structure, ideology, and goals of the Peasant War. It is in this field of the Peasant War and Tonghak that the most noteworthy researches have been conducted.

Studies on the Peasant War began during the colonial era. Japanese scholars approached the Peasant War not within the context of an internal development in Korean history, but within the framework of East Asian foreign relations, specifically the competition between China and Japan. This is to say that the meaning of the "Tonghak Insurrection" and how it led to the Sino-Japanese War were studied under the premise of Korea as a future colony. Such standpoint is based on the colonial historical viewpoint, thinly disguised as a history of diplomacy.

After liberation from Japan, the division of Korea naturally resulted in two separate strains of studies on the Peasant War. In North Korea, the Peasant War was

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National Academy, 1983

Ch'ŏng Ch'ang-ryŏl, "1894 Peasant War and Reform," An Introduction to Korean History Research, second edition, Association for Korean Historical Studies, Ch'üssa-ya, 1987


Ko Tong-hwan, "Reform Movements from the Bottom Up Since the Opening of Korea," A History of National Liberation Movements, Yŏksa-pip'ŏngsa, 1990


Pak Maeng-su, "The Direction and Tasks of Researches on Tonghak and the Tonghak Peasant War," Collection of Theses in Commemoration of the 60th Birthday of Professor Pak Sŏng-su Perspectives on Korean Independence Movements, 1991

* For a list of theses and publications on Tonghak and the Peasant War, refer to


Pak Maeng-su, "A List of Theses on Tonghak Ideology and the Tonghak Peasant Revolution by Subject" in From Hwang'o Hill to Wugu'm Hill, Tonghak Peasant Revolution Commemoration Society, ed., Tongnamp'ung, 1994

viewed from the standpoint of F. Engels’ theory on German peasant war, i.e.,
religion as a mere outer skin of political movements. Thus Tonghak’s ideological
and organizational roles, rather than the religious one, were stressed at first. Later
studies, however, bypassed Tonghak’s religiosity altogether, simply concentrat-
ing on the independence or self-reliance of the peasantry.

In South Korea, in-depth studies on the Peasant War began after late 1950’s A
positivist approach, with a focus on the verification of facts and data on the war,
was prevalent. In comparison with the failure of Northern academia to produce
concrete studies after coming to a unanimous conclusion on the subject in the late
1950’s, and with Japanese circles, which had not advanced much beyond their view
of history since the 1950’s, studies in the South have been remarkable. Researches
conducted since the 1980’s have especially displayed dynamic growth in both
quantity and quality. Moreover, with the centennial of the Peasant War approaching,
there has been a veritable deluge of studies on the war. Researches on the war have
grown in both number and scholarship since the 1980’s, and the accumulated
material is facing a transitional period during which new directions for Peasant War
studies must be sought out.

Discussion of the fruits of studies on the war will thus be concluded with an
overview of the history of Peasant War studies up to now. In this article, recent
directions and major issues of post-1980’s Peasant War studies will be inquired into
The major issues are: the relationship between the Peasant War and Tonghak; the
driving force behind the war; and the relationship between 1894 Peasant War and
1894 Reform.

1) The Relationship Between the Peasant War and Tonghak

There have been many arguments over whether or not the Peasant War and
Tonghak are related, ever since the days of the war itself. The question is raised not
so much from the fact-finding level of what role the Tonghak faith played in the
Peasant War, but rather from the necessity to define and pinpoint the subject of the
reforms, which concerns and affects us deeply to this day. Such inquiry may be said
to have originated from the unique milieu of modern Korean society, which has
gone through a national division.

