Cosmology in Daesoon Jinrihoe and Caodaism: New Religious Ontology or Age-old Literary Motifs Applied in New Religions?

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JDTREA 2025,4(2): 79–103

Original Articles

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Journal of Daesoon Thought and the Religions of East Asia Vol. 4. Issue 2 (March 2025): 79–103

https://doi.org/10.25050/JDTREA.2025.4.2.79

Day of submission: 2025.01.18.
Completion of review: 2025.02.22.
Final decision for acceptance: 2025.03.20.

P-ISSN: 2799-3949
E-ISSN: 2799-4252

Abstract

This study explores the formation of mythical narratives surrounding the lives of the religious founders of Daesoon Jinrihoe and Caodaism. It provides a detailed analysis of the miraculous elements, or in other words, the hagiographies, of figures such as Kang, Jo, and Park (from Daesoon Jinrihoe), as well as the founders of Caodaism. From a cultural anthropological perspective, this study employs the theories of collective memory and invented tradition to demonstrate that the success of these two major religions in East Asia lies in their effective use of familiar folkloric and classical literary motifs within East Asian culture. On this basis, they have successfully constructed collective memories. In other words, the founders of Daesoon Jinrihoe and Caodaism have created traditions through the use of classical East Asian motifs, thereby building a familiar memory space where individuals can reflect upon their own origins. Practically, this study contributes to further exploration of the symbols and mythical stories associated with the two new religions of Vietnam and Korea. Theoretically, it proposes the usefulness and feasibility of cultural studies, particularly cultural anthropology, as an approach to studying new religious movements, at least within the context of East Asia.

Keywords: cultural anthropology; Daesoon Jinrihoe; Caodaism; Vietnamese folk motifs; Korean folk motifs

Introduction

New religious movements in East Asia, in this case, Daesoon Jinrihoe and Caodaism, are often studied and evaluated from political and social perspectives due to historical and geopolitical contexts. It is clear that any religious phenomenon cannot easily escape these influences. Historical, political, cultural, and social changes serve as anchors that help researchers position their subjects and offer opportunities to explore them from multiple angles, laying the foundation for applying theoretical frameworks that can further shape our understanding of new religious movements in East Asia (in this case, Daesoon Jinrihoe in the Korean context and Caodaism in the Vietnamese context). This study does not deviate from this aspiration. However, it is also hoped that these geopolitical anchors will not become a hindrance and that researchers will instead be able to continue expanding their observations and passion for new religious movements in East Asia. In other words, novel forms of research should be pursued to transcend the obvious conclusions that are typically derived from past research based heavily upon the political-historical context.

In this spirit and building on the work of previous studies, outsiders—those not well-versed in the field of religious studies—seek to answer very fundamental questions for any type of subject or phenomenon: why and how? Specifically, why and how have Daesoon Jinrihoe and Caodaism attracted such a significant following within their communities? In this study, the undeniable answer that their appeal is largely due to the irresistible charisma of religious leaders and their organizational management skills (Baker 2020, xiii)[1] is temporarily set aside. Instead, from a cultural studies perspective, an alternative hypothesis can be posited that both Daesoon Jinrihoe and Caodaism have successfully established a collective memory within their religious communities—a space where every individual feels a sense of familiarity and a strong feeling of belonging. In this space, individuals recognize their origins and identify with the movement. This collective memory has allowed Daesoon Jinrihoe and Caodaism to cultivate a substantial number of faithful followers. The next question, then, is how was this collective memory created, and what elements contributed to making so many individuals feel a deep sense of belonging and commitment to these movements?

To answer this question in detail, which is also the main task of this study, two important theories: the theory of "invented tradition" proposed by Eric Hobsbawm and the theory of "collective memory" proposed by Maurice Halbwachs are employed to explain how Daesoon Jinrihoe and Caodaism created and established traditions within their new religions. The preliminary answer is that both Daesoon Jinrihoe and Caodaism have successfully utilized familiar classical folkloric motifs to construct their cosmologies and create hagiographies with mystical and mysterious qualities surrounding their religious founders and leaders. These motifs allow individuals to experience a sense of familiarity while also feeling the freshness of a future that promises hope and brightness in the earthly realm. These traditional motifs, on one hand, stem from the local color of

the region where they originated—closely tied to geography—and on the other hand, carry a national or ethnic hue that connects to historical destiny.

Regarding the scope of the study, this research examines the origins and structure of cosmology and the life stories of the religious founders of Daesoon Jinrihoe and Caodaism. These topics align with the concepts of cosmology and hagiography in Western theological traditions.

In the field of religious studies, cosmology and hagiography are related but distinct areas of research. Cosmology focuses on views regarding the origin, structure, and purpose of the universe from a theological perspective. It often relates to creation myths, concepts of heaven and hell, and the ways in which the universe operates under divine control or presence. For example, in Christianity, the Book of Genesis describes how God created the world in six days. Hagiography is the genre of literature that records the life, miracles, and virtues of saints, those considered moral exemplars or canonized in religious traditions. Notable examples include the lives of Saint Francis of Assisi and Saint Teresa of Avila in Catholicism. While cosmology does not include hagiography, there are instances where the two intersect. For example, some relics or stories of saints may serve to explain part of a religion's cosmology, particularly when they involve miracles or divine intervention in the world. However, as previously mentioned, both terms are closely tied to Western theological traditions. The decision to separate cosmology and hagiography in this study is somewhat reluctant, but it is also difficult to disregard these terms. Therefore, in the title of this study, the term "cosmology" has been chosen, and within the context of this research, it is meant to encompass the lives of the founders and leaders of Daesoon Jinrihoe and Caodaism.

In the first section of this study, the term "motif" is defined and how it is understood within this study is explained—emphasizing that, in this study, "motif" is considered a vocabulary item within traditional cultural heritage, rather than an object of focus for any particular scientific discipline. Next, representative motifs within the cultures of Vietnam and Korea—the home countries of Daesoon Jinrihoe and Caodaism, respectively will be examined. In the third section, the appearance of miraculous motifs in official religious texts will be compared. The presence or absence of specific motifs is significant and plays an important role in attracting followers. Finally, in Section 4, some differences in the application of motifs in the religious texts of Daesoon Jinrihoe and Caodaism will be compared and analyzed.

Regarding sources, in addition to essential religious texts, the book *Myths and Legends from Korea: An Annotated Compendium of Ancient and Modern Materials* (2000) by James H. Grayson will be used as a primary resource for discussions related to Korean folk motifs.

