

# Therapeutic Religion:

**Focused on Two S. Korean Meditation Groups,  
*Maum Suryon and Dongsasup***

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## **I. What is “therapeutic religion”?**

The term is coined by Pamela Leong (sociologist), meaning “a hybrid form of Religion that combines religion and therapy in relatively equal doses.

**OR** “new type of religion” which stresses the change of consciousness or “mind healing” for realizing a better life, using diverse psychotherapeutic techniques.

This type of religion is pervasive in New Age i.e. un-institutionalized religious sector and occasionally in new religions (ex. Church of Scientology).

## **II. Socio-cultural Background of the emergence and spread of therapeutic religions in S. Korea**

- Influence of western alternative/complementary psychology or psychotherapy: Transpersonal psychology, NLP(Neuro-Linguistic Programming), Mindfulness or MBSR(Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction), etc.
- Introduction of western New Age together with diverse meditations and self-training/growing methods of foreign origin.



➤ “Turn to the Self” since “IMF(International Monetary Fund) Crisis”, 1977: consolidation of neo-liberal economic system => the growth of self-religion, self-spirituality, self-therapy.

➤ Meditation boom, Wellbeing boom, Healing boom:

- Meditation boom: 1990s. esp. ‘*ki*-cultivation’(氣修鍊) became popular and rapidly commercialized.
- Wellbeing boom: beginning and mid 2000s, the period of economic stabilization; striving to enhance the quality of life, rather focused on physical health.
- Healing boom: from 2008(financial crisis) till today, the period of economic downturn; increasing unemployment rate, esp. among young people – increasing needs of mind/soul healing => ‘healing industry’, ‘mind industry’ ‘healing market’ etc.

➤ Popularity of Avatar Course (introduced in the country in 1993):

- A western self-development program, designed for attaining its goal in a fast and systematic way, combining traditional meditation and (pseudo) psychotherapy.  
=> impetus to the expansion or appearance of similar local groups.

The most successful local groups of this sort: *Dongsasup*(f 1980) and *Maum Suryon* or *Maum Meditation* (f 1996).

## II. Korean Buddhism and Western Alternative/Complementary Psychotherapy

K. Buddhism: since 2000, very active in integrating modern therapeutic/counseling methods into their “care of soul” or “mind healing” programs.

Many factors:

- the expansion of “mind healing industry”
- the popularity of religious/spiritual therapies in the West, which apply Buddhist teaching and/or meditation techniques into their therapies (ex. Mindfulness meditation).
- Urge to find out new territory of activities in the face of decreasing number of Buddhists incl. clerics.

*Jogye-jong*(曹溪宗), the biggest Korean Buddhist order(school) in the forefront of this movement. Buddhist therapy/counseling as a new task of K. Buddhism for adapting themselves to modern society as well as for expanding their influence on a continuing base.

“Buddhist meditation”(禪) in particular undergoes a big change in term of its new (therapeutically) function as well as its contents.



Even *Ganhwa-seon*(看話禪) is no exception, which defines the identity of the *Jogye-order* as a “meditation school”(禪宗). To maximize its healing effects therapeutic methods are applied.

Use of meditation as a tool for psychotherapy => “meditation healing”, “Zen Therapy”(禪治療).

To secure a share of “(mind) healing Industry” K. Buddhism has built a broader infrastructure: research institutes, academic associations, special educational institutions etc. These organizations encompass researching, developing and disseminating Buddhist therapy/counseling programs as well as training and certifying “meditation (healing/counseling) teachers”(冥想指導者)

A series of institutions were established, exclusively to teach and research Buddhist psychotherapy and counseling.

- *Seoul Graduate School of Buddhism* (f 2002),
- *Nungin Graduate School of Buddhism* (f 2014),
- *Buddhist Counseling Graduate School* (f 2015, affiliated with the Bureau of Missionary Activities of the *Jogye Order*), etc.

### III. Meditation Groups Outside of Institutional Religions

Two large-scale Korean meditation groups that integrate (pseudo-)therapeutic method into their training programs.

(1) *Maum Suryon* (or *Maum Meditation*), f 1996 by Woo Myong (b 1952)

A global meditation group, managing 220 local meditation centers as well as 100 centers in 41 countries overseas. Recently, entangled in “cult controversy” in West.

*Maum Meditation* = “Subtraction Meditation”: designed to clean the human mind.