There are three main theories concerning the relationship between the Peasant
War and Tonghak: namely, ‘the theory of Tonghak movement’; ‘the theory of the
Peasant War’; and ‘the theory of collaboration of the two’. The first, the theory of
Tonghak movement, stipulates everything about Tonghak—its ideology,
organization, and membership—as the driving force behind the Peasant War.
second theory has two offshoots: one sees the Peasant War as the culmination of people's movement for changes and reforms which had continued since the early 19th century; the other, drawing a clear line between the ideology, organization, and membership of the Northern and Southern Assemblies, sets the latter as the motivator of social change. The last, the theory of collaboration, stipulates that Tonghak, by using its ideology, organization, and membership, internally collaborated with the Peasant War. According to one's standpoint, the judgment on the ideology, organization, and membership of the Peasant War changes. The characteristics of the arguments surrounding this question, with recent studies, will henceforth be looked into.

With respect to the relationship between the Peasant War and Tonghak, the most strongly endorsed theory in recent years has been the theory of the Peasant War. The fruit of a combined research project in commemoration of the centennial of the 1894 Peasant War has been published as Collected Essays in Commemoration of the Centennial of the 1894 Peasant War, in three volumes. In these studies, the use of the term "1894 Peasant War" emphasizes the theory of the Peasant War above all, by weakening the role of Tonghak. The conclusion of these works may be summarized by the following. The Peasant War, in the tradition of peasant uprisings which had continued since the early 19th century, broke out in order to overcome both worsening feudal conditions and national crises. The driving force behind the Peasant War was the people, who had become aware of the sociopolitical contradictions of the times and sought to change them. The Peasant War therefore is characterized historically by its double aspects, i.e., anti-feudalism and anti-imperialism.

In regard to the question of the relationship between Tonghak and the Peasant War, the above volumes play down to a significant degree the role of Tonghak in the Peasant War, other than recognizing the role of Tonghak organization and the Southern Assembly. Overall, the focus is on the popular movement which rose against both the feudal system of Chosŏn Dynasty Korea and the tide of Japanese imperialism. From this, one can draw the conclusion that the researchers hold in high esteem the people, including the peasantry, as the initiator of change in

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4 The overall editorial board is The Organization of Korean Historians Society and the publisher is Yŏksa-p'yo'ngsa. The three volumes are:

- Studies of the 1894 Peasant War I: The Socioeconomic Background of the Peasant War (1991)
- Studies of the 1894 Peasant War III: The Political and Ideological Background of the Peasant War (1993).

Vol. IV, dealing with the development of the Peasant War, and Vol. V, dealing with the historical characteristics of the war, are soon to be published.
overcoming the problems of modern Korean society which has experienced colonialism, national division, and military dictatorship. 

Although the theory of the Peasant War is dominant, the theory of Tonghak movement has been advanced from a new perspective also. With the demise of Eastern European Communist Bloc in 1989 and the ensuing search for a new ideological base, some have tried to prove that Tonghak ideology was one of the bases of the independence and uniqueness of Korean society and thoughts. This standpoint, criticizing past studies as being concerned solely with social history or social movements and dealing only with the question of whether Tonghak thoughts could work as the ideology of the Peasant War, claims that Tonghak ideology must be studied with respect to philosophical-ideological history, regardless of the Peasant War. According to this standpoint, the significance of Tonghak ideology is that it developed in the ideological vacuum of the late 19th century and rapidly spread among the populace, thereby presenting them with an alternative ideology. This standpoint esteems Tonghak thoughts as the leading ideology for the peasantry and as the revolutionary ideology leading Korea to a modern society.

After looking into both two theories and their offshoots, it becomes apparent that arguments over the ideological base of modern Korean society find their way even into discussions on the Peasant War of a hundred years ago. The theory of the Peasant War views the people, including the peasantry, as the motivators of social change and their consciousness of overcoming feudal problems and imperialistic threats as the ideology of revolution; the theory of Tonghak movement, on the other hand, sees Tonghak leaders and believers as the motivators of change and Tonghak as the ideology enabling such drive for reform.

