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## A Prophetic "Saint," *Geoduri* Bo-han Lee (1872-1931)

*In-seok Seo*<sup>1</sup>, *Cheol-won Shin*<sup>2</sup>, *Jeong-mun Guk*<sup>3</sup>, *Moo-jin Jeong*<sup>4</sup>, *Jun-ki Chung*<sup>5\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ph.D. Adjunct Professor of History of Christianity, Department of Church History, Kwangshin University, South Korea

<sup>2</sup> Ph.D. candidate, Department of Old Testament, Kwangshin University, South Korea

<sup>3</sup> D. Min. candidate, Researcher at Institute for Pietatis Theologia, Kwangshin University, South Korea

<sup>4</sup> Ph.D. teaches "History of Christian Thought," Department of Church History, Kwangshin University, South Korea

<sup>5</sup> Vice President and Dean of Graduate School at Kwangshin University, South Korea  
Email: <sup>5</sup>junkichung@gmail.com

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### ABSTRACT

In the early 20th century, the Japanese rule over Korea was an unpleasant experience for Koreans. Japan annexed Korea and used her as an advanced military base for invading East Asia. Many young Koreans were recruited as soldiers by the Japanese army or as low-level workers in factories and their labor was thoroughly exploited. Moreover, Koreans were humiliated and coerced into changing their names to sound like Japanese names. Some Korean women were mentally and physically abused and were deemed to be "pleasure girls" for the Japanese military against their will. During this unfortunate period, Korean intellectuals employed several measures to try and restore Korea's independence and sovereignty. While some resorted to armed uprisings, others engaged in a non-violent criticism of society. These individuals instilled hope in the Korean population. This study examines the life of Bo-han Lee, who helped the Koreans envision a better future at the time using strange language and gestures, and focusing on three areas of his "prophetic" criticism—society, politics, and religion.

### 1. Introduction

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Koreans were experiencing a difficult time when compared to any other period in the past. At the end of the 19th century, Korea was still remained in the Yi dynasty (1392-1910). This dynasty undertook the decision to exclude the Buddhist policy of Goryeo dynasty (918-

1392) and instead, adopted Neo-Confucianism as the governing principle of the state. Neo-Confucianism further developed the moral and political philosophy of Confucius (ca. 551-479 B.C.) and Mencius (ca. 372-289 B.C.), emphasizing that the bureaucrats of the governing organization should lead an honest and innocuous life. Although this political philosophy was maintained in the early days of the Yi kingdom, its meaning gradually faded with time. Eventually, corruption polluted the bureaucracy that also turned insensitive to the new international order. The Western imperialistic powers adversely affected the political order in East Asia (Seok, et al, 2020: 167). In the year 1854, Japan's doors were forcibly opened by the United States, and China was also invaded by the West through wars like the Opium War. However, Japan became the first nation in East Asia to partake in the new wave of Western modernization. In the realms of politics, economy, education, medical care, and military, Japan integrated Westernization, while practicing Western imperialism, which invaded and colonized neighboring countries. Korea became the first victim of Japanese imperialism in the year 1910, and Koreans were forced into experiencing sorrow without the freedom of their country. Korean intellectuals experienced these horrific political and social phenomena, and in response, mobilized and practiced several measures for their country and its people. Beom-do Hong (1868-1943) led the Korean Independence Army in Manchuria and other regions, recording remarkable achievements (Kim, 2019b), while Dong-hwi Lee (1873-1935) defected to Russia and founded the Independence Army to resist Japan. Chae-ho Shin (1880-1936) and Un-sik Park (1859-1925), while in China, wrote articles to awaken the identity of Koreans and inspire the independence movement (Chung, 1988: 104). Tae-jun Lee served as a medical doctor in Mongolia and provided funds and shelters for Korean independence fighters temporarily residing in Mongolia (Kim, et al. 2021: 4821-4822). Bo-han Lee, the primary individual explored in this study, did not seek refuge in China, Mongolia or Russia, and instead, stayed in Korea to drive the independence movement and participated in the struggles of the Korean population. Bo-han's presence in the realms of society, politics, and religion at the time left us with substantial spiritual heritage. Studies on Bo-han are slowly emerging today. There are a few introductory historical works available pertaining his biography (Yim, 1996; Jeong, 2019; Rhie: 210-211), which are invaluable. This study attempts to facilitate a more theological and historical analysis of Bo-han by referring to prior research. The thesis of this study is to prove that Bo-han's primary thoughts and actions are fundamentally prophetic criticisms. His criticisms on society, Japanese imperialism, and religion function as the core areas of this study.

