

The Interdependence Ideology Meets the Sharing Economy in Our Community

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The ideal of "One Family under God," for we Unificationists, can be quickly realized, at least technically, through adopting principles of the "Sharing Economy."

The Sharing Economy is a platform-based economy by which people can enjoy economic benefits by sharing idle resources which we possess and operate every day, like a car, a vacant room, etc.



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I clearly recall Rev. Moon saying in a speech, "You don't need to worry about where to stay when you go abroad because Unification Church members are everywhere. You can simply stay at their home or the local church, where you will be served a decent meal and given a bed. You may feel like you're at home."

This is what Rev. Moon described as a dreamlike scene that we would enjoy. If Father had been attended by high-level entrepreneurs at that time, the Unification Church [UC] might have been the first mover to operate a platform like Airbnb. Actually, his foresight has come true already in this era.

The founders of Airbnb, an enterprise of the so-called Sharing Economy, actually started its business with only three air beds, which had long laid idle in a closet, and providing breakfast in their rented apartment in New York. The company grew rapidly within a very short time. It's because there is plenty of demand out there. There are so many who prefer a home-like accommodation rather than a commercial hotel.

Many scholars in our UC community contend we don't have enough concrete examples to show society other than big events full of banner slogans derived from our teachings. I heard a story about African scholars last year who were amazed by the teachings of our church, the ideology of Interdependence, Mutual Prosperity and Universal Values. Then they asked about actual examples to see from our activities, but unfortunately nothing but the slogan was again presented at that time. We had very little to show them as a proof of our ideal. Since then, I've continued thinking of the significance of the trial and experiment of our ideals into substance.

I think the Sharing Economy is best one we can try to put into practice right away because it pursues something similar to the values found in the teachings of our church. The philosophy of the Sharing Economy is very simple: to save the world by rediscovering and sharing limited resources. Statistics show that the earth grows enough grain to feed the entire world. There should be no one who starves or lives in poverty. It's also shocking to hear that 3.5 billion people, half the world's population, live on less than \$2 a day. Most of them suffer from severe lack of proper resources.

The Interdependence Ideology teaches the ideal of economic value by which human beings share the resources available on the earth as family members. Children used to claim their parents' property as theirs by saying "our car," "our house," and so on. None of them directly contributed to acquiring it, but it's because children may share property their parents have purchased or rented. Parents usually do not charge rent or a usage fee to their children. Children are heirs as human beings before Heavenly Parent.

Likewise, all the earth's resources are supposed to be shared together. No human being ever contributed to creating nature, the earth and the universe. They are just a given. At least, there should be no single person who starves or suffers from famine. But the reality is not the case.

The Sharing Economy provides us with a very effective tool to try to implement right away. Through the tool, the platform, all UC members can share their idle resources, things we don't use that much and which sometimes go to waste because of lack of use. But if those idle resources are shared with one another we can save the world.

Most founders of Sharing Economy companies, like online ride-sharing firms Uber or Lyft, claim that a car we drive every day actually spends most of its time parked on the street without doing anything but consuming precious space their entire lifetimes. We drive our cars daily only for two to three hours on average. So, most of the day, about 20-21 hours, they are idle. There are many examples of idleness, and thus wasted, resources.

Sharing Economy companies encourage each owner of an idle room or space to share it with one's neighbors who live in another corner of the globe. Any major sporting event like the Wimbledon tennis tournament or the Olympics can verify that benefit. It has long been argued that the venues for such big sporting events are underutilized after the events they host.

These days hosting cities hesitate to build all the required stadiums, arenas and other venues. Also, adequate accommodations are a major issue. A city can encourage the construction of new hotels, but the problem of under-utilization appears right after the big event. Most newly-constructed facilities quickly become dinosaurs that consume a lot of resources. Airbnb has served successfully the short-term demand of accommodation by operating a network of willing lenders and users based on existing households. It also shows that a room in a particular house has been unused for a long time.

What if we operated a tentative Hyo Jeong platform of the Sharing Economy which connects all kinds of supply and demand among UC members in our communities? Chung Pyung is, in particular, for all UC members a pilgrimage site, like Mecca in Saudi Arabia, where more than six million Muslims visit each year; or Lumbini in Nepal for Buddhist pilgrims. Chung Pyung, or the Cheonwon Complex, especially attracts so many visitors for both Foundation Day and Seonghwa Day each year. Existing residential facilities have accommodated most visitors to date, but they will soon exceed capacity.

Currently there's a plan to build a hotel, but it may not be large enough to accommodate all expected visitors. But, constructing more accommodations may cost a lot because these buildings remain empty the rest of the year, a waste of resources. Another way to overcome this overcapacity issue may be to let outsiders accommodate our visitors to make some income. But, this doesn't seem like a good solution either. Therefore, I suggest creating a platform similar to Airbnb or Uber.