Finally, although this study focuses on the two religions Daesoon Jinrihoe and Caodaism, it is not strictly a comparative study, even though comparative analysis is present throughout. The research methods applied in this study include participant observation, documentary research and synthesis, and logical analysis and synthesis.

In this study, two key theories: Eric Hobsbawm's theory of invented tradition (1983) and Maurice Halbwachs' theory of collective memory (1992) are applied to provide the theoretical foundation for examining the formation and development of new religions like Daesoon Jinrihoe and Caodaism, as well as how they apply classical literary motifs in their religious systems.

From a theoretical perspective, Hobsbawm's concept of invented tradition refers to the creation of new traditions during periods of social change. When old traditions become ineffective or are abandoned, or when certain groups attempt to break away from the past, new traditions are "invented" to link to history while also creating continuity and stability in society. These traditions are not a natural continuation of the past but are a creative process that uses classical materials to build new values to meet the needs of modern society (Hobsbawm 1983, 6). Therefore, the application of classical literary motifs in new religions like Daesoon Jinrihoe and Caodaism can be understood as part of this process, where new religions attempt to establish a modern religious foundation by "inventing" traditions tied to old values.

Moreover, Maurice Halbwachs' theory of collective memory shows that memory is not just an individual recollection but is heavily influenced by social frameworks and relationships between individuals in a community. Halbwachs argues that collective memory is formed through interactions among individuals in a group, aimed at protecting and maintaining connections between generations within a community (Halbwachs 1992, 48). In the context of studying new religions, the concept of collective memory can explain how followers of Daesoon Jinrihoe and Caodaism have created new traditions, not merely as nostalgic recollections of the past but as a process of constructing a new "memory" within their communities—one that is social, political, and cultural. These religions may be restructuring their own history and cultural memory by applying classical motifs, not only to preserve cultural continuity but also to establish a foundation for new beliefs and value systems.

Thus, in the study of cosmology in Daesoon Jinrihoe and Caodaism, both theories will be applied to analyze the development of these religions. Are these movements simply applying classical literary motifs, or is this part of a religious creation process in a changing society? These questions will help clarify how new religions build and maintain connections between the past and present while forming entirely new religious structures that still retain the imprint of traditional cultural values.

Understanding Motif, Motif in Folklore, and its Role in Constructing Collective Memory

> A motif, in its broadest sense, is a conventional, artistic symbol of a plot, typically repeated to record impressions of reality that are particularly strong, important, and reiterated many times. It is the simplest narrative unit, represented through

> images, and can also be considered an elementary, generalized pattern characterized by uniformity and similarity (Grayson 2000, 9).

In the field of folklore, Stith Thompson proposed the understanding that "A motif is the smallest element in a tale having a power to persist in tradition. In order to have this power, it must have something unusual and striking about it" (Thomson, 1977, 415). Stith Thompson also created a toolkit to help researchers identify, compare, and classify similar elements in folk tales from different cultures, called *The Motif-Index of Folk-Literature*. This tool, along with the *Aarne—Thompson—Uther Index* (ATU), has become a primary tool for studying folklore in general and motifs in particular.

James Grayson argued that the term "motif" is somewhat cumbersome and suggested the term "*narrative motif*" as a more suitable expression to reflect the common understanding of the term "motif." A concise and clearer definition would be: "Narrative motifs may be gods, spirits, heroes, ordinary people, animals, or even inanimate objects" (Grayson 2000, 9).

Grayson also emphasized that oral folklore is a crucial resource for studying the ideas, beliefs, and symbols of both ancient and contemporary peoples. Through the stories they tell and repeat, listeners acquire ideas, concepts, and beliefs that reflect and create a unique spirit and morality characteristic of the society of that time (Grayson 2000, 4). While a symbol may appear once in literature to signify an idea or emotion, a motif is an element or idea that recurs throughout the work. Motifs have a close relationship with themes but play a supportive role rather than being the theme itself. It is in this repetition that the power and impact of the motif are realized. In fact, a motif can be expressed through a set of related symbols.

It is evident that the professional handling of motifs is not the central focus of this section. Instead, focus will be directed at the role and value of folklore in general, and motifs specifically. William R. Bascom, in *The Four Functions of Folklore,* outlines four functions that any folk tale can serve for its audience, at least one of the following (Bascom 1954, 333–335)

> 1.To entertain the listener by providing a means of escape from the oppressive conditions of a specific culture or time period through imagination.
> 2.To confirm the values of the listener's culture, as well as its rituals and institutions.
> 3.To educate the listener—offering knowledge related to a specific topic, or providing an explanation of linguistic or causal aspects of something within the listener's culture or the surrounding physical universe.
> 4.To teach the listener how to maintain adherence to established behavioral models and ideals within the community.

In fact, folk materials enable appear to enable quick recognition and connection for wide audiences across various religious and cultural backgrounds. This is because all

ancient cultures across the world have had these ideas, which have emerged in one form or another. Folk materials and motifs not only help preserve history but also promote the maintenance of cultural values across generations. Through oral transmission and the spreading of cultural forms, these values live on in the community, passed down from one generation to the next. Folk tales help people better understand the past, while also binding them to the values of the present and future. Folk materials further strengthen national pride, as seen in stories about dragons in Vietnam or Dangun in Korea, creating a shared memory of the sacred and powerful origins of the nation. These motifs not only connect the past with the present but also foster unity, instilling a shared sense that each person carries a part of the nation's history within them.

Folk materials include legends, myths, folk songs, proverbs, folk tales, and other forms of oral art. These materials are a means for people in the community to construct an image of national identity and transmit cultural, historical, and ethical values across generations. They not only preserve history and tradition but also serve as a bridge between the past and the present, linking generations within the community. In both Vietnamese and Korean cultures, these elements play a crucial role in embedding shared national values, helping to connect the past with the present, and fostering unity between generations, thereby building a durable collective memory that connects people. However, these shared values are not the only expectations that the leaders of Caodaism and Daesoon Jinrihoe have.

At the same time, the religious leaders of Caodaism and Daesoon Jinrihoe must address both the survival of the nation in the face of colonialism and the preservation of their religious community's identity. Therefore, the stories told about the gods, religious leaders, and their cosmology must, on one hand, address the expectations for the historical prospects the nation and people face at the time, which this article temporarily calls the "national destiny." On the other hand, these stories must demonstrate superiority, resolve, and create a religious tradition that satisfies the expectations of religious group identity in constructing a distinct religious identity for their community (compared to other religious groups). In other words, this is both a specific need and a general need.