## 2. Biographical Information

Bo-han Lee was born on 23 January, 1872 in Dangmoe (now Mokcheon-dong, Iri-si, Jeollabuk-do) as the eldest son of Kyung-ho Lee. He was a scholar-official (*Jinsa*) and a wealthy man (Kim, 2019a: 3). Although his father was married, she could not bear a son. Thus, he took a girl from a village to be his concubine. In the past, it was a common custom in Korean culture to have a

son through a concubine, as it was believed that the family line would be cut off if the wife does not deliver a son. Thus, she became Bo-han's mother. Bo-han was treated like a bastard in his family due to the poor status of his mother, and as a child, he suffered from eye disease. As he did not receive adequate treatment, he eventually lost his left eye. Thus, his left eye had to be removed, and he wore black glasses to cover the affected area.

Bo-han adhered to Neo-Confucianism under the influence of his father and relatives, but converted to Protestant Christianity eventually, perhaps in his early thirties. While there are several theories concerning his conversion to Christianity, three such theories stand out. Firstly, it was theorized that Bo-han was influenced by the American Presbyterian missionary Lewis B. Tate, who served in Jeonju from 1892 to 1925 as a Southern Presbyterian missionary of the United States. The second theory is that Bo-han was influenced by his aunt. Finally, another theory is that Bo-han was influenced by missionary Wiley Hamilton Forsythe (1873-1918) of the same denomination as Tate (Seo, 52-54). Let us examine each of these claims.

It was believed by Missionary Tate that evangelizing influential Korean upper class (*yangban*) houses in Jeonju would create a huge ripple effect. Thus, he was courageous enough to visit Bo-han's father. Tate bowed down in Korean style to Kyung-ho and said, "How are you, father?" in Korean (Yim, 1996: 31; 2019b: 94). Since he was a foreigner who was despised as a barbarian by the Korean upper class, Kyung-ho was infuriated when he called him his father. Thus, he directed his servants to beat Tate down in the yard. When this news reached the headquarters of Jeolla Province, authorities were directed to put Kyung-ho in a prison as he violated the law formulated by the Korean emperor who ordered Western missionaries to treat them like the emperor himself. To end this crisis, Kyung-ho promised to believe in Jesus, and as a result, he was released. However, in reality he did not intend on believing in Christianity. Since it was not possible to undo his words, he gathered his family members and asked, "Is there anyone who believes in Jesus instead of me?" Nobody responded. Suddenly, Bo-han stepped in front of his father as he believed that his father would be reviled if there were no believers. He said: "Yes, I will believe in Jesus instead of you" (Yim, 2019b: 95). According to this theory, Bo-han's belief in Christianity began with filial piety to his father.

The second argument is that Bo-han was influenced by his aunt- the wife of his great uncle Jin-ho (Cho, 1996: 80; Yim, 2019b: 96). When Bo-han was lonely and depressed, he would often visit his uncle's house in Jeonju's North Gate. His aunt was always welcoming of Bo-han. She was a lonely woman as she had no children. She was a devout Christian. She loved to sing a hymn called "Will Reap" [*Geoduri-do-da* in Korean]: "Let's sow our seeds from dawn to evening . . . The fruit will gradually ripen . . . Those who sow with tears will reap, will reap, and will reap" (Yim, 2019b: 96). Bo-han also liked this hymn, so he hummed as often as she did. This was the reason why the public called

him "Lee *Geodouri*." This hymn indicates that if we sow the seeds of the gospel and weep hard, there is a harvest of joy.

