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Aims and Scope

The *Journal of Daesoon Thought and the Religions of East Asia (JDTREA)* is the official English language journal of the Daesoon Academy of Sciences, and thus far, it is the only peer-reviewed, English language journal dedicated to not only research on the contemporary relevance of East Asia Religions, but also to research on the relatively new fields of East Asian New Religious Movements (EANRMs) and Daesoon Thought. Although there is a reasonable level of worldwide familiarity with the major religious traditions of East Asia, misunderstandings are still common, and novel research on these movements remains highly beneficial. As for EANRMs and Daesoon Thought, both are profoundly under-researched outside of East Asia. As a remedy to this, the Daesoon Academy of Science (DAOS), aims to publish *JDTREA* twice a year and hold conferences on East Asian religions and Daesoon Thought such as the World SangSaeng Forum and the *JDTREA* Conference. Daesoon Thought refers to a grouping of native Korean religious concepts best characterized by the Resolution of Grievances for Mutual Beneficence (*Haewon Sangsaeng*) and the Grateful Reciprocation of Favors for Mutual Beneficence (*Boeun Sangsaeng*); two concepts that can be traced back to the religious figure, Kang Jeungsan. The editorial board of *JDTREA* consists of active scholars from over a dozen countries including Australia, Bulgaria, Canada, China, France, Japan, Korea, Lithuania, Netherlands, Poland, Russia, Spain, Taiwan, the UK, and the USA. *JDTREA* is published to promote global studies on East Asia religion and Daesoon Thought by encouraging wide-ranging research on these topics. The scope of *JDTREA* includes the following:

- Interpretation and analysis of religious phenomena in all fields of the humanities and social sciences
- Comparative research on the above in relation to another religion, philosophy, ideology, etc.
- Critical reviews of academic trends, mainly in the arts and humanities, that relate to East Asian religions and/or Daesoon Thought
- New interpretations of and approaches to East Asian religions and/or Daesoon Thought

The types of publications featured in *JDTREA* will include original articles, research notes, and book reviews. Other types of contributions are negotiable but subject to the approval of the editorial board. All unsolicited articles will be subject to peer review, and commissioned articles are reviewed by the Editorial Board.

About the Journal

JDTREA debuted on September 30th, 2021 with volume 1, issue 1. The journal is set to be published twice annually and special editions may also be published in the future. The number of copies printed will be 500 per publication. The full texts will be freely available at www.jdre.org. No publishing costs will be incurred by authors who submit to the journal.

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EDITOR'S PREFACE

Carole M. CUSACK
The University of Sydney, Australia

JDTREA

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, Huafan 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 (*abiṃsā*) 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 Gongsa* 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
Editor of *JDTREA*
The University of Sydney

RESEARCH ARTICLES

- Ethnic Conflict and *Haewon-sangsaeng*
  HUANG Pochi (Huafan University)

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  Carole M. CUSACK (University of Sydney)

Ethnic Conflict and *Haewon-sangsaeng*

HUANG Pochi

Huang Pochi earned a Ph. D. in Sanskrit and Indian Studies at Harvard University. He taught Sanskrit, Pali and Indian Religions at the Graduate Institute of Religious Studies, National Chengchi University for 20 years and currently is the director of the Graduate Institute of Asian Humanities, Huafan University. He is also the president of the Taiwanese Association for South Asia and Himalayan Studies. He is vitally interested in intellectual interaction between Hinduism and Buddhism in India and takes abiding interest in ancient India, China and Israel. He published many monographs on pre-modern Indian intellectual history and the most recent one is entitled *The Cosmos, The Body and Īśvara: Ideals of the Body in Indian Socio-Religious History* (Taipei: Cité Publishing Company, 2017).

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Original Articles

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Abstract

This article begins with issues related to ethnic conflict in the contemporary world. It points out that ethnic conflict seems to be ineradicable in the modern nation-state when the majority overrides the minority. As the malady of modern civilization, ethnic conflict becomes a hard nut to crack. Political scientists and politicians are busy working out in theory and practice to understand and cope with this socio-political collective violence. However, ethnic identity is not born naturally. In forming ethnicity, the deliberate construction of a homogenous ethnic memory is indispensable. Thus, knots of enmity between different ethnic communities could be untangled and a reconciliation of conflicting groups is possible.