For the Daesoon Jinrihoe religious community—a community with no recorded ethnic divisions and stability in social position (i.e., the common people)—the need for religious group identity is almost a subset of the first need, which is the need for national destiny. This is quite similar to what happened with the Caodaism religion due to geopolitical influences in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. However, unlike Daesoon Jinrihoe, which has ethnic homogeneity, Caodaism was established in a new land, literally, with a mix of ethnicities from the immigrant groups to southern Vietnam. The three main ethnic groups are Kinh (Vietnamese), Hoa (Chinese), and Khmer. These three ethnic groups, though different, shared the same fate—they were immigrants who left their homeland to settle in a new region. This shared experience not only bonded them in the turbulent historical context but also united them in their precarious social,

political, and cultural status. Therefore, one of the essential tasks and needs for the Caodaism community, besides the need for national destiny and religious group identity, is the need to establish their position—or more precisely, their political legitimacy, social legitimacy, and cultural legitimacy. Of these three forms of legitimacy, the need to build political legitimacy for their religious community is perhaps the most evident. In the following sections, this article will clarify these points further.

The Magical Motifs in the Lifecycle of Religious Founders

Caodaism, fully named Đại Đạo Tam Kỳ Phổ Độ (大道三期普度), was established in 1926 in Long Trung Hamlet, Long Thành Commune, Hoà Thành District, Tây Ninh Province, founded and developed primarily by officials, capitalists, landowners, and intellectuals, with its main development in the southern provinces and cities of Vietnam.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the philosophy of the Three Teachings (Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism) in Vietnam was on the decline, but the activities of the Minh Dao Five Branches group (Minh Sư, Minh Lý, Minh Đường, Minh Tân, Minh Thiện) flourished, contributing to the revival of the Three Teachings. At the same time, the Western Spiritualism movement gained momentum in Southern Vietnam with practices such as "spirit tables" similar to the Vietnamese tradition of spirit summoning and the "spirit writing" practice of the Minh Dao Five Branches group, leading to the "spirit writing" movement. In these spirit gatherings, two main groups formed Caodaism. The first group, led by Ngô Văn Chiêu, conducted spirit writings at temples, pagodas, and Buddhist halls following the traditional spirit writing practices of the Minh Dao Five Branches group. The second group, including Cao Quỳnh Cư, Cao Hoài Sang, and Phạm Công Tắc (the Cao - Phạm group), organized spirit table practices in the Western Spiritualism style. In 1926, the two spirit writing groups united to form Caodaism, with Ngô Văn Chiêu being appointed as the first Giáo Tông (Supreme Pope) of Caodaism.

In Vietnamese folklore, there is a recurring motif in which supernatural elements appear suddenly before the protagonist takes any action. This motif is reflected in Caodaism through the active role of divine forces, particularly "The Eye"(Thiên Nhãn), which manifested as a divine revelation, while the founder, Ngô Minh Chiêu, remained passive.

The key events in the founding of Caodaism lacked a proactive approach. One evening in 1921, while walking along the seashore in deep contemplation, he suddenly witnessed a distant vision of a serene and magnificent celestial realm—a pure and sacred paradise.

In the same year, 1921 (Canh Thân), as he sat in silent meditation at home, a radiant Eye suddenly appeared before him, shining with countless beams of light from afar. It moved closer and closer, until it gradually faded away. This detail is in stark contrast to the events surrounding Daesoon Jinri. The proactive nature of this religious spirit is clearly shown when the deity worshipped in Daesoon Jinrihoe, Sangje, only appears in response to a prayer: "Heaven and Earth in their current crisis can be repaired only by

Sangje."

When the path of Heavenly Dao (天道, 천도 *kr.*) and ethical norms finally collapsed, the chaotic situation was described as people losing their human values, and society became degenerate due to self-indulgence and lack of morality (Kim 2020, 73). Nature was devastated, with no hope remaining. Humans then challenged the powers of the gods. Their growing arrogance damaged the inherent goodness present in human minds. The new religion of Korea explains this spiritual condition by stating "the source of the Dao had been cut off". At this time, all the sages, deities, buddhas, and bodhisattvas from ancient times gathered together to seek a solution. However, the efforts of all the sages and deities were deemed futile, leading to a prayer to the supreme deity of the ninth heaven, with the words: "Heaven and Earth in their current crisis can be repaired only by Sangje". In response, Sangje descended to Cheongye Tower and carefully inspected the three realms: heaven, earth, and humanity. He then entered the icon of the "Golden Maitreya Buddha" at Geumsan Temple on Moak Mountain (母岳山, 모악산 *kr.*), where he remained for thirty years.

Nevertheless, in both cases, the role of magical elements plays a similar and relatively significant part in highlighting the key moment—the most important detail being the selection by supernatural entities and forces.

For Caodaism, "After Đức Ngô Minh Chiêu saw that Eye, during a religious gathering, the Old Immortal clearly declared his title as Ngọc Hoàng Thượng Đế (玉皇上帝, The Jade Emperor), also known as Cao Đài Tiên Ông Đại Bồ Tát Ma-ha-tát (高臺仙翁大菩薩摩訶薩), who descended to the world to expand the Great Dao of the Third Period [Tam Kỳ] and instructed him to draw a Holy Eye [also known as the Heavenly Eye], just as he had seen it, to be worshiped as a symbol of the new religion, the New True Religion. (Hội Thánh Truyền Giáo Cao Đài 1956) Thus, Đức Ngô Minh Chiêu became the first disciple of the Jade Emperor; he received the mission to spread this new religion on Earth.

While Caodaism did not include any further magical elements in its religious founding narrative, Daesoon Jinrihoe introduced a particularly striking motif: the petrifaction[2] scene—or more precisely, the "dwelling within the stone icon"—a motif common in cultures both Eastern and Western.

As mentioned earlier, in response to the world-saving prayer of deities and buddhas from various eras, Sangje descended to the Cheongye Tower in the region of Great Law in the West and carefully examined the three realms—heaven, earth, and humanity. Afterward, he resided within the statue[3] of the "Golden Maitreya Buddha" at Geumsan Temple on Moak Mountain where he remained for thirty years (Kim 2020, 71)

Stone is a fundamental feature of mountains (stone mountains), and mountains are considered sacred places, the spiritual connection between heaven and earth. Thus, stone can be a medium for conveying human desires to supernatural forces. Humans have used stone in magical practices to achieve goals such as good harvests, favorable weather, healthy crops, and prosperous families (Phan 2011, 11). Meanwhile, the motif

of dwelling within the stone icon in Korea symbolizes the accumulation of energy, a form of metamorphosis and rebirth. This motif reminds contemporary observers of a famous character in the classic Chinese novel *Journey to the West* by Wu Cheng'en, namely, the character Sun Wukong, the Great Sage Equal to Heaven. The novel describes Wukong as having been born from a stone on the East Sea, the Flower-Fruit Mountain. This stone absorbed the essence of the universe and the spiritual energy of heaven and earth. The sense of being born from stone, or transforming into stone to be reborn, always conveys an awareness of boundless power and the mystical mysteries hidden within for the listener.