The third claim is that Forsythe influenced him (Yang, 2018). There is an interesting story behind Forsythe's ministry. In Jeonju, the male patients were supposedly reluctant to be treated by Dr. Matte B. Ingold, a female medical doctor, who was a missionary of the Southern Presbyterian Church of the U.S. During that period, it was very inconvenient for male patients to be treated by female doctors in Korea, as the male and female living spaces were clearly distinguished. Thus, when Forsythe arrived in Korea in September 1904, he was assigned to the Jeonju Mission Station, and began living in Jeonju in October of that year. Upon his arrival, he traveled around Jeonju Market and distributed evangelical tracts to Koreans. He approached the patients with great interest, particularly those suffering from hopeless physical illnesses—the disabled, Hansen's patients, and poor boys. On 11 March 1905, Forsythe was visited by Bo-han's big uncle, Jin-ho, who attended the Jeonju Presbyterian Church (presently Jeonju Seomoon Presbyterian Church)—the first established church in Jeonju in 1893. Jin-ho informed Forsythe that his brother- Bo-han's father- was attacked by armed robbers and required urgent treatment. Forsythe rushed to Kyung-ho's house and treated him. The same evening, while spending a night at Kyung-ho's home, Forsythe was attacked indiscriminately by the same set of armed robbers (Brown: 96). Upon encountering Forsythe's black suit, they mistook him for police, and cut off half of his ear, wounding the back bone, about an inch deep. Forsythe was taken to Seoul and returned to Jeonju only five months later, after he was treated at the Severance Hospital. The Governor of Jeolla Province arrested the armed robbers who attacked Forsythe. Forsythe implored the Governor to release them and exempt them from punishment because he had forgiven them. After this incident, Forsythe visited Kyung-ho's house and introduced the gospel (Yang: 97). Kyung-ho refused to change his religion from Confucianism to Christianity. Nevertheless, he said he would be more accepting of Christianity if any of his family members would believe in Jesus, saying, "Who will come forward because I will give a strong reward to anyone who believes in Jesus on my behalf?" (Yang: 99). In response, his eldest son, Bo-han, raised his hand. Bo-han was moved by Forsythe's pure love, and the way he treated his father and the violent robbers. He believed that his meeting with Forsythe made a huge difference to his life. It was only in 1905 that he met a trusted person for the first time in his life. Bo-han received Jesus through the evangelism of Forsythe and followed him to Jeonju to study the Bible, realizing the true nature of Christianity. Of the three theories, the last one is most widely supported. Deok-joo Rhie, an expert in Korean church history, also supports the third theory (Rhie: 110). Regardless of what theory is factual, the aspect that is common among the three aforementioned arguments is Bo-han's devotion to missionaries and his aunt's love. He realized that the core Christian doctrine is human equality regardless of rank, gender, age, and career distinction. As a new Christian, he learned English and understood modern Western civilization by developing a very close relationship with Forsythe and other missionaries. It

seems that the influence of Forsythe over Bo-han cannot be understated. Bo-han was very intelligent and thus, he learned English quite quickly from the American missionaries.

Bo-han attended Jeonju Seomoon Church and worked as a devout believer, but soon stopped attending various activities of the church, fearing that his influence would be greater than that of the missionaries or Korean pastors. Instead, Bo-han focused on expressing interest and love for the marginalized. Bo-han died on 16 August, 1931 due to poverty because he gave away all his precious things. So many orphans, beggars, and poor workers who were supported by him mourned his death by attending his funeral to pay their respects. They made a flower bier and grieved, like they were holding a funeral for their biological father, as they praised Bo-han's beautiful life (Kim, 2019a: 25). During the funeral, even the beggars did not take a sip of water, indicating their respect and sadness for Bo-han.

