Technologies of Self in Contemporary Korea:
The Notion of *Suryŏn* (修練) in GiCheon (氣天)

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Abstract

GiCheon (氣天) is one of many contemporary South Korean mind-body disciplines focused on physical and moral self-cultivation. Utilizing a series of interviews with the adherents of this movement, this paper examines their individual experience and understanding of GiCheon praxis in the new social and political context, revealing the mechanisms of self-construction in modern and post-modern South Korea. Within my analysis of this empirical material, I focus on the notion of *Suryŏn* (修練, training), often referred to by the interviewees as central to GiCheon. The process and the goal of self-transformation, generally associated with *Suryŏn,* are further conceptualized within this paper through the framework of "technologies of self" provided by Michel Foucault.

Key words: GiCheon, *ki suryŏn,* technologies of self, mind-body, self-cultivation.

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The East Asian cultural realm is home to long traditions of psycho-physical practices commonly referred to as qigong and taijiquan, which have now spread globally. Extensive scholarship exists on Chinese psycho-physical practices.[1] However, similar phenomena in Korea have been studied very little in the English-speaking academic world; Don Baker has examined Korean internal alchemy, but primarily from a religious angle.[2]

In South Korean academia, Korean psycho-physical practices are examined within various frames of reference, usually being referred to as *ki suryŏn* (氣修練)—that is, training related to *ki*, or life energy. The word *suryŏn* (修練) consists of two characters: *su* (修), to cleanse, to wash, to master; and *ryŏn* (練), to master, to practice, to exercise. *Suryŏn* is most commonly used in the context of life-long dedication, whole-hearted acceptance, and constant diligent practice. *Ki suryŏn* adepts of various lineages use the term *suryŏn* often.

Studies on *ki suryŏn* in Korean academia tend to focus on meditation and the martial art Kouksundo (國仙道, *Kuksŏndo)*, addressing issues of quality of life,[3] Korean dance and philosophy,[4] sports, and modern history.[5] *Ki suryŏn* is also approached in the context of stress management,[6] nationalistic discourse, and globalisation.[7] There is also anthropological research on *ki suryŏn* based on interviews with practitioners.[8] This paper analyses the meaning of the term *suryŏn* for the adepts of GiCheon (*KiCh'ŏn)*, one of the contemporary South Korean practices.

As I start with categorizing GiCheon as *ki suryŏn* and as a psycho-physical practice, I have to clarify from where the term "psycho-physical" originates. It was coined by Russian sinologist Abayev: Psycho-physical training aims at cultivating, at "forming" a person toward a culturally defined "ideal".[9] This process includes different methods of the conscious, goal-oriented and systematic regulation of psychic processes, involving corporeal practices.[10] Abayev takes a comprehensive view of psycho-physical culture as a research subject of its own.[11]

Other scholars use different terminology in their study of East Asian psycho-physical practices. To name but a few, Thomas Ots calls them "techniques of health preservation and exercises prolonging life";[12] Catherine Despeux names similar practices martial arts, techniques prolonging life, and gymnastics.[13] Geoffrey Samuel and Jay Johnston refer to them as "subtle body

practices",[14] while Peter Van der Veer defines Chinese psycho-physical practices as qi (氣) exercises, connected to cosmological concepts, bodily health, concentration of the mind, meditation and quietness. While continuing to relate to these practices as *"disciplines of the self"*, Peter Van der Veer connects them to "techniques of the body" by Mauss[15] and "technologies of self" as articulated by Foucault.[16]

Starting with historical-philosophical analysis of such institutions as madness, illness, criminality, and sexuality, in his later years Foucault moved toward the questions of self-reflection, self-formation, and self-constitution. Foucault's concern with the technologies of self starts with his investigation into the practices he categorizes as *epimeleia heautou*, translated into English as "the care of the self." Technologies of self "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."[17] "Care of the self" is an important motif in an historical-philosophical discussion on subjectivity by Charles Taylor[18] and Pierre Hadot.[19]

Foucault notes that in ancient Greece self-transformation was connected to *gnothi seauton*, or "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 of "know yourself," often coupled with *epimeleia heautou* "taking care of yourself," was originally subordinated to "taking care of the self". It is in the context of "taking care of yourself" that you had to "know yourself".[20] You have to know yourself in order to transform yourself. In this context the object of knowledge is the old, "pre-transformed" self, modeled 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.[21]

Foucauldian technologies of self were taken up by the scholarly community and developed in various directions. Recent research, for example, includes James Laidlaw's examination of Foucault's ideas on 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 an 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.[22]