The motif of dwelling within the stone icon is a familiar one, but the difference in Daesoon Jinrihoe lies in the subsequent developments, which are what make it particularly noteworthy. Typically, there would need to be an event or significant occurrence to conclude the process of dwelling within the stone icon. However, this is not what happened in the case of Daesoon Jinrihoe. The process simply ended after thirty years without any external influence or turning point. In other words, it was a process of self-cultivation and refinement. At this point, it may be difficult to imagine for those accustomed to Western culture, but for true East Asian inhabitants, it is easier to picture the image of sages or hermits who have cultivated themselves over decades. This naturally leads us to the famous concept of Self-Cultivation in Neo-Confucianism. This process of cultivation is also visually represented. (See Figure 1)

Figure 1. Kang Performing Self-Cultivation
(Source: AADDJ, 2018, p.44)

This concept further proves the place of Daesoon Jinrihoe's cosmology, as this religion promises that humans will gradually transcend the need for external divine intervention. Not only does it agree with Buddhism and Confucianism that humans can

become like gods through their own efforts, but it also teaches that when the era of endless conflict ends, humans will attain divine qualities, reducing their dependence on deities. This concept is linked to the ethical belief that a wise person can become a god in Confucianism. Symbolically, Maitreya (Buddha of the Future) in Buddhism is often seen as the Buddha of hope, compassion, and salvation, and the belief that Sangje's presence was manifested within this icon could be a promising representation of a commitment to the days to come. This manifestation does not involve sudden excitement but is reasonable and highly compatible with Korean and East Asian cultural traditions.

In Vietnam, the motif of petrification holds a significant influence throughout various regions and among the different ethnic communities. However, the most famous example is "Hòn Vọng Phu," or the Stone Waiting for the Husband to Return. The story of a woman transforming into stone while waiting for her husband, emphasizing her loyalty and unwavering love, is widely known within the Kinh community (the dominant ethnic group in Vietnam). Other ethnic minorities in Vietnam also have variations of the petrification story. Overall, the motifs of petrification in Vietnam revolve around three main meanings: curse and punishment, eternity and immortality (as in the case of the "Hòn Vọng Phu" story mentioned), and the idea of immortality, as stone is considered an indestructible material over long periods of time. Lastly, petrification is often seen as a symbol of pain and separation. However, most petrification motifs in Vietnam focus more on human emotions rather than divine intervention or supernatural forces.

That said, this motif does not appear in the records of Caodaism, despite the religious prospects of using petrification motifs being entirely plausible in Vietnam. To answer this question, we need to return to the Southern region of Vietnam, where Caodaism was founded and developed—an area that is geographically unfamiliar with rocky terrains. In other words, the Caodaism community, although Vietnamese, is not accustomed to rocky landscapes, making the concept of stone almost foreign.

Each religion interprets mystical elements in its own way. In contrast to Caodaism's tendency to exercise restraint in the use of supernatural elements, Daesoon Jinrihoe strongly emphasizes divine intervention, miraculous birth narratives, and omens to reinforce the legitimacy of its spiritual leaders.

The use of mystical elements continues in the prophetic dream of the mother of a woman with the surname Kwon, who married into the Kang family in Jeolla province. One day, Kang's mother dreamt that the northern and southern skies split apart, and a huge ball of fire enveloped her body, illuminating the entire world She then felt as though she was pregnant. After thirteen months of pregnancy, on 19 September 1871, the deity Sangje descended to earth in human form (Kim 2020, 74–75).

Such details are somewhat linked to the motif of the miraculous birth stories in various cultures, such as the story of Queen Maya dreaming of a white elephant with gleaming tusks entering her side, after which she gave birth to Prince Siddhārtha Gautama, the founder of Buddhism. Similarly, in the Han Wu historical records, Empress

Wang was pregnant for three years. When Emperor Jing was about to pass away, the empress dreamt of a divine being giving her the sun and saying, "Eat it." She then gave birth to the little prince Liu Zhi (劉彘), who later became Emperor Wu of Han.

And when Kang was born, two celestial maidens descended to the delivery room, which was filled with a sweet fragrance and mystical energy, as auspicious signs signaling the arrival of a deity on earth. The entire house was enveloped by a radiant energy that reached up to the sky (Kim 2020, 75).

This motif continued to be applied to Jo Jeongsan, the second leader of Daesoon Jinrihoe. It is said that a woman from the Min family in Yeoheung became pregnant after a brilliant light from the sky shone down upon her, and she gave birth to a boy. On 4 December 1895, during the Eulmi year, this boy grew up to become Doju, the founder of Mugeukdo, the predecessor of Daesoon Jinrihoe, who would inherit the task of reorganizing the universe by Sangje (Kim 2020, 97). However, in the case of the third leader, Park Wudang (朴牛堂, 1917–1996, 박우당 *kr.*), this motif was not used. According to our understanding, the reason no miraculous motif was applied is because there was a direct transfer of leadership between Jo and Park, witnessed by a large number of followers and supported by Jo's solid will. Therefore, no additional supernatural elements were needed to legitimize this succession.

Meanwhile, in Caodaism, miraculous elements are not entirely absent but manifest in a distinct form compared to other religious traditions. Unlike Daesoon Jinrihoe, which incorporates motifs such as miraculous birth narratives, Caodaism does not emphasize supernatural origins in the biographical accounts of its founders. This distinction can be attributed to the backgrounds of Caodaism's founders, most of whom were intellectuals with a Western education.

Ngô Văn Chiêu (1878–1932) and Lê Văn Trung (1876–1934), both key figures in the formation and development of Caodaism, came from intellectual backgrounds and were well-versed in both Eastern traditions and Western scientific knowledge. Ngô Văn Chiêu, the only son of a declining noble family in Huế, graduated from Chasseloup Laubat School and worked as a civil servant at the Southern Ministry of the Interior. He was known for his integrity, calm demeanor, and noble character. Lê Văn Trung, from a well-established family in Chợ Lớn, also graduated from Chasseloup Laubat School and served as a secretary at the Southern Governor's Office before becoming an elected representative at the Southern Administrative Council. Their exposure to rationalist and scientific perspectives likely influenced their approach to religious philosophy, leading to a more structured and systematic framework in the development of Caodaism.