### 3. Bo-han's Social Criticism

#### 3.1. *His Criticism on Social Class Status*

The traditional class system in Korea was officially abolished in 1894 (Lim, 2020). However, the age-old system could not be demolished overnight. Classes such as *yangban* (upper class), middle class, and commoners still existed implicitly until the beginning of the 20th century. Slaves were not entirely liberated, and step-children of *yangban* family members were ignored similarly. Even *gisaengs* who made the atmosphere cheerful with dances and songs were clearly subject to discrimination. Although Bo-han himself was a son of *yangban*, it was true that he was treated as a bastard. Bo-han was greatly moved during his early days of faith, by Korean Christians, who worshiped God without discrimination at the same time in a church. Bo-han, who was aware of the downsides of Korea's status system thoroughly challenged it after becoming a Christian. In fact, his life performed the socio-political function of breaking this class system. He treated the *gisaengs* personally and taught them to sing. His voice resembled that of a master singer, and thus, Jeonju *gisaengs* were not ashamed to become his disciples. When he sang, he often satirized the *yangbans* with witty jokes to expose their arrogant and hypocritic lifestyles (Yim, 2019b: 108-109). One day, when Bo Han was seated at his *yangban* friend's house, his eyes fell upon a few nice clothes hanging on the wall. He left the house while he said to his friend, "You have a lot of good clothes besides these, so I'll wear them once" (Yim, 2019b: 106). Outside the house, Bo-han encountered a man in rags and exchanged his clothes with him. Here, we can see Bo-han transcending class status, identifying himself with the poor and participating in their lives. He lived as a best friend and spokesperson for those who were rejected, abandoned, and marginalized (Yim, 2019b: 82).

### 3.2. *His Criticism on the Rich*

Bo-han wanted the rich to share their wealth with the poor. Thus, he began to divide his father's wealth among them. One day, his father asked Bohan to collect rent from numerous tenants. When he met them and asked for money, most of them said that they would pay the money later as they did not possess an adequate amount at that moment. Considering their pitiful situations, Bo-han stated that they had all paid off in the ledgers. When Bo-han entered the house, his father asked him for the money he had collected and ledgers. Instead of money, Bo-han gave his father the empty ledgers. Then, his father asked him what happened to the collected money. Bo-han said: "My father can live well without receiving that money, but those people are going to starve to death right now, so how can I get it?" (Lee, 2019: 62). On another occasion, his father sent Bo-han with 10,000 *yen* worth of leather to Pyongyang for trade. Bo-han returned home after a few months empty-handed, saying to his father: "I have been using it to fertilize for my country" (Yim, 2019b: 92). Of course, his father was furious that Bo-han was almost ready to die while his father's anger exploded like a volcano. It is also important to note that, Bo-han was very considerate around hungry beggars and orphans. Understanding the suffering of starvation, he would try to help satisfy their hunger. Many of Bo-han's relatives occupied government posts and were financially well off. One day, he led dozens of beggars to one of his relatives' house, who was the chief (*Gunsu*) of Heung-deak county. Bo-han asked the chief's wife for good quality meals for the benefit of the beggars. Bo-han's words were a kind of "command" to serve them (Yim, 2019b: 104-105). Bo-han argued that it was reasonable to embrace and feed the beggars because they were the civilians living in the same district governed by his relative, and therefore she should act like a mother. She was reluctant to cook and feed the beggars, but Bo-han proceeded with this task without hesitation. Another example of Bo-han's considerate nature was the story of a rich man celebrating his 60th birthday. One day, when Bo-han was invited to this party in Gimje, a town near Jeonju, he attended the event with around 70 beggars. The rich man was very upset when an unexpected swarm of beggars arrived, but he did not want to ruin the long-awaited feast. Thus, he bought chickens from the town, made high-quality side dishes, and boiled noodles in large quantities to serve the beggars. The beggars and Bo-han ate until their stomachs burst, and happily left the house, returning to Jeonju like a general's triumphant army (Yim, 2019b: 106-107). In addition to this, Bo-han packed up many woodworks of woodcutters to rich people's yards and "forced" the rich to pay to the poor workers for their survival (Yoon, 108). He encouraged the rich to empty their pockets to help poor students purchase food or school supplies. Sometimes, Bo-han led 40 to 50 beggars to buy hot bean sprout soup and feed them. He asked *gisaengs* to dance as well as to sing songs for beggars who had no source of entertainment.

