

It is my great pleasure to write this introduction to the seventh issue of *Journal of Daesoon Thought and the Religions of East Asia* at the Center for the Study of World Religions (CSWR) at Harvard Divinity School. It is an honour to be a Research Fellow here for the 2024–2025 academic year. I get the opportunity to learn from all the wonderful academics who are PhD students, postdoctoral scholars, and researchers on the large projects the CSWR hosts like “Transcendence and Transformation” and “Thinking with Plants and Fungi.” Meeting North American colleagues, and colleagues from around the world (Italy, New Zealand, Iran, Iraq, and Argentina, among other countries) is an opportunity to discuss my engagements with new and innovative projects like *JDTREA*, and new religions more generally, which are not a primary focus in any of the current CSWR projects. This issue of *Journal of Daesoon Thought and the Religions of East Asia* is drawn from papers presented at the Daesoon Thought and the Religions of East Asia Conference on 25 June 2024. This was a well-attended and very enjoyable intellectual event, and I am delighted to introduce to you some excellent research from that conference.

This issue contains six articles, three of which concern aspects of Daesoon Jinrihoe and three of which examine broader topics in East Asian religions. The first article is Huang Pochi’s (Graduate Institute of Asian Humanities, Huaan University) “Ethnic Conflict and *Haewon-sangsaeng*.” This is a far-reaching study that addresses ethnic conflicts in the contemporary world, and considers two different methods to approach this problem; the non-violent (*ahimsā*) approach of Mahatma Gandhi and the Daesoon Jinrihoe ideal of *Haewon-sangsaeng* (the Resolution of Grievances for Mutual Beneficence). Various violent wars, including the Rwandan genocide and the Tamil-Sinhala conflict in Sri Lanka are situated in contemporary social scientific methodology, and tested against Gandhi’s non-violence and Daesoon Thought’s resolution of grievances model, generating interesting new perspectives.

The second research article is by Lee Jeeyoung and Lee Gyungwon, “The Sublime Beauty of Divine Manifestation: An Aesthetic Interpretation of *Cheonji Gonga* in Daesoon Thought.” This is an original contribution, given that it commences with the theoretical position that aesthetics is an under-utilised model for the study of religion, and because it champions the idea that beauty (of principal, ethics, theological excellence, and generally operating in the world) is an intrinsic part of the communication of a new religious and spiritual message to the world.

The third article is Mohammad Jahangir Alam’s “The Spiritual Nexus: Daesoon Jinrihoe and Its Diverse Connections to World Religions.” This is a particularly

ambitious study that works to link Daesoon Jinrihoe (as a Korean new religion) to both ancient Korean traditions and the broader religious landscape of the world. This is an innovative argument, represented in recent scholarship by Olav Hammer and Karen Swartz-Hammer's *New Religious Movements and Comparative Religion* (Cambridge Elements, 2024), which argues that as new religions are religions, they should be studied in the same fashion as all religions and not treated as a special case.

The next contribution is Livia Kohn (Professor Emerita, Boston University) with "Actualizing Interconnectedness: Dao, World, and Humanity," a piece of research that considers climate change and other pressing global disasters. Kohn examines Rachel Carson's pioneering *Silent Spring* (1962) and subsequent developments in ecofeminism and biocentricism. Core issues that Kohn examines are associated with the Daoist ideas of non-interference and non-action; however, her conclusions are not only directed towards personal and communal responsibility, but have impact that has relevance beyond the East Asian sphere.

The next article is Thomas Michael (Beijing Normal University), discussing "Examining Erotic Images and Features of Chinese Shamanism in the Nine Songs of the Songs of the South." This research area, the study of early Chinese shamanic texts, in particular from a sex and gender perspective, is a new field for *JDTREA* to engage with, and opens up discussions around the gendering of the cosmos and the engagement of humans with the divine in East Asian societies.

I am very proud that the sixth contribution in this issue is my own research, "Nineteenth Century Chinese Temples in Australia: History, Religion and Heritagisation." I am excited to be able to bring my island continent of Australia into relationship with East Asian culture in this new religious studies journal. The connections between Australia and China may date as far back as to the Han Dynasty, but the history I present dates only from the nineteenth century, when the gold rush attracted single Chinese men from Guangdong, who hoped to make their fortune, but often stayed in marginal communities that changed the cultural landscape of Australia forever. The precious remaining temples that survive in the twenty-first century are discussed in the context of heritage and multicultural history.

The journal issue is completed by reviews of Edward Irons (The Hong Kong Institute for Culture, Commerce and Religion) supplied by the Review Editor, Professor Holly Folk (Western Washington University). As ever, gratitude is due to Bae Kyuhan, Lee Gyungwon, Jason Greenberger, and Choi Wonhyuk from Daejin University, and to the authors and referees who made this issue happen. It is a pleasure to start the fourth volume of *JDTREA*, and I hope that this issue will be received positively by scholars and

students with many different research interests in the study of religion.

**Carole M. Cusack**

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