However, it would be misleading to suggest that Caodaism lacks supernatural elements altogether. The religion's foundational doctrine, encapsulated in its full name *Đại Đạo Tam Kỳ Phổ Độ* (The Great Way of the Third Universal Salvation), explicitly asserts that its establishment represents the third major divine intervention in human history. This concept of divine intervention aligns with spirit writing (*cầu cơ, giáng bút*)—a fundamental practice within Caodaism—where communication with deities,

deceased cultural heroes, and even God was conducted through séances. From its early years, Caodaism recorded hundreds of such instances, reinforcing the presence of mystical and supernatural dimensions within the religion.

Contemporary studies in Vietnam have widely acknowledged that in the context of war, poverty, and colonial oppression, the people of Southern Vietnam (*Nam Kỳ*) were naturally inclined toward beliefs in supernatural forces such as luck, misfortune, divine intervention, and ancestral spirits. Given this cultural backdrop, it is unsurprising that Caodaism, emerging in this environment, integrates significant mystical elements. The critical distinction, however, lies in how these elements manifest. Unlike many other religious traditions where miraculous narratives often center on the founders themselves, the supernatural in Caodaism primarily emerges through divine communication rather than hagiographical accounts of its leaders' early lives.

Thus, rather than an outright absence of miraculous motifs, Caodaism presents a unique approach—one that does not emphasize supernatural origins of its founders but instead places miracles within the framework of divine revelation and spiritual guidance. This nuance is crucial in understanding the role of supernatural elements in Caodaism and how they differentiate it from other religious movements.

Motif of Sacred Beasts

The folk motifs of Vietnam and Korea share two common threads. The first thread is humanity, as the ancient consciousness of all the peoples of the world is fundamentally the same. The second thread is the civilization of *Huaxia* (華夏), as both Vietnam and Korea share the achievements of Chinese civilization, including philosophy, language, cultural institutions, education, state models, and, naturally, cultural symbols. Therefore, it is not surprising that there are similarities in folk cultural motifs.

Both Daesoon Jinrihoe and Caodaism utilize motifs of sacred beasts. In the process of integrating, exchanging, and adapting to the local cultures of Vietnam and Korea, these motifs have undergone certain modifications. However, fundamentally, the symbolic meanings of these sacred beasts have not undergone significant changes.

Throughout their process of integration, exchange, interaction, and transformation with the indigenous cultures of Vietnam and Korea, the *Four Holy Beasts* and *The Four Symbols* have undergone certain changes. However, fundamentally, the symbolic meanings of these sacred beasts have not undergone significant alterations.

The Four Beasts and the Four Symbols, during their introduction, exchange, and adaptation with the native cultures of Vietnam and Korea, have undergone certain changes. However, fundamentally, the symbolic fields of these sacred beasts have not changed drastically.

In Vietnamese culture, the Four Holy Beasts (四靈, Tứ Linh)[4] include: the Dragon, the Unicorn, the Turtle, and the Phoenix. The most revered of these sacred beasts in Vietnam is "Tứ Linh," which includes the dragon (rồng), the unicorn (kỳ lân), the turtle

(rùa), and the phoenix (chim phượng).[5] According to ancient beliefs, animals in nature were divided into five categories: terrestrial animals (with humans at the top), feathered animals (with the phoenix at the top), horned animals (with the unicorn at the top), scaled animals (with the dragon at the top), and shelled animals (with the turtle at the top). Therefore, the four sacred beasts—the dragon, the unicorn, the turtle, and the phoenix—were revered as noble creatures and became symbols, themes for sculpture, decoration, and worship in the architecture, art, culture, and religious practices of many East Asian cultures, including Vietnam. From the mid-15th century, along with the traditional creative processes of the emperors and the Confucian intellectual class, the Vietnamese people began to refer to themselves as "Children of the Dragon, Descendants of the Fairy." This phrase originates from the myth of Lạc Long Quân and Âu Cơ, who gave birth to a hundred eggs, which hatched into a hundred children, with fifty following the father to the sea and fifty following the mother to the mountains. The eldest son stayed in Phong Châu to become the king, founding the Đại Việt state and adopting the era name Hùng Vương. Since then, the Vietnamese people have always taken pride in their Dragon-Fairy ancestry. As a sacred symbol tied to the "Children of the Dragon, Descendants of the Fairy," the Dragon in Vietnam, like its general East Asian significance, is considered noble and associated with royal lineage, as well as being a symbol of clear origin and ancestry.

Similarly, the second sacred beast is the Phoenix. The phoenix is revered as the king of birds and is born from the sun and fire. The male is called "phượng (鳳)," symbolizing prosperity, and the female is called "hoàng (凰)," symbolizing the queen, often appearing alongside the dragon, which represents the king. According to researcher Trần Đức Anh Sơn, because it is a compassionate and life-giving bird, the phoenix is also the sacred bird of Buddhism. Many Buddhist architectural and decorative works feature the phoenix (Trần Đức Anh Sơn). In Vietnamese culture, the phoenix is often seen as a symbol of rebirth, prosperity, and wealth. It is also a symbol of female power, as the phoenix is often used to represent queens or goddesses in mythical stories.

In addition to the sacred beasts, the lotus flower is also a symbol of the Vietnamese people and represents the essence of their character. The lotus in Vietnamese culture is a symbol of purity and refinement: It grows from the mud without being polluted, symbolizing purity, overcoming difficulties and challenges, and attaining enlightenment. The lotus also symbolizes lofty ideals, as seen in literary works where the lotus is often an image of beauty, nobility, and grace.

To emphasize the symbolic meanings of these motifs, and the leaders of Caodaism's selection in building their religion, it will now be shown these relate to other popular and familiar symbolic motifs in Vietnam: the bamboo tree, the banyan tree-well, and the buffalo.

If the lotus symbolizes purity and nobility, bamboo serves as a symbol of resilience and perseverance. Bamboo is a familiar image in Vietnamese rural villages, closely tied to the daily lives of rural people. It is not only an essential tool but also a symbol of

unyielding strength and endurance. Bamboo frequently appears in Vietnamese literature, especially in folk tales, as a representation of loyalty and spiritual strength.

Next is the symbol of the buffalo. The buffalo is a familiar image in rural Vietnam, particularly within agricultural societies. It became a national symbol during the 22nd SEA Games, which Vietnam hosted, representing labor, diligence, and patience. The buffalo also plays a significant role in festivals, such as the Plowing Festival, which honors the hard work of farmers.

Finally, there is the motif of the banyan tree and the village well. This symbol represents communal connection. The banyan tree and the well are iconic images in Vietnamese rural life, reflecting the spirit of neighborly love, solidarity, and shared community values. These elements often appear in folk songs and fairy tales, symbolizing the bond between humans, nature, and one another.