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 latter-day scholarly discussion on technologies of self connections are drawn with contemporary art. Among various self-altering techniques Foucault addresses, Paul Rabinow singles out the *melete*, or "meditation", drawing a parallel between Stoic technologies of self and the work of the artist Gerhard Richter.[23] In a similar vein, James Faubion compares a modern poet Constantine Cavafy to ancient Greek Cynics—Faubion focuses on the practice of *parrhesia*, or "speaking the truth", another technique of the self reviewed by Foucault.[24] 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,[25] though sometimes Foucault's contribution to this debate goes almost unnoticed.[26]

The notion of technologies of self is engaged and implemented by Sonia Ryang 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 the 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.[27] As to the analysis of the living psycho-physical practices of today, scholars such as David Palmer and Nashima Selim mention the relevance of Foucauldian technologies of self but do not themselves actively apply this concept in their analysis of qigong[28] or vipassana.[29]

The current paper approaches Korean *ki suryŏn* as a technologyt of self through the case study of a contemporary psycho-physical practice of GiCheon. For my research I conducted interviews with about 60 GiCheon trainees and trainers in South Korea from September 2010 to April 2011. Beside being based on participant observation, my work is a classic example 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 a group, and enjoying a full membership in a group, as recognized both by the researcher and the people of the group.[30] My case certainly answers these criteria, as for the last 15 years I have been a GiCheon practitioner and teacher. Besides the knowledge gained through the years of teaching and practice, 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 researches falls under the category of embodied knowledge and personal experience, reflexive ethnography, narrative ethnography, and self-ethnography. The questions of self-construction and self-narration are essential for autoethnography,[31] thus connecting the notion of autoethnography to the concept of technology of self. Writing the self—bringing the self into being and into awareness, shaping it through writing—is a technique of the self. But the contents of this written narrative bring in additional experiences and events the self has passed through. The contents of my narrative, the GiCheon experiences related by other practitioners I discuss in the present paper, connect directly to myself, and are in fact interpreted by me through the lens of my own GiCheon experience. It is a combination of ethnography and autoethnography, of interpretation and self-interpretation.

GiCheon appeared in South Korea in 1970s, and the followers of Lee Sang-wŏn, who formed the majority of my interviewed, regard it as a meditative discipline for self-healing. Investigating the experiences of the adepts and inquiring into their perceptions and conceptualizations of the practice are goals of my research. The interview material presented in this paper shows that the notion of *suryŏn* arises often in the narratives of the practitioners.[32] This made me ask myself: what meaning and content does the concept of *suryŏn* carry for the adherents? Why it is so important for them to emphasis that GiCheon is *suryŏn,* and not something else? In this paper I argue that the notion of *suryŏn* in the mind-hearts of the practitioners connects directly to the ideas of self-consciousness, self-understanding, and self-construction.

In my theoretical approach I also deploy the Confucian schematic *sŏngŭi jŏngsim susin ch'ega ch'iguk p'yŏngch'ŏnha* (誠意正心修身齊家治國平天下 "authenticize the intention, rectify the mind-heart, cultivate the body, love the family, govern the country, bring peace to the world")[33]. This diagrammatic strategy is repeatedly called for by GiCheon practitioners themselves when describing their experiences. In my application of this scheme we might portray the self as a live, busy, active movement. Like a ray of light, it bursts from the inside towards the outside, towards the world. Following Confucian terminology we could recount its progress as starting from intentionality and progressing towards emotion and cognition, further coming into actualized being on personal, familial, social, and cosmic planes.[34]

But active and cosmic as it is, the self is always already in the world.[35] The moment we look at the self, we see how it is conditioned to this fact. The social, for example is defined by the cosmic (at least in East-Asian cosmology), the social that moulds the familial and the personal; the ways of acting, thinking, feeling and intending are shaped by bodily, familial and social factors. This is the reality the actualized self finds itself in, seized by a dualism of forces and pulled in two opposite directions—one outward, from inside the self toward the outside world, another inward, from the outer world toward the inner self. In my analysis I relate 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 unintentional influence through which the self is formed, from the external towards the internal. My paper investigates the experiences of Korean *ki suryŏn* adepts utilizing this two vectors theory as a methodological tool. My two vectors theory is developed on the basis of Confucian self-cultivational schema and technologies of self elaborated by Michel Foucault.[36]

We can schematically portray the vectors as following:

the first vector:
intentional→emotional→cognitive→physical→familial→social→cosmic
the second vector:
cosmic→social→familial→physical→cognitive→emotional→ intentional

The definition of the "self" in this schema is relational. Depending on the context, the self can shrink and swell, sometimes limiting herself to the intention or the physical body only, other times stretching to embrace 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 cosmos.

