



**Su-un
and His World of Symbols**
The Founder of Korea's First Indigenous Religion
Paul Beirne

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Su-un and His World of Symbols explores the image which Choe Che-u (Su-un), the founder of Donghak (Eastern Learning) Korea's first indigenous religion, had of himself as a religious leader and human being. Su-un gave his life so that he could share his symbols, his scriptures and the foundational principals of his religion with all people, regardless of their status, gender, age or education. His egalitarian creed challenged the major religious traditions in Korea, and Korean society as a whole, to reflect on the innate dignity of each individual, and to reform their social, ethical and religious practices to accord with the reality of the Divine presence in the 'sacred refuge' that lies within.

Exploring the two symbols which Su-un created and used to disseminate his religion, and the two books of Scripture which he composed, this book breaks new ground by presenting the only major work in English which attempts to ascertain the image Su-un had of himself as the prototype of a new kind of religious leader in Korea, and by extension, East Asia.

Contents

Preface; Introduction; Materials and method; Su-un's life and times; Su-un's encounter with the Lord of Heaven; The mystical talisman; The sacred incantation; Su-un's final self-image; Haewol and the unity of all creation; Su-un's legacy; Donghak/Cheondo-gyo in historical perspective; Bibliography; Index.

About the Author

Paul Beirne is Dean and Professor of Comparative Religion at the Melbourne College of Divinity. He lived and studied in South Korea for fifteen years, and has undertaken research on the Donghak/Cheondo-gyo religion since 1991. He has visited many of the religion's sacred sites (to which he had unrestricted entry). His contacts within the Cheondo-gyo organization made available to him a wide range of historical resources and rare archival material which provided vital insight into the mind and the heart of Su-un and his religious odyssey.

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