The selected motifs illustrate a distinct difference in the systems of symbolic motifs often used alongside each other. One layer of motifs represents royalty, power, and the elite, emphasizing individual strength and excellence—such as the dragon (*Long*), the phoenix (鳳凰, *Phượng Hoàng*), and the lotus (*Hoa Sen*). In contrast, another group, including bamboo, the banyan tree, the village well, and the buffalo, embodies attributes (such as bamboo, banyan tree, and well) and virtues (like the buffalo) associated with the working class, collective strength, and ordinary people.

When exploring the motifs used to construct the cosmology of Caodaism, it becomes evident that the leadership of this religion predominantly favored motifs associated with the semantic field of power, nobility, the elite, and the glorification of individual beauty and strength, rather than the alternative group of symbols.

When exploring the motifs used to construct the cosmology of Caodaism, it becomes evident that the leadership of this religion predominantly favored motifs associated with power, nobility, and the elite. However, rather than solely serving as a means to assert political legitimacy, these motifs may have played a crucial role in shaping a collective memory among the religious community.

By incorporating these motifs, Caodaism created a spiritual and cultural framework that resonated deeply with the Southern Vietnamese population at the time. In a rapidly changing socio-political landscape, these symbols provided a sense of continuity, linking the followers to historical and cultural traditions that evoked familiarity and belonging. This aligns with Maurice Halbwachs' model of collective memory, in which shared recollections—especially those embedded in religious narratives—help sustain community identity and cohesion.

Dragons, phoenixes, and lotuses are motifs extensively utilized in the Holy See of Caodaism. The selection of symbolic motifs by Caodaism—Dragon, Phoenix, and Lotus—is an intentional and deliberate choice, reflecting the aspirations of its founding religious groups to assert their social status and political legitimacy. This is why they chose symbols associated with nobility, power, and authority rather than folk images deeply rooted in labor and ordinary life. This decision highlights the historical lack of social

standing among these migrant groups and their desire to construct a religious and social identity with an aristocratic and legitimate character in the emerging society.

To illustrate this, one must look back to the past of southern Vietnam, where migrants established settlements during the period of territorial expansion. For various reasons, different ethnic groups found themselves settling and cultivating the southern lands. According to Ngô Đức Thịnh, the Khmer people had been present in the Mekong Delta since the 13th century, following the fall of the Angkor Empire, which predates the arrival of the Vietnamese by two to three centuries (Ngô 1993, 285). Trần Quốc Vượng notes that Vietnamese settlement in the Mekong Delta began in the sixteenth century, involving a diverse range of social classes. Some were prisoners, others were impoverished wanderers seeking refuge, and many were soldiers and officials dispatched to protect the newly acquired territories (Trần 2005, 269). Nguyễn Đức Toàn (2015) observes that, beginning in the eventeenth century, migrants from northern Vietnam—mainly poor farmers and artisans—moved south due to wars and oppressive feudal systems. Among them were also educated individuals and intellectuals discontent with the regime (Nguyễn 2015, 20–21). Similarly, the Chinese community also migrated to this region for various reasons, including their resistance to the Qing dynasty during the Ming-Qing transition. Phạm Bích Hợp (2007) argues that the Chinese played a crucial role in reclaiming and developing the Mekong Delta. A notable example is Mạc Cửu, who led 400 Chinese settlers to Hà Tiên in 1678 to reclaim the land. By the late 19th century, the Chinese continued migrating to this region, organizing themselves into "*bang*"[6] (associations /幫), each led by "*bang trưởng*" (a head of the association/幫長) (Phạm 2007, 56–57).

Motifs such as the Dragon, Phoenix, and Lotus are deeply tied to symbols of supreme power, regality, and legitimacy. In the religious framework of Caodaism, these images not only represent strength but also serve as emblems of the elite class, nobility, and authority. These motifs carry immense cultural significance, connecting to the exalted values of East Asian traditions, symbolizing rulers, monarchs, and dynasties. The selection of images like the Dragon, Phoenix, and Lotus is not merely an adoption of traditional cultural symbols but can be viewed as a deliberate choice, reflecting a subconscious desire of migrant groups to address their historical lack of social status.

During the process of migration and settlement in the South, many of these groups, particularly those from lower classes or those exiled, faced tremendous hardships, scarcity, and an almost complete absence of clear social standing. Consequently, when creating a new religion, they were inclined to select symbols that conveyed their aspirations to assert a higher social status. These aristocratic motifs served as a way to redefine their perceived roles in society, legitimizing and granting political and social authority to the new religion they were building, effectively ending their identity as marginalized outsiders.

In contrast, what unfolds in Daesoon Jinrihoe is almost the opposite; the absence of motifs associated with royalty, nobility, and the intellectual elite is a notable

characteristic of this religion.

Firstly, instead of the Four Holy Beasts (Tứ Linh) as seen in Caodaism, Daesoon Jinrihoe tends to emphasize the Four Auspicious Beasts (四象, *Four Auspicious Beasts* Tứ Tượng *vn.*). *Dongcheongyong* (東靑龍, Blue Dragon of the East, 동청룡 ***kr.***), *Seobaeko* (西白虎, White Tiger of the West, 서백호 ***kr.***), *Namjujak* (南朱雀, Red Phoenix of the South, 남주작 ***kr.***), and *Bukhyeonmu* (北玄武, Black Tortoise-Serpent of the North, 북현무 ***kr.***). The Four Auspicious Beasts in the context of Daesoon Jinrihoe strongly reflect a sense of sacred protection for the nation, emphasizing themes of nationalism and sovereignty.

The Blue Dragon symbolizes the East, the origin of life, and Is associated with the Wood element in the Five Elements theory (*obaeng,* 五行). With its blue body representing spring, the Blue Dragon conveys a powerful will to live and the ability to control wind and rain. This motif appears in mural paintings of the Goguryeo and Goryeo dynasties, not only reflecting cultural traditions but also asserting national sovereignty as the guardian deity of the East. The Blue Dragon was also depicted on the ceilings of royal gates during the Joseon dynasty, emphasizing the connection between spiritual beliefs and the sacred protection of the nation.