For the theory of collaboration, the most representative stance is that of presupposing a cooperation between Tonghak and the Peasant War. According to this stance, Tonghak, by collaborating with peasant uprisings, provided them with

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5 The following are individual studies adhering to the theory of the Peasant War for a study which stresses the separatedness of Tonghak and the Peasant War, refer to

Woo Yun, Chŏn Pong-chun and the 1894 Peasant War, Ch'angjikwapi'ŭngsa, 1993 For studies which stress the role of the Southern Assembly, refer to


6 Yongryun Social and Philosophical Research Institute, “Reassessing the Significance and Position of Tonghak in Korean Intellectual History,” (1) and (2), Social Philosophy, Vols I and II (Winter 1993 and Spring 1994 issues), Saheoch'olhaksa

7 Shin Yong-ha, A Study of Tonghak and the 1894 Peasant War, Iljogak, 1993
the organization and egalitarian ideology of Tonghak. Thus the Peasant War was in fact a combination of the peasantry with the ideology, organization, and religious faith of Tonghak.

Having looked into all the arguments surrounding the relationship between Tonghak and the Peasant War, this writer, while adhering to the theory of the Peasant War, would like to raise the following questions. First, arguments hitherto have focused on the Peasant War per se, i.e., the period from 1892, when the Movement for the Exoneration of the First Patriarch began, to 1894, when the war ended. Discussions of the relationship between Tonghak and the Peasant War, unlike questions on the ideology, subject, organization, and aims of the war, must not be limited to the war itself. The relationship between Tonghak and the Peasant War should be studied in three different periods: pre-Peasant War, Peasant War, and post-Peasant War periods. Secondly, the political lines of the Tonghak order itself and of the peasant took different courses. The relationship between the Peasant War and Tonghak thus may be explained by the history of Tonghak and of peasant movements respectively. Peasant movements developed after the early 19th century, with the gradual disintegration of the ruling order, socioeconomic changes, and exploitation of the masses through extortion of illegal taxes and levies in the background. Tonghak movement, on the other hand, while also sharing feudal problems and foreign intrusions, fundamentally remained on a religious level. The ideology of the Tonghak maintained a two-sided stance toward the society, one mystical, the other revolutionary. To use Tonghak terminology, the former aspect may be expressed as “Come into Being from Nothing” and the latter, “Sustain the Nation and Provide for the People.” The Peasant War belongs mainly within the realm of the history of peasant movements, with the Southern Assembly’s movement for social change at its heart.

2) The main body of the Peasant War

Any discussion of the main body of the Peasant War may be said to stem from the driving force of social change in modern Korea of today. Herein is reflected a view of reality which stipulates democratization and reunification as the supreme agenda for Korean society in interpreting the situation of a hundred years ago, when the immediate task of the Korean society was modernization and the maintenance of national independence.

The main body of the Peasant War may be classified into leaders, mainstream group, and participating group. The leaders include Chŏn Pong-chun, Son Hwa-chung, and Kim Kae-nam. “Mainstream” would signify those in an executive
capacity who, while assisting the leaders, actually led the Peasant War. "Participating" denotes those who, under the mainstream group's direction, took part in the war.

What then poses a problem first is the relationship between these leaders, mainstream group, and participating group and the Tonghak order. The evaluation of these relationships will differ according to how one sees the overall relationship between Tonghak and the Peasant War. Emphasizing close relationship with Tonghak, the leaders, mainstream group, and participating group may be viewed as the leaders of Tonghak order, leaders of Assembly, and believers respectively. However, if the role of Tonghak is downplayed, then the main question would be: on what socioeconomic level did each group stand? The different classes could be categorized thus, when material wealth is the measure: landowners, affluent peasants, medium peasants, indigent peasants, and day laborers. When inherited social status is the measure: yangban (ruling class), chung'in (middle class), yisō (petty clerks), p'yŏngmin (ordinary people), and nobi (serfs).

What is called into question here is the social status or class to which the leaders and the mainstream group of the Peasant War belong. In studies so far, they have been classified as fallen yangban, affluent peasants, or indigent peasants.