Examination of those 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.[37]

This problem of building the self opens here on two analytical levels. When it comes to a timescale, the first level of analysis is the past. The question is the gaze toward the past: what is my "old" self? What pushed it into being? Who am I and how did I come to appear like that? This is an inquiry into the old, "pre-modified" self. The second analytical level sets forth the future. It looks toward the future: what do I want to develop into and whom am I becoming? This is an examination of a new, "potential" self, and her possible trajectories of progress. On a theoretical level these are two different questions, one relating to the past, the other querying the future. Yet, for the self and her relation to the world the past and the future intersect and merge in a present moment.

The analysis of empirical material below—the story of Cho Chin-sik—shows that realization of the quality of the old self and coming to life of a new self take place simultaneously, in the present moment. The moment I see the old self, it changes. This is the moment of self-knowledge turning into a moment of self-transformation. A different dynamic is revealed in the story of Yi, 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, the third adherent coming into view in the current paper, 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 the developing an ability to bear with dignity the burdens of life, and to successfully progress from the "old self" toward the "new self", strong and forbearing.

The narrations of Cho, Yi and Pak are related in the context of *suryŏn*. Many trainees assert that GiCheon practice should not be categorized as *undong* (運動 sports) but instead understood as *suryŏn* (self-cultivation). Labeling GiCheon as "sports" is regarded by most practitioners as diminishing the value of the practice, whereas defining GiCheon as *suryŏn* has far-reaching significance for its conceptual vitality. Adherents of GiCheon also use the words *suyang* (修養 personal improvement) and *suhaeng* (修行 asceticism) in a mode of meaning similar to *suryŏn*.[38]

After having briefly introduced the notions of *ki suryŏn*, psycho-physical practices, the conceptual framework of Technologies of Self as elaborated by Foucault, and the way Technologies of Self are approached in contemporary scholarship, the paper will proceed to investigate the technologies of self applied in real life. I have introduced the Confucian diagrammatic *sŏngŭi jŏngsim susin ch'ega ch'iguk p'yŏngch'ŏnha*, and my vectors theory. In order to more holistically explore these notions we will examine participants' self-conceptualization in practice, by examining empirical material gained through interviews. The self-transformational mechanisms, the tools in the work of self-modification which Foucault itemizes in his account on Technologies of Self, and which we can identify in the narrations of the GiCheon adepts presented in this article, include the role of the "other", the notion of "going back to the origin", and the notions of freedom, hardship and purification.[39] We will examine how these vehicles of self-transformation are accounted for and utilized by the trainees, both in their direct experience and in its articulation. Later, in the conclusion, we will investigate the inner connection of these instruments with each other.

Empirical material

In this section of the paper I address three ways GiCheon trainees interpret the concept of *suryŏn*. For the GiCheon instructor Cho Chin-sik *suryŏn* is a review of past experiences which

allows the realization of old behavioral patterns and appropriation of new strategies and criteria for action. A university student Yi Kyŏng-won talks about *suryŏn* as a self-chosen and self-directed study continued voluntarily by the subject. Pak Kyŏng-hae, the manager of a bank team believes that *suryŏn* is a process of effort through which the suffering of the body and mind-heart are made bearable.

Let us start with the extract from the interview with Cho Chin-sik:

> First of all, I started looking at my habits and observing the patterns [of my actions]. My GiCheon practice became a chance to observe the habits and patterns connected to my body that were wrong. I realized something. … For example, when I was training and other people were also practicing [behind me], those who came six month 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 Hŭi-sang[40] 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." When the teacher responded "no one can do that well in the beginning," I had a moment of sudden realization. My reason for coming here is not to demonstrate anything [to anyone], but to develop some space in my heart. At this point my previous habits became visible [to me].

Cho continues:

> [I tell them] "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 [of themselves]. 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 subjects for themselves. But they do not gain this knowledge by themselves. These people, similarly to me, grew up in a different environment [from mine] but have tendency similar to mine; there are many people like that. So, now [it is] not the idea of undong that categorizes GiCheon but suryŏn, suhaeng, that concept. … Through continuous suryŏn, I started observing myself and my way of thinking.