Why did Bo-han try to feed and help the poor? The reason was that eating is the most primitive and fundamental problem that humans must resolve (Kang, et al, 2021: 797-798). Jesus had to solve this eating problem even before

starting his own public ministry. In Luke 4 of the *New Testament* (NT), Jesus' first test was the question of eating. If this problem is solved, the second problem- world power- appears. Those who have solved the second problem face the third problem, the vanity of honor. If we look closely, the military coup in Myanmar in February 2021 also started with an economic problem: eating. The reason is that when military leaders lose power in Myanmar, their economic lives become very difficult. Furthermore, in order to prevent the continuous emergence of a dictatorship in Myanmar, economic stability must be achieved first. It is the historical testimony of the world that political democratization comes only with the resolution of problems related to food (Lee, et al. 2021: 1248-1249). The reason why South Korea succeeded in political democratization is because of economic democratization. Jesus commanded the twelve poor disciples who followed him, "You give them something to eat" (Mark 6:37). There is something very incomprehensible about this command. The disciples actually had no wealth to feed the crowd. There seems to be a problem with the words of Jesus, as he commanded the disciples to feed thousands of hungry crowds without money and resources. However, this command of Jesus has important spiritual and physical teachings. Because it reminds us of the attitude of Jesus' disciples who had to take care of the flock. Jesus' disciples are the future leaders. Leaders have the right and duty to feed their flocks under any circumstances. As a disciple of Jesus, Bo-han was aware that he had to feed the Korean people suffering under the Japanese colonial rule. This sense of responsibility acted as a driving force for him to take care of the poor Koreans. He frequently visited rich Koreans who lived in collusion with the Japanese. Bo-han made sure that their property was distributed to the poor and the sick. Bo-han's "holy" appearance made the rich Koreans share their wealth with the marginalized, as they lived a hard life every day. Bo-han's coercive, critical orders can sometimes seem problematic. This is because if beggars, the sick, and orphans continue to beg and eat, they will lose their independent spirit. This problem must be addressed. Bo-han was also aware of the seriousness of this problem. Thus, he encouraged them to work as hard as possible to achieve a self-reliant economy. Bo-han visited places where workers gathered and taught them the nobleness of labor by giving the example of a worker pulling a rickshaw. He said:

Pulling a rickshaw is hard work. So no one is willing to engage in this kind of job. But more blessed are the people who pull the rickshaw than the one who rides it, Because a person riding a rickshaw has strong legs and does not walk around, so it is almost crippled, but a person who pulls a rickshaw sweats profusely while riding a person, so it is even more blessed to exercise and earn money (Kim, 2019a: 19-20).

Nevertheless, because of the special circumstances they faced under the Japanese colonial rule, Bo-han fed the poor even when they begged without conditions. With his various strange languages and gestures, Bo-han taught and practiced how to share, while criticizing fellow Koreans who were financially relaxed.

#### 4. His Political Criticism on Japanese Imperialism

Japan's invasion of Korea and its 36 years' rule (1910-1945) should be correctly and critically evaluated. The reason is that Japan ruled Korea by force against the free will of Koreans. Thus, Bo-han denounced Japanese colonial administration in Korea with a mixture of humor and ridicule. He clearly communicated his thoughts with the Japanese officials even at the police station where his life could have been endangered. His appearance was reminiscent of the prophets of the *Old Testament*, John the Baptist of the *NT*, and even the image of Jesus driving out the merchants from the Jewish Temple (Matt. 21: 12-13).

##### 4.1. A "Mad" Patriot Bo-han Lee

Bo-han studied Neo-Confucianism extensively while growing up with Chinese classics, and after converting to Christianity, he acquired a certain level of Western knowledge from missionaries. Although he did not enjoy today's standard level of education, he had a knowledge of English that helped encourage secondary school students. He often improvised lectures by gathering students from Jeonju Shinheung High School under the Jeonjucheon Bridge. He instilled national consciousness, for example, by teaching them English proverbs such as "Boys, be ambitious!" and "The barking dog is more useful than the sleeping lion" (Rhi: 110).