Of course, any ideal has its flip side. Some regular taxi drivers in New York City and in South Korea have strongly protested because of competitors like Uber and Lyft. Though Uber was first introduced as a Sharing Economy company, it became another normal enterprise that seeks profit. Many economists point out that Uber is no longer part of the Sharing Economy as it has focused more on profit and less on benefit. They don't share their profits specifically with those affected taxi drivers. Uber is classified as another kind of taxi service and so it has invaded the domain of the existing taxi industry. As result, some weaker taxi businesses cannot but face despair. It's not really what many people, who were amazed by the emergence of the Sharing Economy while observing many practitioners like Airbnb and Uber, had expected.

Also they are supposed to start the enterprise from existing properties and talents but in some countries like China, businessmen purchased or created brand new facilities to operate under the banner of the Sharing Economy. But they were not really examples of the Sharing Economy, but more like typical rental businesses. So, many criticized that phenomenon as a waste of limited resources. You may have seen on the Internet or television a pile of discarded rental bicycles like a grave marker on many street corners of China.

Another problem, which is more significant, is alienating those who have low reference levels. The platform creates trust with the tools of a cross-evaluation system. Not only the user evaluates the room or the car, but also the lessor of the car or the room can evaluate the temporary user. Even an existing social network like Facebook is used to strengthen the level of mutual trust. But, once a person gains a series of poor ratings from the users of the platform, he or she gets alienated from the public and hardly gets back on the platform.

I see all these problems from profit generation activities. Originally, we don't share an empty room for profit. We are not hoteliers. We don't offer a ride for the monetary reward but for real joy. We shouldn't charge on any offer. But technically in order to facilitate these voluntary activities of resource-sharing, a certain benefit needs to be endowed like providing credit or mileage. So, any user of that voluntary offer can give credit rewards to the provider at the end of the service. Once those credits reach a certain point, the recipients can redeem them for other offers or services within that platform. In order to prevent it from

being used as pseudo-money, we could put a warranty period as a cap.



One Minute Spotlight: Cheongshim Village in the Hyojeong Cheonwon.

After a certain period of time, it restarts. Then, the joy from providing such offers will remain with us. It will work during any big event. A time limit could also be put with a week for the special occasion. All kinds of offers and services would be abundant and many people would enjoy such benefits. And then after the event in a week, it returns to normal life. In this case, the time limit could be resumed to a month or so. Or, the platform operator could reward with a gift in exchange for certain mileage at the end of year; or, it could be transformed into some contribution as a donation. And, a committee should be formed to manage all the operations.

Finally, we've gathered up to build the kingdom on earth. Somewhere on earth, some kind of a community where our members practice their values in daily life should appear -- especially because Cheon Il Guk has been proclaimed. The Cheonwon Complex is the right place to begin to implement such an ideal. The Sharing Economy and its platforms can be useful tools for us to adapt as an experiment.

The Divine Principle says the satanic system precedes the heavenly system, which should be realized as a socialistic society centered on God. There's no reason not to adopt Sharing Economy principles and methods which are abundantly available as a predecessor social system, which we can experiment with in our community and fine tune as an economic practice of Cheon Il Guk, the ideal of our movement.

We've got to try out various social systems to focus on better community-building movements like social enterprises, cooperatives, and the Sharing Economy. Because we've been given the theological and philosophical foundation based on True Parent's teachings on universal family values, I'm sure we can overcome the downsides that such secular systems exhibit and successfully turn them into real examples so that the secular world clearly sees us as real practitioners of the ideal of "One Family Under God."

James 2:26 says, "As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead." We would be deemed dead people of faith if we don't show tangible and practical examples of an ideal of one family. Many critique us for using grandiose slogans but not showing as much in our actual lives.

These days my concern dwells on what we can pass on to our descendants besides books of truth such as like Divine Principle, Unification Thought, and True Parent's words, etc. I've become very preoccupied thinking about our members 100 years from now who will never have met True Parents, their original disciples, or members who physically served with our great teachers and were personally trained by them. Our descendants will best see us through what we've achieved, not so much by what we proclaimed as the truth.

We will have a big pilgrimage to Chung Pyung in February next year to celebrate the 100th anniversary of True Father's birth. Over 10,000 people will stay during that period in a small village. If we successfully operate a platform during that period, we can possibly lodge all of them without further investment in residential buildings to accommodate them all. We've got to start social experiments right away, one by one, to fill all the segments of our ideal world. Our clock is ticking.

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Photo at top: *Overview of the Cheonwon Complex in Gyeonggi-do, South Korea.*