Cho Chin-sik describes a certain type of people within his narrative 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 GiCheon studio and perform exercises, their main goal (of which they are unconscious) is to show others that they "can do it well" and to impress others. Cho Chin-sik counts himself among these people. When he initially came to the GiCheon studio and started the practice, his goal, of which he was unaware, was to "do well". Cho Chin-sik describes one eventful moment of his practice

within the studio and which happened less than a month after he began his engagement with GiCheon. Cho had been training with co-practitioners who already had a six month training experience behind them. Performing an exercise, we was feeling unhappy and dissatisfied that he could not seem to "do that well". At that moment the instructor approached him and following a short conversation between the teacher and the student, the "self" of Cho became visible to him. This was a moment when his teacher, Kim Hŭi-sang, remarked "no one can do that well in the beginning." Cho became conscious of his old behavioral pattern and realized that impressing others with his practice had been his purpose. Cho Chin-sik 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." The reason for practice thus altered into what he termed "getting some space in my heart". We might also categorize this as Cho having "recollected" his "real" motivation as being practicing for himself, not for others. After turning into a teacher, when encountering students with similar issues to those he confronted in the past, Cho attempts to "reconstruct anew" 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 Hŭi-sang played for Cho. Cho stands in the place of Kim Hŭi-sang, while Cho's students come "in the shoes" of Cho himself: Cho Chin-sik wishes to deliver to them the office Kim Hŭi-sang had administered to him. The content of this role and this office is provoking a transformation of the students' own subjectivity and inducing them perform GiCheon positions for themselves rather than for others.

According to Cho, through GiCheon practice his "self" got 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. The important point here is the presence of the "other" and Foucault stresses that only through an active involvement of the "other" can the moment of self-alteration take place.[41] The other—a teacher, a friend, a co-practitioner—has an essential role to play in the transformation of the self. The "other" serves as a mirror, revealing to us our "self". As an example, for Cho Chin-sik old habits and behavioral patterns only became observable when his teacher had intervened and asked "what's the problem?" At that moment Cho realized that what he (Cho) wanted was to look well in the eyes of other people. Now similarly Cho Chin-sik plays the role of the "other" in his interaction with his own students.

This precisely is the meaning of *suryŏn* for Cho: "through … suryŏn I started observing myself and my way of thinking." *Suryŏn* is the ability to see yourself and through seeing yourself, through developing consciousness of your old habits and aspirations, to modify your "self".

The adherents perceive the practice of GiCheon as the act of "re-making" the self. In order to

re-make ourselves we have to go back, to the place where we started. A number of times in his discussion Foucault comes back to the idea of "going back to the origin" as an important element of self-care.⁴² Chronologically, this 'return to the source' can be interpreted also as going back in time. Many practitioners say that the training makes them re-call their childhood, for example this is how an image of a toddler is evoked by Cho Chin-sik: "When I was learning GiCheon steps, … I thought that it is like I was learning to walk as a youngster. Accordingly, when the teacher says "do this, do that", I become a young child." The "self" is an important concept within the narration of Cho. He uses Korean word *jagi* (자기) for the "self" and while he does not give definition of the self, the meaning of his narration is clear:

> The important thing is, that the "self" enters there. I chose it [the practice] 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 Chin-sik 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 as the free choice of the self is her essential characteristic.

The story of Cho Chin-sik relates to different selves on the vectors, but mainly to the cognitive 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 second vector in his life and revealing that he was motivated by the desire to "look good in the eyes of other people". Cho further contemplates whom he wants to be, and how to awaken similar realization in others. In his correlation 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 sense placing them within the boundaries of his responsibility. And his idea of 'freedom' relates of course to multiple selves on the first vector: freedom to desire, to think, to feel and to act.

The notion of freedom and free choice is another important moment in self-formation discussed by Foucault in his account on self-care in ancient Greece and Rome.⁴³ This free agency is also a

fundamental element of GiCheon practice for the university student Yi Kyŏng-won. Now let us turn to the extract 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. 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. Suryŏn is something I do by myself, of my own accord. … That process is hard, but I bear it, endure it and develop myself [through it] …. Not everything can be suryŏn, because the value I grant [to it] is different.

Yi defines *suryŏn* as a self-directed study, chosen and continued voluntarily. Not every study is *suryŏn*, but only those through which you endure hardship, generate self-development, and to which a high value is attached. The sense of subjectivity is characteristic of *suryŏn:* you engage in it because you want to, and not because others made you to. In the narrative of Cho Chin-sik the subjectivity was directed by the goal toward which the action flows: the motivation focused on impressing others changed into "getting some space in my heart." In case of Yi Kyŏng-won the subjectivity is defined by the manner of how the action is performed, freely or under pressure: "do I practice because I want to, or because others forced me to?" This sense of actualized subjectivity Yi developed through the practice is related to her new motivation: doing things because she wants.