In the theory of fallen yangban, the leaders of the Peasant War are seen as yangban who for some reason have fallen out from their class. According to this theory, they were practically the same as p'yŏngmin in social status, had no opportunity to climb back up the social ladder even if they were to adhere to Confucianism, and were economically stranded; hence, their negative stance toward the establishment and the ruling ideology resulted in the leading role in the Peasant War.8 The theory of affluent peasants, on the other hand, claims that affluent peasants, out of their desire to join the bourgeoisie, came to lead the Peasant War to bring about modernization from the bottom up.9 The theory of indigent peasants stipulates that the Peasant War was led by indigent peasants, whose social status was that of tenured peasants and whose social class included both p'yŏngmin and nobi.10

8 Han Woo-kün, "Tonghak Leadership," Paeksan Hakpo, Vol 8, Paeksan Society, 1970
On the subject of the Peasant War, the theory of indigent peasants has been dominant. With recent findings shedding more light on the social status of the Peasant War leaders, some of them have been shown to be fallen yangban, affluent peasant, and intellectuals as well. However the driving force of the Peasant War should not be determined only from the social class of a few of its leaders. In determining the nature of the driving force of the Peasant War, not only is a comprehensive evaluation of the social status of all of the leaders, but whether or not they adequately reflected the views and wishes of the participating groups should be taken into account as well.

While fallen yangban are to be found in no small numbers within the Peasant War leadership, it is difficult to say that they played a central role in the War. Some of them are even suspected of having been rising p’yŏngmin rather than fallen yangban. All in all, fallen yangban more often joined the anti-peasant Fortress of the People Army rather than joining the peasants.

Although affluent people played a key role in directing the kun scale peasant uprisings in the 19th century, they were vacillatory in the case of the 1894 Peasant War. This was because rapidly emerging groups with a bourgeois bent, affluent peasants and merchants, had yet to acquire a sense of identity as an independent political group or a distinct social class. Thus, they were unsure of their standing in relation to the ruling feudal power before the opening up of Korea; and afterwards, to the imperialistic economic forces. For affluent peasants and merchants, the way to comprador capitalism was wide open. On the other hand, those who had accumulated wealth through increased productivity and innovation in production methods were in danger of economic ruin in the face of economic intrusion by foreign imperialists. The possibility of the affluent peasants leading social change, amidst feudal problems and national crises, therefore could not but be limited.

Rather, fallen yangban and the affluent peasants were more apt to join the top-down changes initiated by public officials, landowners, and merchants. Thus the indigents must be seen as the primary driving force of the Peasant War, despite some affluents who participated because of their near ruin in the face of feudal problems and foreign intrusions.

3) The Aims of the Peasant War

Recently, interest in the contents and direction of Chipkangso Reform and in their relationship with the top-down 1894 Reform initiated by the Progressives has increased greatly.11 Academic circles have for a long time tried to determine the

11 On evaluations of Chipkangso Reform, refer to the following studies
nature of Chipkangso, usually evaluated as a self-governing organ set up by the
peasantry. With the recent discovery of new data and facts, a better understanding
has become possible.\(^{12}\)

Evaluation of the nature and contents of Chipkangso Reform varies according to
which of the two prevailing theories one espouses: one, sees Chipkangso as the
independent product of the peasant army; and the other, sees it as a by-product of
the compromise between Chun Pong-chun and Cheolla Magistrate Kim Hak-chin.

The view which holds that Chipkangso was installed independently by the
peasant army\(^{13}\) esteems it as an administrative organ for and by the peasantry and as
a form of local government in the peasant revolution. According to this theory,
Chipkangso was the seat of power in the peasants’ revolution as well as an
administrative organ, and its function was not simple administration but
revolutionary rule by the peasantry. Through its activities, social changes were
effected. All in all, Chipkangso Reform are seen as revolutionary changes which
sought to overthrow the ancien régime and establish the new society wished for by
the peasantry.