Before and after 1 March, 1919, nonviolent movements for independence emerged in all parts of Korea. With the *Taegeukgi*, the national flag of Korea, Koreans held demonstrations for national independence in market places or roadside where many people gathered. Bo-han also went in and out of Seoul before and after the March First Movement, and one day witnessed a demonstration for national independence by students of Seoul Central High School and Hwigi High School (Yim, 2019b: 114-115). Bo-han jumped into the demonstration and shouted "Long Live Korea's Independence." When he was hit in the shoulder by a Japanese firefighter's pickaxe, he collapsed. Later, he found himself in the Jongro Police Station Interrogation Room (Lee, 2019: 67). He volunteered to reveal the mastermind of the demonstration. The Japanese moved Bo-han to a special room and treated him cautiously. After receiving their hospitality, he insisted to confess the truth only if he had an exclusive meeting with the police chief. Finally, the police chief called him and asked, "Okay, who is the mastermind and where is he? [Bo-han replied], The mastermind is God, and his address is [in Heaven]" (Cho, 2009: 247; Yim, 2019b: 115). The police chief was infuriated and beat Bo-han hard before putting him in a cell. Then Bo-han urinated and defecated everywhere in the cell, and put it on the walls and painted his face. The police interrogator thought that Bo-han began to face mental illnesses because he had beaten him so badly. With guilt, the police man freed Bo-han. On the way back to his hometown, Bo-han jumped into the ranks of hurrah once again in Suwon. He was caught by the Suwon police and said, "My dearest friend is the Jongro Police Chief." Suwon Police men began to treat Bo-han well and immediately

stopped the interrogation. Then, they called the Jongro Police Station and checked Bo-han's identity. When they heard that Bo-han was mentally ill, they immediately released him. Arriving in Cheonan, he repeatedly hurrahed for national independence and was released from Cheonan prison after being imprisoned for three months. He did not even tie his pants, and his hat had a hole in it, which he wore backwards, showing his "madness." This behavior of Bo-han was his politically critical struggle during the bleak and grim era. He went to the front of a Japanese military police and sang the hymn "*Geoduri*" and said:

What's wrong with an orphaned people who have no country and no parents to appease their sorrows by singing hymns to God? If we coerce Japan and rule over you, you won't like us. . . . If [we] use violence against someone like you, will you stand still? The Japanese army won't be able to stand still. Then this country will become a sea of blood and we will perish each other. That's why we're marching peacefully without violence . . . Our white-robed [Korean] people love peace" (Yim, 2019b: 116).

Hearing this, the Japanese military police commander did not respond. He regarded Bo-han as a troubled maniac. From then on, the Japanese military police did not interfere with Koreans who wore their hats upside down in front of government offices and sang the hymns of "*Geoduri*" or "Hurrah for Korean Independence" (Yim, 2019b: 116).

#### **4.2. Market Movements for National Independence**

Bo-han was in charge of the Jeolla Province youth council at the time of the March First Movement in 1919. He handled the transportation of the *Taegeukgi* throughout Jeolla Province. With the Jeonju beggar chief at the fore, beggars went to every alley to set market days in various parts of Jeolla Province and secretly distributed *Taegeukgi*. The beggars took the lead, and the villagers followed. One day, people began to gather in a marketplace called Gutaein, when Bo-han appeared in the middle of the market. When he first shouted, "Long live the Korean independence," the beggars standing next to him all sang hurrah and waved the *Taegeukgi*. Then, villagers of all ages, men and women, holding the *Taegeukgi* from here and there joined like an explosion. Japanese police arrived and started shooting. As the victims continued to rise, Bo-han called a beggar and sent him on an errand to a Japanese police officer to say, "There is a leader of the independence fighters here, and we will let you know if you release the captured people" (Yim, 2019b: 117). At this, the police officer ordered to cease the shooting. The beggar who brought Bo-han out in front said, "This is the captain of the Independence Army." Bo-han said in Japanese, "I have something I want to ask the villagers, so please give me one speech." With permission, Bo-han stood in front of the audience. Everyone quietly listened to him: "[Ladies and] Gentlemen, we are a peace-loving people . . . We fully show our will to love our country to the Japanese, and we also see the unity that we can become independent. So, no more sacrifices, everyone, go home and work" (Yim, 2019b: 117-118). The crowd, who heard

the words of Bo-han, shouted "Hurray" and went home together. The Japanese police chief who watched the scene said that Bo-han "is a true patriot and a true independence fighter" (Yim, 2019b: 118). After this incident, even though there were minor demonstrations for Korean independence in this area, there was no major conflict between the Japanese police and the Koreans. This shows how influential Bo-han was.