> My thoughts changed so much. … before 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". ... 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 … [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 compete outside the school. I wanted … to go out with friends. … What I wanted to do, what I liked … I discovered things like the dream [of my future] …

The father of Yi Kyŏng-won compelled her and her sister Yi Ji-wŏn (aged thirteen and twelve at the outset) to practice GiCheon against their will. Every morning when he woke them up for the practice "it was a battle," says Yi Kyŏng-won. Ironically however, it was this involuntary training

imposed on the child that resulted in the unfolding of her subjectivity and free will. Years later Yi felt grateful to her father, with whom her relationship has also gradually improved.

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

Without deliberate consideration and without any self-making on the part of Yi in the past, her "old self" appears pretty much as "familial" and "social", formed along the second vector. Her intentional self was very weak—it seems she hardly had any intentions or desires at all, associating 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 and active.

For Yi an important element of *suryŏn* is hardship, the endurance of hardship and self-development that ensues following it. As GiCheon positions are hard and painful to sustain, this is not surprising and this aspect of GiCheon training is referred to by practically all the adherents and participants. Foucault stresses the aspect of hardship as central to the techniques of self-development,[44] and bearing hardship is often linked to cleansing and purification.[45] For bank team manager Pak Kyŏng-hae 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 sports.
>
> —What is suryŏn, in your opinion?
>
> —Suryŏn? … suryŏn is the cleansing of body and mind together. … Habits or wrong things are corrected …. And the mind also … through the process of "making it bright?" To suppress the bad heart and to make it secure … relaxed? … The ability to maintain the 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—suppressing the bad heart." She talks about "suppressing" and "managing the pain", describing her effort of and work on self-modification. The concepts of patience and endurance evoked by Pak are all contingent with the idea of "suppressing". To accept the hard, the painful, the uncomfortable, "to be able to handle your condition" and "cleanse the mind-body" are the outcome of her GiCheon training. Another extract from her interview supports that interpretation:

> … in family relationships… I learned to ch'amta (참다 bear with things[46]) better. Before that I would be fighting... But with the 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 could now maintain continuously what was important for me and my strength to go forward has increased.

In her interview Pak Kyŏng-hae also talks about the difficulty of maintaining a highly demanding career and simultaneously functioning as a mother and a wife in contemporary Korea. Her various tasks are not easy to fulfill 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. In the interview, she shows aspiration to develop a contemplative view on life, to learn acceptance and reconciliation. These aspirations and intentions lie along the first vector and relate to her mind-set, her intentions, her emotion and cognition, her body, and to her family relationships. But the hardships themselves 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 could now maintain continuously what was important for me and my strength to go forward has increased."

Conclusion

This paper suggests the analysis of Korean GiCheon and other similar East-Asian practices within a theoretical construction of two vectors. I propose to understand the Foucauldian conceptions of technology of self as the resistance of the first vector against the second vector, intentional subjective drive that attempts to counterbalance the external, unconsciously absorbed influences. But we have to bear in mind that according to the alternative understanding the function of the practice itself might sometimes be categorized as the second vector, and not the first. This is the case when we look at the change in motivation: the reason for practice or the intention behind practice—and sometimes the intentions behind other actions un-related to practice—are modified by the fact and reality of practice itself.

The narrative of Cho Chin-sik 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. Cho was pre-occupied with the gaze flowing along the second vector, from outside toward inside. The intervention of the teacher Kim Hŭi-sang changed that. After his short conversation with the teacher, Cho started "practicing for himself." The direction flowing from the external toward the internal changed and began to move from the internal towards the external. 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.[47] 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 second vector: old patterns were formed unconsciously but now they are visualized and intentionally modified.

Yi Kyŏng-won in the beginning was rather impacted upon by the realm of the external; her authoritative father and also her mother seemingly decided her life for her. Her own agency was thus rather weak. The father who brought her to GiCheon studio and the practice in which he made her engage were the catalysts that caused Yi 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 the internal aspect has the active impact.

Finally in the case of Pak Kyŏng-hae 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 strong agency, her internal self still seems to be troubled by life. She therefore utilizes GiCheon as a tool for developing further internal strength to cope with external conditions and uses it to advance the resistive capacity of her own agency against externalities.