The view which holds Chipkangso as the by-product of a compromise\(^{14}\) claims
that while Chun’s moderatist camp, with greater emphasis on foreign aggressions,
sought an alliance with the affluent peasants as well, the hardliner Kim Kae-nam’s
camp, with more emphasis on the feudal problems within Korean society, actually
saw the affluent peasant as objects to be overthrown and done away with. The

\(^{12}\) Chun Ch’ang-ryŏl, “An Evaluation of Chŏnu Truce and Chipkangso of the 1894 Peasant War in
Relation to the History of Academic Research,” Complete Collection of Researches on Korean History in
Commemoration of the Sixtieth Birthday of Professor Pak Yong-sŏk, 1992

\(^{13}\) Kim Yang-shik, “An Evaluation of Chipkangso During Chŏnu Truce Period in Relation to the History
of Academic Research,” Sahakchu (Historical Journal), Vol 26, Historical Society of Dankook University,
1993

\(^{14}\) Researches of Chipkangso hitherto have referred to History of Tonghak written by O Chu-yŏng, a
member of the Tonghak order who also participated in the Peasant War. Recent discovery, however, of
Ohagimusun by Hwang Hyŏn, a contemporary and a conservative Confucian and of Surok, a collection of
official documents from Muju, Cheolla province, has provided many new facts about the installation,
development, and the contents of the reforms initiated by Chipkangso

\(^{15}\) Chun Ch’ang-ryŏl, “A Study of the 1894 Peasant War With An Focus on the Ideology and
Actions of Chŏnu Pong-chun”, PhD Dissertation, Yonsei Univ, 1991

\(^{16}\) Chun Ch’ang-ryŏl, “A Comparison of the Tonghak Peasant War and the French Revolution,” The French
Revolution and Korea, Ilwol-sŏigak, 1991

\(^{17}\) Chun Ch’ang-ryŏl, “The Reform Ideology of the Peasant Army in the 1894 Peasant War,” Collection of
Theses in Koreanology, Vol 18, Kyemyŏng University Press, 1991
installation of and reforms implemented by Chipkangso therefore are viewed as the result of the moderatist Chŏn’s compromise with the moderate progressive Kim Hak-chin and also as an alliance with the affluent, in a bid to overcome the national crises of Japanese interference in internal politics and of the First Sino-Japanese War.

Also, some theories hold that Chipkangso, strategically established as a by-product of the compromise between Chŏn and Kim, the Chŏlla Magistrate, went only as far as cooperating with Kim in governing and maintaining public peace and order in Chŏlla province.15

Recent studies of Chipkangso have stressed the compromise between Chŏn and Kim Hak-chin on as well as Chŏn and Kim Kae-nam’s disagreement over its management, which may be judged as a development both logically and positively from prior studies. It is hard to deny, however, that they have somewhat downplayed the historical significance of Chipkangso. It is this writer’s belief that any evaluation of Chipkangso Reform should be taken in comparison with the accomplishments of pre-1894 kun level peasant uprisings. Also, the fundamental limitation of the bottom-up Peasant War in seizing power and implementing changes, as well as the Japanese-backed Progressives’ efforts at reform amidst the Sino-Japanese War should be taken into consideration.

The significance of Chipkangso Reform in explaining the modernization process of the Korean society should be evaluated on the wider sphere of politics and society. This poses in particular the question of how one is to view the relationship between Chipkangso Reform and 1894 Reform, both of which aimed at modernization. Because Chipkangso Reform was implemented at the same time that 1894 Reform was implemented by the Deliberative Council, a comprehensive look at the dramatic changes that took place through pre-modern and modern Korean society, with the Peasant War and 1894 Reform at the center, should not be omitted in explaining and interpreting the modernization of Korea.

In relation to the efforts set forth for overcoming feudal problems and foreign intrusions eventually to establish a modern nation-state, studies hitherto have taken an approach to the question of which sociopolitical group held legitimacy. Those in favor of the populace have naturally stressed the legitimacy of the Peasant War; those in favor of the gradual modernization implemented by the ruling class have


emphasized the legitimacy and necessity of 1894 Reform.