### ***4.3. Korean Independent Fund Delivery***

Bo-han had immense respect for Pastor In-jeon Kim (1876-1923). Pastor Kim served Jeonju Seomoon Presbyterian Church from 1914 to 1919 while he worked as a teacher at Yeongmyeong School in Gunsan (Seong, 2021). When the March First Movement broke out, Pastor Kim mobilized students from Yeongmyeong School to actively participate. In Jeonju, on 13 March, Christian churches and Heavenly Way Religion (*Chondo-gyo*) united to lead the national independence movement at South Gate Square in Jeonju. As the leader of this independence movement, Pastor Kim became a target of the Japanese police, and he resigned from the church and defected to Shanghai, China to participate in the Korean Shanghai Provisional Government. Pastor Kim's character and leadership were immediately recognized, and on 3 April, 1922, he became the fourth chairman of the Korean Provisional Assembly in Shanghai. Bo-han sent the independence movement funds raised by beggars and *gisaengs* to In-jeon Kim's provisional government. Bohan's strong patriotism, rooted in the belief that there were no exceptions for beggars or *gisaengs* in relation to Korea's independence was moved to those who were marginalized at the time. A *gisaeng* named Hwa Jung-sun, who was called the national singer of her time, not only learned how to sing from Bo-han in her spare time, but also took off her golden hairpin and ring to help finance the independence movement (Yim, 2019b: 118). Bohan wrapped these heartfelt gold and silver treasures in a book bag and took the wrist of his young grandson Jung-hwan Lee (then 8-year-old) and went to Jigyeong Railroad Station (now Daeya Station). When the train came in, he ran to the bathroom and secretly exchanged this bag from Korean independence fighters. He delivered these bags five or six times a year. It was usually around two thousand *won*. At that time, a single piece of rice was 70-80 *jeon*, and the price of a bag of rice for a day was one *won*.

## **5. Bo-han's Religious Criticism**

### ***5.1. His Meek Criticism on Protestant Christianity in Korea***

Bo-han achieved remarkable growth in faith by accepting Protestant Christianity through constant fellowship with missionaries and Korean clergy. Jesus, whom Bo-han met, was a completely free man. In fact, Bo-han was well aware that his nick name was "*Geoduri*" (Reap) because of the hymn he always sang, "Reap, Reap." Meanwhile, he revealed his identity by interpreting the word "*geoduri*" in Chinese characters. In Chinese, "*geo*" (渠) means "person," "*du*" (肚) refers to stomach or "no fear," and "*ri*" (裏) means "inner mind." Thus, "*geo-du-ri*" means "a free man who lives according to his own mind

[without fear]" (Kim, 2019a: 23). Bo-han respected and loved American Protestant missionaries and Korean pastors. When they perceived Bo-han as a "stranger or mad person," and expressed discomfort, Bo-han stopped attending regular church services without arguing with them. But Bo-han's pursuit of freedom was never indulgence or disorder. His freedom was to truly love people beyond religious forms and fixed systems. Bo-han's open Christianity did not end with members serving the church community by diligently attending Sunday worship services and various church meetings. The ideal Christianity for Bo-han was not a plausible institution in the form of a religion, but one in which the members experienced God's presence in the church community and shared a sense of belonging as one body of unfeigned love (Kim and Chung, 2021: 299-304; Kim, et. al., 2021: 4827-4831; Seok and Chung, 2021: 759-760; Yim, 2019a: 82). When Bo-han stopped attending public services at the church, people asked why and stated that he had graduated from believing in Jesus. He replied: "Before I believed in Jesus, but now Jesus believes in me" (Kim, 2019a: 11). What an absurd answer! Jesus supposedly believes in Bo-han who now sounds more spiritual than Jesus. He is better than Jesus, so it can be interpreted that he no longer needs to go to a church that believes in Jesus. But Bo-han's intentions were different. Since he believed in Jesus, he never betrayed Jesus. Rather, he introduced Jesus more diligently and devoted himself to his evangelistic life. His refusal to go to the church was to avoid being the subject of disputes, and in this way avoid burdening the missionaries and Korean clergy (Kim, 1963). It was Bo-han's belief that even if he did not go to the church and kept a quiet house-based church, Jesus would soften his heart and acknowledge his faith. In other words, Bo-han indirectly criticized the "immature" attitude and lack of understanding of the institutional church at the time (Jeong, et al. 2021: 6612).