Recent scholarship on self-transformation and self-knowledge is often rooted in textual analysis of ancient sources. This includes insights into the "personal", "bodily", "social", and "cosmic" selves and their co-relation in Judaism and Christianity[48] and analysis of emotional, cognitive and cosmic selves in Hebrew tradition.[49] Slave selves in ancient Rome,[50] student selves in late antiquity,[51] and a female self in Palestine in the second-first century BCE[52] also emerge out of the contemporary academic writings. The book edited in 2013 by Jörg Rüpke and Greg Woolf is wholly dedicated to the "religious dimensions of the self in the second century CE". The research on master-disciple roles in the systems of self-transformation and knowledge transmission,[53] on self-modification in Vedic sacrificial rituals,[54] on a transformative function of memory in Vedic tradition;[55] on self-transformation in Sanskrit texts[56] and in Sufism[57] relate primarily to distant past. Rare exceptions to this rule are the discussions on self-modification in Tibetan Buddhism[58] and Daoist inner alchemy (Kohn, Wang ed. 2009). These accounts include a contemporary perspective on self-transformation practices today, as does the study of Sonia

Ryang mentioned earlier in this paper.[59]

In a similar vein my own paper focuses on the present, engaging and analyzing the self-perfection performed by our contemporaries in South Korea. This research is based on real-live experiences, and is text-based only to the extent that the texts are the transcriptions of the interviews given in the years 2010–2011. The self presented here is the living self of today. There is no doubt that a vast amount of scholarship exists on contemporary self-transformation around the world in the field of anthropology of the body.[60] Nevertheless, this branch of study does not usually utilize the methodological tools developed by Foucault in his technologies of self, nor use the term "self", but the "living body".

This paper has attempted to demonstrate the usefulness of the vectors theory for the analysis of psycho-physical practices, as a tool for identification and classification of processes and influences. My vectors theory is developed on the basis of the Confucian self-cultivational model and Foucauldian technologies of self. I tried to pinpoint the position of intentional, emotional, cognitive, physical, familial and social self in the transformative progress undertaken by three GiCheon practitioners. In this context the notions of "other", of "returning to the source", of freedom, hardship and purification underlined by Foucault in his conceptualization of the technologies of self are important venues for anchoring our analysis.[61]

Looking at the inner connections of these symbolical means with each other, 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 for many self-cultivational traditions. If the self is inside the cell, she 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 the dirty thing is hard to clean, and a cleansing process is painful and uncomfortable for the thing, like a cloth that is being washed. The cleansing also constitute a "return" to an "originally clean" state of the self, hence its connection with the "return to the origin".

These self-transformative icons center around the notion of the "self" advanced and promoted by Foucault. However technologies of self have not been sufficiently called upon in the study of contemporary psycho-physical culture, the lacuna the current paper hopes to start filling. I have tried to achieve that through the reviewing of the notion of *suryŏn* and its meaning for GiCheon trainees.

We have seen that for GiCheon instructor Cho Chin-sik *suryŏn* is gaining a new understanding of old behavioral patterns, while university student Yi Kyŏng-won defines *suryŏn* as self-directed and

self-chosen study voluntarily continued. Bank manager Pak Kyŏng-hae believes that *suryŏn* is an effort by which you make the suffering of the body and mind-heart bearable. Three persons define *suryŏn* in three different ways, but the common element in their interpretations is the transference from the second vector to the first vector, achieved through *suryŏn*. Here, ultimately we have used a few short interview extracts to apply the two vectors theory, elaborated on the basis of Confucian rhetoric and the technologies of self. I suggest that application of vectors theory to various anthropological material related to contemporary psycho-physical culture in East-Asia might further develop our understanding of the subjective mode and subjected self, forming a link and connection with Foucault's continuing history of subjectivity.