What is noticeable in recent studies, however, is the growing interest in whether the efforts from various levels of society to bring about modernization show the possibility of some kind of political alliance or another. What is the possibility of an alliance between the modernization plans of the conservative Min faction and those of the Peasant War? How did the peasant army and conservative Confucians go about solving their conflicts in the provinces? What program did 1894 Reform have, to stabilize the aftermath of the Peasant War and to proceed with social changes? What relationship exists between the bottom-up Chipkangso Reform and the top-down 1894 Reform instituted by the Progressives through the Deliberative Council?

On the relationship between Chipkangso Reform and 1894 Reform, the main stances may be summarized as follows: one which denies any interrelationship, on the level of national problems; one which sees a collaboration on the structural level of modernization in Korea; and one which sees a melding of the personages from the two camps at a certain point.

So far, the prevalent stance has been that which entirely severs Chipkangso Reform and 1894 Reform, putting the two in direct opposition. According to studies in this vein, with all the similarity in the contents of the two reforms, the peasant army and the Progressives could never collaborate. This is because while the former tried to circumvent foreign intruders by supporting the Grand Regent Yi Ha-ung, not only did the latter seize power with the help of the Japanese army but then went on to consolidate Japanese foothold in Korea through 1894 Reform. Summarily, this perspective is in favor of the Peasant War.

The stance which views Chipkangso Reform and 1894 Reform in relation to the structural modernization process of the Korean society clearly stipulates the theory of collaboration between peasants’ revolutionary movements and citizens’ reform movements. This perspective claims that without the revolutionary demise of the ancien régime through the bottom-up peasants’ movement of the Peasant War and the bold implementation of the Twelve-Point Reform Program, the Progressives could have neither seized power after the fall of the ancien régime nor instituted their-albeit legal-reforms. All in all, the citizens’ reforms undertaken by the Progressives were made possible by the results of the Peasant War and Chipkangso

17 Shun Yong-ha, ibid, 1993

Reform.

According to the perspective which claims that Chipkangso Reform and 1894 Reform culminated in a melding of personages from the two camps at a certain point, the officialization of Chipkangso Reform in fact signifies a coalition of the peasant army and the ruling Progressives. Of course, it cannot be denied that with later events—i.e., seeing the Progressive regime dwindle into a mere Japanese puppet and judging that any coalition with them would be useless in overcoming national crisis, the peasant army brought about the Second War—the cooperation or collaboration between landowner-oriented reforms and peasant-oriented reforms has proved a failure. However, what must be emphasized is the collaboration and eventual disengagement, both borne of the imminent national crisis, of the two political movements.

The view which, separating Chipkangso Reform and 1894 Reform, esteems highly the peasant army’s reform-mindedness sets to establish the people as the driving force behind social change in modern Korea. On the other hand, the view which connects Chipkangso Reform and 1894 Reform stems from an effort to seek out the potentials for modernization within the Korean society. According to the latter, the subject of socio-historical changes cannot be determined on an ether/or basis, but must be sought out in the possibility of a political alliance which can solve imminent problems, keeping also in mind the dynamics between the various sociopolitical groups before the grand task of the times. While the former stance focuses on the Peasant War itself, the latter views the war in the wider context of the sociopolitics of the era, which may help to expand the scope of studies on Peasant War. In reality, however, the Peasant War and 1894 Reform proceeded in completely opposite directions.

3. The Direction of Future Peasant War Studies

Thus ends an overview of recent trends as well as problems and accomplishments in studies on the 1894 Peasant War, with a focus on several themes: the relationship between Tonghak and the Peasant War, the subject of the war, and the nature of Chipkangso Reform and their relationship with 1894 Reform. Overall, underlying studies on the Peasant War of a hundred years ago is the question of how modernization and nationalism, key issues in modern Korean history, are to be

solved. That question of course is based on the premise of ongoing surge of studies within the academia, i.e., on-the-spot excursions, unearthing of data, recording of witnesses' statements, comparison of historical documents, and collaboration on research projects.