The White Tiger represents the West, the Metal element, and autumn. With its powerful form, the White Tiger symbolizes protection and righteousness. The image of the White Tiger is vividly portrayed in the art of the Goguryeo and Goryeo dynasties, often appearing alongside other deities as a symbol of national defense. This reflects respect for natural strength and the spirit of resilience, highlighting a strong sense of sovereignty and national pride. In geomantic theories (*pungsu,* 風水), the White Tiger is a symbol of the mountain ranges protecting the country, tied to the belief in the nation's enduring stability. The Red Phoenix symbolizes the South, the Fire element, and summer. Depicted as a phoenix with outstretched wings, the Red Phoenix embodies rebirth, light, and justice. In Daesoon Jinrihoe, the Red Phoenix not only represents protective strength from the South but also signifies judgment and the balance of cosmic forces. This image appears in ancient architectural structures, including the southern gates of the Gyeongbokgung Palace, affirming the link between spiritual beliefs and national sovereignty. The Black Tortoise-Serpent represents the North, the Water element, and winter. Featuring a tortoise entwined with a serpent, the Black Tortoise-Serpent symbolizes the harmony between Yin and Yang, connecting beginnings and endings. In Daesoon Jinrihoe, the Black Tortoise-Serpent not only protects the North but also represents enduring strength and permanence. This motif is present in the tombs of the Goguryeo and Goryeo kings, symbolizing the eternal protection of rulers and the nation. It underscores the Black Tortoise-Serpent's role as a guardian deity representing sovereignty and national longevity (Kim 2020, 186–190).

The Four Auspicious Beasts do more than protect the cardinal directions; they also symbolize balance and harmony among the elements, reflecting a desire to safeguard and maintain the nation's prosperity. This highlights Daesoon Jinrihoe's close ties to folk

culture and nationalist philosophy, while also affirming the role of religion in preserving and protecting the nation's cultural heritage.

As mentioned earlier, the absence of motifs related to royalty, nobility, and the intellectual elite is a defining characteristic of this religion. Or more precisely, Daesoon Jinrihoe emphasizes popular, grassroots culture. This is evident in the humble and relatable imagery, such as the act of making rice cakes (***tteok***, 떡 ***kr***.), a traditional Korean food that serves as a near-symbolic representation of the relationship between Daesoon Jinrihoe's leaders and its followers.

Rather than emphasizing hierarchical authority based on aristocratic or scholarly status, Daesoon Jinrihoe conceptualizes spiritual leadership through the doctrine of the "Truth of the Two Mountains." This is reflected in the symbolic connection between Jeungsan (甑山, "Steamer Mountain") and Jeongsan (鼎山, "Cauldron Mountain"), where: The steamer (siru, 甑) represents Jeungsan, identified with Sangje, the Supreme Dao. The cauldron (sot, 鼎) represents Jeongsan, revered as Doju, the Lord of the Dao (The Fountainhead of Our Order and the Dao of the Two Mountains, Museum of Daesoon Jinrihoe, n.d.). These two foundational figures form the spiritual framework of Daesoon Jinrihoe, reinforcing its emphasis on accessibility and grassroots cultural values, distinguishing it from religious traditions that prioritize hierarchical or aristocratic symbolism.

This spirit of simplicity, accessibility, and focus on the common people is further reflected in some branch temples of Daesoon Jinrihoe (as illustrated in the example below at the Maitreya Buddha Hall of Geumsan Temple). Here, leadership is conceptualized through a threefold model inspired by the tteok-making process: The siru (甑, steamer, 시루 kr., or jeung in Sino-Korean, 증 kr.) symbolizes their deity (Kang). The sot (鼎, cauldron, 솥 kr., or 96eong in Sino-Korean, 정 kr.) represents the founder (Jo). The fire represents the motivator (Park) (Kim 2020, 72). Although the orthodoxy of Daesoon Jinrihoe's doctrine regarding this interpretation remains questionable, its core emphasis on mass appeal and connection to the common people remains evident (See Figure 3: "Siru and the Sot at the Maitreya Buddha Hall of Geumsan Temple").

Figure 2. Siru and the Sot (Source: AADDJ, p. 72)

Figure 3. Siru and the Sot at the Maitreya Buddha Hall of Geumsan Temple (Source: Museum of Daesoon Jinrihoe, 2024)

The populist and grassroots nature of Daesoon Jinrihoe is also reflected in *Simudo* (尋牛圖, The Ten Ox-Seeking Pictures, 심우도 ***kr***.) (Kim 2020, 214–220). This serves as a quintessential example of close ties to folk culture through simple, relatable symbols that bear no traces of royal, aristocratic, or intellectual elite motifs. The central figures in these paintings are not kings, officials, or scholars but a young boy (disciple) and a white ox—symbols that are simple and familiar to the everyday lives of common people.

The boy's journey to find the white ox is a metaphor for the process of spiritual cultivation leading to enlightenment, but instead of using distant and grandiose imagery of nobility, it is intimately tied to natural symbols and daily life.

In *Simudo*, the white ox (白牛, 흰소 ***kr***.) symbolizes the "Daesoon Truth" (大巡眞理, 대순진리 ***kr***.) (Hwang 2009, 88–89), the ultimate truth that anyone can pursue, regardless of their social status. This symbol starkly contrasts with the high-status imagery commonly associated with royal religions, such as lotus thrones or dragons and phoenixes. The young boy (少年, 소년 ***kr***.) represents the believer or disciple, emphasizing that anyone, regardless of humble origins or low status, can attain enlightenment if they persevere on their spiritual path.

Each stage of the boy's journey is depicted through familiar natural imagery, fostering accessibility and practicality. During *Simsim-I* (深深有悟, deep contemplation leading to enlightenment, 심심유오 ***kr***.), the boy sits under a pine tree, pondering philosophical questions such as: "What is life?" and "Where do I come from?" (AADDJ 2016, 59). The rustic springtime setting highlights the beginning of the spiritual journey, grounded in introspection and connection with nature.

During *Bongdeuk-singyo* (奉得神敎, seeking and following heavenly teachings, 봉득신교 ***kr***.), the boy finds ox tracks, symbolizing spiritual guidance provided by deities or ancestors. These tracks serve as guiding signs for the believer. In *Myeoni-suji* (勉而修之, diligently practicing the Way and overcoming hardships, 면이수지 ***kr***.), the boy faces storms, steep cliffs, and other unavoidable challenges, symbolizing the trials and obstacles encountered on the path of spiritual cultivation. Every image, from

footprints, streams, and pine trees to lightning and storms, is drawn from nature and real-life experiences, making the teachings of Daesoon Jinrihoe more relatable to the common people. Through the boy's journey, Daesoon Jinrihoe emphasizes the philosophy that anyone, regardless of status, can achieve enlightenment through effort. In the stage of *Seongji-Useong* (誠之又誠, continuing endless dedication to the Way, 성지우성 ***kr***.), the focus is on abandoning old habits and thoughts to fully internalize the teachings of Daesoon Jinrihoe. After overcoming steep valleys, the boy finally finds the white ox and begins the journey of unity with it (AADDJ 2016). The stage of *Dotong-jingyeong* (道通眞境, perfect harmony with the Way, 도통진경 ***kr***.) portrays the boy riding the white ox and playing a flute, reaching the state of "The Way is the self, and the self is the Way" (道卽我 我卽道, 도즉아 아즉도 ***kr***.). This philosophy emphasizes the will and power of the individual in the process of cultivation—a message with profound resonance and persuasive appeal for the common people, who often had limited access to elite knowledge.