Notes

[1] See: Farquhar, Judith and Zhang, Qicheng. *Ten Thousand Things: Nurturing Life in Contemporary Beijing.* New York: Zone, 2012; Otehode, Utiraruto. "The Creation and Reemergence of Qigong in China". In *Making Religion, Making the State: the Politics of Religion in Modern China*, edited by Yoshiko Ashiwa and David L. Wank, 241–265. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2009; Palmer, David A. *Qigong fever: body, science, and utopia in China*. New-York: Columbia University Press, 2007; Torchinov, E. A. *Puti filosofiyi vostoka i zapada: poznanie zapredelnogo* (Пути философии востока и запада: познание запредельного) (Philosophical Ways of East and West: the Knowledge of the Beyond). Saint Petersburg: Peterburgskoye vostokovedenie (Петербургское востоковедение), 2007; Torchinov, E. A. *Religii mira. Opit zapredelnogo. Psihotehnika yi transpersonalnye sostoyaniya* (Религии мира. Опыт запредельного. Психотехника и трансперсональные состояния) (World Religions. Experience of the "Beyond". Psycho-techniques and Transpersonal States). Saint Petersburg: Peterburgskoye vostokovedenie (Петербургское востоковедение), 1998; Kerr, Catherine. "Translating "Mind-In-Body": Two Models of Patient Experience Underlying a Randomized Controlled Trial of Qigong". *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry* 26 (2002): 419–447; Despeux, Catherine. "Le qigong, une expression de la modernité Chinoise". In *En suivant la Voie Royale. Mélanges en homage à Léon Vandermeersch*, edited by J. Gernet and M. Kalinowski, 267–281. Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1997; Despeux, Catherine. *Taiji Quan : Art martial - Technique de longue vie.* Paris: Guy Tredaniel, 1981; Ots, Thomas. "The Silenced Body—The Expressive Leib: On the Dialectic of Mind and Life in Chinese Cathartic Healing". In *Embodiment and Experience: The Existential Ground of Culture and Self,* edited by Thomas Csordas, 116–136. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994; Ots, Thomas. "Phenomenology of the Body: The Subject-Object Problem in Psychosomatic Medicine and the Role of Traditional Medical Systems herein". In *Anthropologies of Medicine A Colloquium on West European and North American Perspectives,* edited by Beatrix Pfeiderer and Giles Bibeau, 43–58. Wiesbaden: Friedrich Vieweg & Sohn Verlag, 1991; Abayev, N. V. "Daosskie istoki kitaiskih Wu-shu" (Даосские истоки китайских у-шу) (Daoist Sources of Chinese Wu-shu). In *Dao yi Daoism v Kitae* (Дао и даосизм в Китае) (Dao and Daoism in China), edited by B. V. Menshikov, 244–257. Moscow: Nauka (Наука), 1982; and Abayev, N. V. "Chan-buddhism yi kultura psihicheskoi deyatelnosti v srednevekovom Kitae (Чань-буддизм и культура психической деятельности в средневековом Китае) (Zen-Buddhism and Psychic Culture in Mediaeval China). Novosibirsk: Nauka (Наука), 1983.

[2] Baker, Don. 2007a. "The Korean God Is Not the Christian God: Taejonggyo's Challenge to Foreign Religions", in Buswell, Jr. Robert E. ed., *Religions of Korea in Practice*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, pp. 464–475; Baker, Don. 2007b. "Internal Alchemy in the Dahn World School", in Buswell, Jr. Robert E. ed., *Religions of Korea in Practice*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, pp. 508–513.

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[7] U, Hye-ran (우혜란). "Ki suryŏn tanch'e ŭi minjŏkjuŭi jŏk sŏnghyang kwa segyehwa kihoek: tanwŏldŭ rŭl jungsim ŭro (기수련 단체의 민족주의적 성향과 세계화 기획 : 단월드를 중심으로) (Nationalistic orientation and globalization plan of ki suryŏn groups: focusing on Dahn World [단월드 *tanwŏldŭ*]). *Inmun kwahak yŏn'gu* (人文科學研究) (The Journal of Humanities) 11 (2006): 37–63.

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[9] Abayey, 1983: 1.

[10] Abayey, 1982: 244.

[11] Abayey, 1983.

[12] Ots, 1994: 120.

[13] Despeaux, 1997: 267, 273–276.

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[17] Foucault 1988: 18.

[18] Taylor, Charles. *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1989.

[19] Hadot, Pierre. *What is ancient philosophy?* Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2002.

[20] Foucault 2001: 5–6; Epictete. *Entretiens*, III, 1, 18-19. Translated by Souilhe, J. Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1963 [108 AD]: 8; Xenophon. *Memorables*, IV, II, 24. Translated by Chambry, P. Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1966 [371 BC]: 390.

[21] Foucault does not explicitly mention the terms "old self" and "new self". It is clear from his narrative, though, that the Delphic precept of "know yourself" relates to the "old self" (Foucault 2001: 5).

[22] Laidlaw, James. "The Undefined Work of Freedom: Foucualt's Genealogy and the Anthropology of Ethics". In *Foucault Now: Current Perspectives in Foucault Studies*, edited by James Faubion, 23–37. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014a: 26–30; Laidlaw, James. *The Subject of Virtue: an Anthropology of Ethics and Freedom*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014b.