Finally, some kind of direction in interpreting Peasant War studies must be sought out. It must be pointed out above all that through discovery of more data, the historical facts concerning the Peasant War need to be further clarified. The recent discovery of battle sites, Tonghak-related religious orders, and documents long hidden deep inside libraries in connection with the centennial of the Peasant War, are all good news indeed. The data thus unearthed, however, had been recorded mostly by government officials, conservative Confucians, and landowners. Information straight from the mouths of the peasants is very much in need and would deepen our understanding of the war.

Also, a wider perspective which can survey and judge the historical significance of the Peasant War is needed. To attain such insight, scholars should not be buried in piles of petty details with a focus only on the war itself, but should evaluate the meaning of the war in a wider context, both temporally and spatially. Temporally, it is necessary not only to turn one's attention to the historical circumstances both before and after the Peasant War, but also to evaluate what significance the war can hold for us today. Also imperative is the task of deciding: how have the problems of anti-feudal modernization and anti-imperialistic maintenance of national independence, raised during the Peasant War, developed and altered since late Chosön dynasty up to now amidst historical changes, all the while existing? And how did the initiators of reforms, to overcome such problems, develop and go about putting their ideas to action? Spatially, studies focusing on what kind of political lines and actions were taken by the myriad of sociopolitical groups in Korea then—and not just the people under the direction of the peasantry—in trying to surmount the historical task of anti-feudalism and anti-imperialism and on the significance of the peasantry, must be expanded. Through such widened scope will it become possible to verify the nature of modernization process in Korea, even to come up with an answer to the contradictions and problems of the society today.

In relation to the problem of widening one's horizon spatially, it should be pointed out that an evaluation, in the field of comparative history, of what the Peasant War can signify in a global context is in order. Among recent publications were theses which, in commemoration of the bicentennial of the French Revolution, set out to compare and contrast the Peasant War and the French Revolution from a Korean viewpoint; they, however, failed at being in-depth comparative studies due
to an inadequate understanding of the French Revolution. By expanding research on the significance of the Peasant War with respect to world history, the 1894 Peasant War of Korea should become a part of universal History and contribute to the establishment of the history of peasant movements throughout the world.

GLOSSARY

Battle of P'yŏngyang 平壤戦闘
Chipkangso 执織所
Ch’oe Che-u 崔濟愚
Ch’oe Shi-hyŏng 崔時亨
Chŏlla province 全羅道
Ch’ŏn Pong-chun 全琫準
Chŏnju Truce 全州和約
ch’ŏnmin 賤民
chung’in 中人
“Come into Being from Nothing” 無為而化
Deliberative Council 軍國機務處
First War 第1次農民戦爭
First Sino-Japanese War 清日戰爭
Grand Regent 大院君
History of Tonghak 『東學史』
Hwang Hyŏn 黃玹
Kim Hak-chun 金鶴鎭
Kim Kae-nam 金開南
Kobu Uprising 古隣民亂
Korean-French Treaty 朝佛條約
kun 郡
Kyŏngbok Palace 景福宮
magistrate 監司
Min 喬氏
Movement for Exoneration of First Patriarch 教祖伸冤運動
nobi 奴婢
Northern Assembly 北接
O Chi-yŏng 吳知泳
Ohagimun 「梧下記聞」
Patriarch 教祖
Progressives 開化派
p’yŏngmin 平民
Surok 「隷錄」
Second War 第二次農民戦爭
Sŏhak/Christianity 西學
Southern Assembly 南接
“Sustain the State and Provide for the People” 輔國安民
Tonghak 東學
Twelve-Point Reform Program 改革12條
yangban 雨班
yisŏ 吏胥

19 Shin Yong-ha, “The 1894 Tonghak Peasant Revolution Movement with Respect to the French Revolution,” The French Revolution and Korea
Chŏng Ch’ang-ryŏl, “A Comparison of the Tonghak Peasant War and the French Revolution,” ibid