## ***5.2. His Criticism on Religious People in Korea***

According to the report of the Ministry of Culture and Sports of South Korea, as of 1 November, 2015, the number of religious people in South Korea was 21.55 million, or 43.9% of the total population of 49.05 million. Among them, Protestantism ranked first with 9.67 million believers, followed by Buddhism and Catholicism. Christianity and Buddhism are higher religions, and their core tenets are self-denial, sacrifice, and service. If today's religious Korean people imitate Bo-han's practical life, it will be much easier to buy a house in South Korea. Houses in South Korea are very expensive, and young people have reached a lamentable state of saving their entire lives to buy even a small house. While it is almost impossible, if religious South Koreans stop investing in land or houses and sell their properties at a lower price to the poor, the current problematic housing phenomenon will disappear. Bo-han teaches us a clear lesson in this respect. Bo-han attempted to follow the teaching of Jesus: Love your neighbor as yourself (Matt. 22: 37-40, Gal. 5: 14). He was born as the eldest son of an aristocrat and enjoyed a material rich environment, but he had to live in a rented room when he gave them away to suffering beggars and orphans. He was the breadwinner of a family with a wife, a son and two

daughters, but he worked harder to save those who were stuck in a more difficult situation than his family. Pitying Bo-han's poor life, his great uncle gave him some money to ensure he does not suffer economically. With this money, Bo-han started a red bean porridge business in the South Gate area of Jeonju, but he went bankrupt after three months. When he saw orphans, he gave them red bean porridge for free, so he had no time to save for his family (Kim, 2019a: 16). His descendants later say that a Korean independence fighter said these words: "Since [Teacher *Geoduri*] passed away, the funds for Korean independence are too short" (Yim, 2019b: 118). One day, he came to Bo-han's house again and said, "Are you [Teacher Bo-han's] grandson?" and gave him a considerable amount of money (Yim, 2019b: 118).

In short, Bo-han did not hold any negative views of the church he served. He did not speak or act aggressively toward missionaries or Korean pastors except the few cases that we have seen above. At that time, almost all religious leaders in Korea were united to resist Japanese imperialism, so he did not take any severe actions against other religions. The lessons Bo-han demonstrated in his Christian life seem more convincing to Koreans today than those of the past. The reason is that through Bo-han's life history, he strongly criticizes almost all religious Koreans who are not fulfilling the role of light and salt; they are mostly indistinguishable from secular people.

## 6. Conclusion

Throughout the late Yi dynasty period and during the Japanese occupation of Korea, many Korean intellectuals exerted their best efforts for Korea's independence in their own ways. Some Koreans fled to China, Mongolia, or Russia to fight for their country's independence. However, the majority of Koreans remained on Korean soil and suffered from the colonial policy of Japanese imperialism. In this miserable environment, many Korean patriots, who fought against wrong social practices and political oppression, suffered due to the Japanese colonial government without exception. However, Bo-han Lee, the main character of this study, became an unusual prophet who proudly expressed his thoughts and refreshed the hearts of suffering Koreans at the time. He used bizarre gestures and the language of a madman to resist the brutal abuse and retaliation of Japanese officials and comforted many Koreans in their sorrows. He showed what true religion really is by manifesting the words of Jesus. He made it clear that the ethics and morals that social leaders and officials must follow is human love without discrimination, beyond social status.

Now, to conclude this study, let us examine how Bo-han played the role of a prophet. The prophets of the Bible have proclaimed to sinners the Word revealed from God, and it is the work of sinners to manifest responses. Therefore, it seems a bit unreasonable to interpret Bo-han as a prophet in a strict Biblical sense. However, Bo-han may be seen as a kind of prophet as he proclaimed God's justice and mercy to those who practiced evils, and that they responded to Bo-han's words to a large extent. In this respect, Bo-han is a great

saint who walked the path of a prophet through his insights, knowledge, and practices.

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