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[25] Rüpke, Jörg and Woolf, Greg ed. *Religious Dimensions of the Self in the Second Century CE*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013; Alter, Joseph. "Sex, *askesis* and the athletic perfection of the soul: physical philosophy in the ancient Mediterranean and South Asia". In *Religion and the Subtle Body in Asia and the West: Between Mind and Body*, edited by Geoffrey Samuel and Jay Johnston, 33-47. New York: Routledge, 2013; Gill, Christopher. *The Structured Self in Hellenistic and Roman Thought*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006. Brakke, David; Satlow, Michael; Weitzman, Steven ed. *Religion and the Self in Antiquity*. Bloomington-Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2005; Shulman, David and Stroumsa, Guy ed. *Self and self-transformation in the history of religions*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.

[26] Kohn, Livia; Wang, Robin ed. *Internal Alchemy: Self, Society, and the Quest for Immortality.* Magdalena: Three Pines Press, 2009.

[27] Ryang, Sonia. "Technologies of the Self: Reading from North Korean Novels in the 1980s". *Acta Koreana* 5 (1) (2002): 21–32: 23, 25–26.

[28] Palmer, 2007.

[29] Selim, 2011.

[30] Hayano, D. "Auto-ethnography: Paradigms, problems and prospects". *Human Organization*, 38(1) (1979): 99–104.: 99–100.

[31] Ellis, Carolyn; Bochner, Arthur. "Autoethnography, Personal Narrative, Reflexivity", in N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln. (Eds.) *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, (2nd ed.), 733–768. CA: Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, 2000: 734, 740–742, 746.

[32] Interview with Yi Kyŏng-won, 05.11.2010, Seoul, South Korea. Interview with Cho Chin-sik, 07.03.2011, Seoul. Yi Kyŏng-won and Cho Chin-sik gave me their explicit permissions to use their real names. Interview with Pak Kyŏng-hae (not a real name) 17.01.2010, Seoul.

[33] *Daxue* (大學, The Great Learning). E-SKQS: *Electronic edition of Wenyuange Siku Quanshu* 文淵閣四庫全書 (Wenyuan Chamber, Complete Collection in Four Branches of Literature), 1999. One of the four books of "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 the virtue thus providing a personal example and a role-model for the others.

34 Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Phénoménologie de la perception.* Paris: Gallimard, 1945. 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 with it a single system (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 paper, almost equalizes consciousness with life itself. Deep underlying intention, first and foremost a desire to live, shapes perception, emotion and cognition, that 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 good life, is equated with a desire to give life, or give good life, to others.

35 Merleau-Ponty, 1945.

36 Hahm, Chaibong. "Confucian Rituals and the Technology of the Self: A Foucauldian Interpretation". *Philosophy East and West* 51 (3) (2001): 315–324. The connection between 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 cosmos 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 (Hahm, 2001).

37 Rhett, K. ed. *Survival Stories: Memoirs of Crisis.* NY, Garden City: Doubleday, 1997. 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.

38 Judith Farquhar and Qicheng Zhang in their study on self-cultivational practices in contemporary Beijing call these practices 'nurturing life' (養生 *yangsheng*) (Farquhar, Zhang 2012).

39 Foucault, 2001: 16, 83, 92, 123–130, 167, 476–477.

40 Kim Hŭi-sang was a well known GiCheon leader who composed three books on GiCheon. The author of this paper had the honor of being his friend, for a short while before his death.

41 Foucault, 2001: 123–130.

42 Ibid: 92, 476–477.

43 Ibid: 83, 128, 477.

44 Ibid: 46, 146.

45 Ibid: 16, 167.

*46*Nancy Abelman suggests this translation of *ch'amta* (Abelman 2003).

*47*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 Yi.

48 Miller, 2005; Weitzman, 2005; Harvey, 2005; Frank, 2005; Schofer, 2005.

49 Olyan, 2005.

50 Harill, 2005.

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[51] Watts, 2005.

[52] Menn, 2005.

[53] Stroumsa, 2005.

[54] Malamoud, 2002.

[55] Doniger, 2002.

[56] Shulman, 2002.

[57] Sviri, 2002.

[58] Gyatso, 2002.

[59] Ryang, 2002.

[60] Csordas, Thomas J. *Body / Meaning / Healing*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002; Csordas, Thomas J. "The Body's Career in Anthropology". In *Anthropological Theory Today*, edited by Henrietta Moore, 172-205. Cornwell: Polity Press, 1999; Lock, 1993; Ots, 1994; Ots, 1991.

[61] Foucault, 2001: 16, 83, 92, 123–130, 167, 476–477.