Finally, in the last stage, *Doji-tongmyeong* (道之通明, the enlightened world of the Way, 도지통명 ***kr***.), the ideal world is depicted as a paradise on earth, featuring flowers of immortality, celestial maidens playing music, and soaring cranes (Kim 2020, 219). This is not an image of a grand palace or the abode of supreme deities, but a serene and harmonious natural landscape. This image clearly reflects Daesoon J Jinrihoe's vision of an ideal world where all people, regardless of their origins or status, can live in harmony with the Dao and with nature.

The absence of symbols associated with royalty, aristocracy, or Intellectual elites, along with the use of simple images such as the boy and the white ox, has created a religion that feels closely connected to everyday life. While the *Sibwudo* (十牛圖, Ten Ox-Herding Pictures, 십우도 ***kr***.) in Buddhism or the *Parudo* (八牛圖, Eight Ox-Herding Pictures, 팔우도 ***kr***.) in Taoism often carry profound philosophical and cosmological meanings, Simudo focuses on more relatable and easily understood symbols. The number of paintings in Simudo is reduced to six instead of ten (in Buddhism) or eight (in Taoism). This reflects the compactness, visual clarity, and emphasis on practical personal cultivation. Daesoon Jinrihoe's *Simudo* is a clear testament to their populist and grassroots philosophy.

Conclusion

From a cultural anthropological perspective, the success of both Caodaism and Daesoon Jinrihoe lies in their ability to effectively identify the target and scope of the cultural realm—the collective memory region. Based on this, they have creatively adapted traditional elements to form new religions that both satisfy the specific needs of their communities at the time and respond to the broader demands of the historical period of colonization and Westernization. Although both Caodaism and Daesoon Jinrihoe religions use traditional cultural motifs to construct their religious cosmologies, they

reflect two very different trends. Caodaism tends to create an elitist religion, combining symbols used by the royal court and major religions to assert a high, upper-class position in society. While it is undeniable that there are exceptions where certain symbols used in Daesoon Jinrihoe's sacred spaces have connections to the royal court and state-sponsored religions during Korea's dynastic period (for example, Dancheong (丹靑, 단청 *kr.*) paint), the overall religious aesthetic of Daesoon Jinrihoe moves in a different direction.

In contrast, Daesoon Jinrihoe focuses on building a cosmology that is accessible and close to the everyday lives of the common people, emphasizing popularization and practicality in the spiritual journey. This difference reflects the distinct ways in which each community expresses its cosmology and ontology within their historical and social context.

In Caodaism, deities such as Buddha, Jesus, Avalokiteśvara, and various historical figures are venerated, but they are not perceived as omnipotent, eternal, or supernatural beings. Rather, they are regarded as enlightened guides and spiritual mentors who serve as exemplars of moral and ethical conduct. Worship of these figures is not aimed at seeking miracles or divine intervention, but rather to draw inspiration for personal cultivation and virtuous living. This reflects a measured approach to the use of miraculous elements, focusing instead on personal spiritual refinement. Motifs like the bamboo, the banyan tree, and the ox are closely linked to the values of working-class labor and the diligence of the peasant class. These symbols not only represent collective strength but also embody the virtues of hard work, perseverance, and resilience of the poor and lower classes in society. From this perspective, the choice of noble symbols in Caodaism, such as the Dragon, Phoenix, and Lotus, further demonstrates a desire to break free from the image of the common people, aspiring instead to establish a religious and social identity associated with nobility and elevated status. This reflects the reality that these groups may have lacked recognition and social status in the old world, but they sought to create a new legitimacy for themselves in a society of pioneers, and the chosen religious symbols served as the means to achieve this.

While the Caodaism community is vulnerable due to its historical identity, the Daesoon Jinrihoe community, as reflected in its philosophy, demonstrates a more stable historical position; however, it is still sensitive and reactive to foreign cultures. As a result, Daesoon Jinrihoe tends to return to traditional motifs, symbols, and, most importantly, embraces a populist, folk-oriented approach in its philosophical and cosmological outlook. The Daesoon Jinrihoe follows a path of what Vietnamese scholars would refer to as strong popularization (大衆化, đại chúng hóa *vn.*) and folkification (平民化, bình dân hóa *vn.*). The cosmology of Daesoon Jinrihoe is built from familiar, simple, and accessible motifs for the common people. Natural symbols such as the white ox, pine tree, and images of rural life not only reflect the spirit of spiritual cultivation but also emphasize the simplicity and ordinariness of daily life. This religion places emphasis on personal practice, perseverance in the journey of self-realization, with a philosophy that

anyone, regardless of humble origins or low status, can attain enlightenment. It is a cosmology that is closely tied to reality, practical, easy to understand, and free from class distinctions.

Conflict of Interest

No potential conflict of interest relevant to this article was reported.

Notes

[1] Donald L. Baker, "Preface" in David Kim (2020).

[2] Petrifaction, also known as petrification, refers to the process of transforming people into solid stone—a prevalent theme in folklore, mythology, and even modern literature

[3] The original statue, built in 764, was destroyed in a fire in 1597. The second version, which existed during the lifetime of Kang Jeungsan, was erected in 1627 but was also lost to fire in 1934. The current version, built in 1938, remains standing today. See: https://webzine.daesoon.org/board/index.asp?webzine=329&menu_no=5460&bno=10101&page=1

[4] In the scope of this study, we will temporarily interpret the dragon and phoenix due to the limitations of space.

[5] The Holy Beasts are most commonly referenced by their native Vietnamese or combined native and Sino-Vietnamese names such as indicated in the list above. As Sino-Vietnamese (Chinese characters) they can appear as long (龍), lân (麟), quy (龜), and phượng (鳳).

[6] "Bang" (幫) and "bang trưởng" (幫長) are Sino-Vietnamese terms of Chinese origin, referring to self-organized associations of Chinese migrants in Vietnam. These groups were typically formed based on geographic or occupational commonalities, with the "bang trưởng" serving as the leader responsible for managing and overseeing each association.

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