The underlying theory of *Maum Meditation*:

“The human mind is an accumulation of pictures that are stored within our mind/consciousness and body. Pictures are taken by “the 5-senses camera” (the eyes, ears, nose, mouth and body). These stored pictures dictate our thoughts, emotions, desires, behaviors and health. We unknowingly live inside them thinking them to be real, although they are mere illusions. The reason we are unsatisfied with our lives and we feel our lives are meaningless, is we do not live in the real world but in the false world we have each made.”

“The way to move from the false, illusory world of our mind to the Truth is by discarding the images that we have accumulated since birth.”



## The Methods to Discard False Minds

7 levels of  
Subtraction  
Meditation



By covering 7 levels  
of meditation  
your false minds or  
false self can be  
completely  
eliminated.



Level 1 : Throwing away remembered thoughts

(in the level one knows the Universe is one's self)

Level 2 : Throwing away images of self and relationships

(in the level one knows there are no [false] minds)

Level 3 : Throwing away my body

(in the level one knows the universe exists within one's self)

Level 4 : Throwing away my body and the universe

(in the level one knows the original soul and spirit)

Level 5 : Throwing away my body and the universe

(in the level one knows the original Soul and Spirit  
and the world of the original Soul and Spirit)

Level 6: Throwing away one's self and becoming the universe

(The level of becoming the original Soul and Spirit)

Level 7 : Throwing away the illusionary world and the self that is living in that

Level 8: ~~Throwing away everything, being resurrected as Truth and living a life of Truth~~



## Intensive courses at the main center of *Maum Meditation*

1. level	2. level	3. level	4. level	5.~7. level
1 week	1~2 weeks	2~3 weeks	more than 6 weeks	2~3 weeks

Fixed fee in each level (less than \$200 per week)

\* At (220) local centers: 1 week -> 1 month)







Main center of *Maum Meditation*  
(*Nonsan-city, Province of Ch'ungchung-namdo*)



(2) *Dongsasup*, f 1980 by Yong Ta (b. 1940)

*Dongsasup*(同事攝) is one of “Four Bodhisattvas’ Way to lead sentient beings to liberation”(四攝法). *Dongsasup* means amicable association, or unification of the mind of self and others according to their capability, for the purpose of embracing them all.

*Dongsasup* has developed from T group workshop in 1980 which was initiated by Yong Ta (a Kor. Buddhist Monk) on the basis of ‘encounter group’ theory of Carol Rogers(1902~1987), a leading figure of humanistic psychology.

Founder: Yong Ta(龍陀)



Yong Ta developed a “human development program” with 6 large stages.

1. The pure encounter stage.
2. The organizing stage.
3. The theorization stage.
4. The mind control stage #1 (the theories of "filter" and "purification of filter")
5. The mind control stage #2 (realization of self-nature)
6. The final arrangement stage of the five major Principles

- (1) The first unorganized "primary encounter" stage program is composed of the idea of letting the participants do whatever they wish to do except for violence.
- (2) The second "the organizing stage" is to review the problems of the first stage to establish its structure.
- (3) The third "the theory stage" is to study the discipline and theory of the fourth stage of "sharing the mind with others."
- (4) The fourth stage of "the mind control #1" is to discern the three poisons of anger, greed, and ignorance in the minds of people to purify them.
- (5) The fifth stage of "the mind control #2" of singing the brilliance of the sun is to realize our original pure self-nature to attain unobstructed complete emancipation.
- (6) The final arrangement stage of the foregoing five stages is to classify the virtue and merits of the five stages to true identity, great aspiration or vow, mind cultivation, harmony, charity or benevolence, and then further theorize them to put into action in the actual daily life.



Now *Dongsasup* offers 4 courses at the main center.

Primary course	intermediate course	higher course	leadership course
5 nights 6 days	4 nights 5 days	4 nights 5 days	18 x monthly 1 nights 2 days

Acc. to *Dongsasup* their programs make people learn themselves how to live happily.

*Dongsasup* runs a main center (community), “Happy Village *Dongsasup*” in *Hamyang*, in the Province *Gyongsang-namdo* as well as a local center in Seoul.

<https://youtu.be/C55Gs575j8g>

## IV. Summing-Up.

The number of people is increasing who pursue self-development or spiritual growth as well as perfect control of their environment with help of the modern “scared technic”, namely, psychotherapy. It means more and more people give credit to psychotherapy as a reliable scientific method which is supposed to bring them visible effects step-by-step but fast.

In comparison, traditional religions demand long-term commitment as an exchange for uncertain salvation. It means the involvement in traditional religions could be an activity of high risk and low return. The more people experience the feeling of uncertainty in late-modern society, the more infallible methods are needed to manage the uncertainty. As a result, the boundary between religion(spirituality) and psychotherapy has become **fluid**.