Samuel Huntington's thesis on the clash of civilizations offers a grim vision of geopolitics based on conflict. However, human society needs reconciliation rather than antagonism to ensure a flourishing future. In this regard, Mahatma Gandhi's non-violence (*ahiṃsā*) movement against the British Raj mounts a political revolution in human history. In the spirit of non-violence, the lofty ideals of Daesoon Jinrihoe's *Haewon-sangsaeng* (the Resolution of Grievances for Mutual Benficence) can be used as guidelines when dealing with ethnic conflict. As a peaceful and adequate foundation to unravel hostility among antagonistic ethnic groups, *Haewon-sangsaeng* would bring rapprochement without violence. If our civilization is to advance steadfastly, mechanisms which support diversified ethnic communities living together without grudges are warranted. To illustrate this point clearly, the ethnic conflict of Sri Lanka is used as an example. It is argued that majoritarianism must be renounced, and the fundamental human rights of minorities should be guaranteed in a democratic country to avert irreconcilable conflict. As a guiding principle, *Haewon-sangsaeng* can bring concord between conflicting ethnic groups when put into practice.

Keywords: ethnicity; nation-state; conflict; *Haewon-sangsaeng*; non-violence; Gandhi; Sri Lanka

Introduction

One of the most prevailing socio-political scenes in the contemporary world is the frequent occurrence of ethnic conflict in many parts of the globe. These conflicts are often accompanied by horrific collective violence and appalling interethnic bloodshed. The following can be taken as examples of this phenomenon. In Europe, the Yugoslav Wars took place in the Balkans from 1991 to 2001. A series of separate but related ethnic conflicts, wars of independence, and insurgencies intertwined to make these wars even deadlier. During the Rwandan Civil War between 7 April and 15 July 1994, the Rwandan genocide occurred. Members of the Tutsi minority ethnic group, as well as some moderate Hutu and Twa, were killed by armed Hutu militias within a hundred days. It is estimated that about 500,000 to 800,000 people were slaughtered in Rwanda by ethnic Hutu extremists in this very short period (McDoom 2020). In Sri Lanka, ethnic conflict after independence between Sinhala Buddhists and Tamil Hindus escalated into a civil war from 1983 to 2009. The UN estimated a total of 80,000–100,000 deaths during these 26 years of civil war.

Ethnic conflict seems to be the ticking time bomb of the present time. It has become a severe and lingering illness in today's civilization. Heinous crimes like ethnic cleansing, genocide, and bloody massacre are often committed in the name of communal or national interest. At present, the situation remains rather grim as conflicts are unremitted and widespread.

Antagonism, Ethnicity, Identity, and Nationalism

Following Donald L. Horowitz's arguments on attributive elements of ethnic identity such as race, language, religion, tribe, or caste as the base of conflict[1] (Horowitz 1985, 41–54), Stanley J.Varshney pointed out that ethnic conflict could range from the Protestant-Catholic conflict in Northern Ireland and Hindu-Muslim conflict in India to black-white conflict in the United States and South Africa, Tamil-Sinhala conflict in Sri Lanka, and Shia-Sunni sectarian violence in Pakistan (Varshney 2002, 4–5). It therefore includes a wide variety of collective violence that happens among different social, religious, and cultural communities.

Likewise, Stanley J.Tambiah mentioned that in our era ethnic violence has taken place not only in the third world but also in the industrialized and affluent countries. Among others, internal conflicts among ethnic nations in Eastern Europe after the demise of the Soviet Union are noteworthy. In short, ethnic conflict is a global phenomenon (Tambiah 1996, 4). He alluded to the universality of ethnic conflict at the end of the last century:

> Ethnic conflict is a major reality of our time. This is confirmed, not simply by its ubiquity alone, but also by the cumulative increase in the frequency and intensity of its occurrence. According to a recent enumeration, some forty-eight countries

> (including the republics that have supplanted the USSR) are experiencing ethnonationalist conflicts of one kind or other. (Tambiah 1996, 4)

The existing scale of ethnic conflict all over the globe is daunting.[2] One may wonder if ethnic conflict reflects the reality of our modern nation-state civilizations. On the other hand, scholars like Samuel Huntington consider that in the post-Cold War world, ethnic conflict has intensified into a full-scale strife of civilization. In his thought-provoking book on civilizational clash (Huntington 1996), Huntington argued for the possible inter-civilization conflict on issues like nuclear proliferation, immigration, human rights, and democracy. For him, a clash of civilizations seems to be inevitable after the Cold War between what he called "the West and the rest." He said:

> In the emerging world, the relations between states and groups from different civilizations will not be close and will often be *antagonistic.* Yet some intercivilization relations are more *conflict-prone* than others. At the micro level, the most violent fault lines are between Islam and its Orthodox, Hindu, African, and Western Christian neighbors. At the macro level, the dominant division is between "the West and the rest," with the most intense conflicts occurring between Muslim and Asian societies on the one hand, and the West on the other. The dangerous clashes of the future are likely to arise from the interaction of *Western arrogance, Islamic intolerance, and Sinic assertiveness*. (Huntington 1996, 183; italics mine)

Although Huntington's pessimistic view on the clash of civilizations is based on realpolitik, he perceives global politics as the acute rivalry of different cultures or ethnic, religious, and civilizational conflicts[3] with the West in one corner and Islam and China in the other. His vision of geopolitics emphasizes antagonism rather than collaboration or reconciliation. However, the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 was probably not a clash of the West and the rest in the beginning, but a war within the Eastern Bloc itself although it quickly evolved into a major conflict between NATO and Russia. Moreover, this war is not on issues like nuclear proliferation, immigration, human rights, or democracy. Rather, it is a war on issues of territorial annexation and integrity. Still, patriotism in Ukraine would make Ukrainians feel rather different from Russians in terms of ethnic and national identity. Ukrainians would think that they are ethnically other than Russian and to be a Ukrainian is fundamentally incompatible with Russian in their national identity. Here, Ukrainians as people of a nation-state are irreconcilable with Russia from an ethnonationalist perspective.

However, what of ethnicity and its relationship to nationalism? Eric Hobsbawm said:

> In ordinary usage, this [ethnicity] is almost always connected in some unspecified way with common origin and descent, from which the common characteristics of the members of an ethnic group are allegedly derived. 'Kinship' and 'blood' have

> obvious advantages in bonding together members of a group and excluding outsiders, and are therefore central to ethnic nationalism. (Hobsbawm 1992, 63)

In a modern state, starting from Europe, nationalism is often intricately linked with ethnicity. It is the emphasis on common origin and descent that gives rise to modern nationalism. However, modern territorial nation-states are "too heterogeneous to claim a common ethnicity." (Hobsbawm 1992, 63) Hobsbawm also showed that through immigration, depopulation, and resettlement, the mixture of ethnicity in many parts of Europe is diverse (Hobsbawm 1992, 63–64). In general, the matter of ethnicity is a vital concern in the modern nation-state where the division of language, culture, or religion creates variegated ethnic identities.

On the other hand, although ethnicity is a term frequently used in social sciences, identity is sometimes contentious and elusive. It could be fabricated by historians, and easily manipulated by politicians when necessary. Interestingly, when forming the majority of the population, ethnic identity could overlap with national identity in the contemporary nation-state. However, for the minority, ethical identity does not necessarily accord with national identity. Members of minority groups in a nation-state often articulate their ethnic differences distinctively and make an effort to protect their identity from cultural assimilation. When asserting one's ethnic identity becomes the chief concern of minorities, their position likely competes with national identity. This often leads to conflicts of identity in a nation-state. Yet, a sense of belonging to one ethnic group or another is not a collective consciousness born naturally. Tambiah also indicated an unusual twist of ethnic identity:

> Ethnicity embodies and combines two interwoven processes, which constitute its double helix. One is the substantialization and reification of qualities and attributes as enduring collective possessions, made realistic and imaginable by mytho-historical charters and the claims of blood, descent, and race. This results in what has aptly been called "pseudo-speciation"—that is, the collectivities in a certain sociopolitical space think of themselves as being of separate social kinds. Internal unity and homogeneity, and external difference and opposition, are integral to this condition. (Tambiah 1996, 21)

As a collective consciousness, ethnic identity emphasizes exclusiveness and dissimilarity. Homogeneity is proclaimed to exclude heterogeneity in terms of ethnic relations. Nonetheless, this could be arbitrary as ethnic identity often has its historical contingency and mythological edifice. Ethnic consanguinity could also be socio-politically constructed in the vicissitudes of time. Accordingly, ethnic consciousness is not permanently fixed. It may change in different contexts and historical periods. This discrepancy also indicates the variability and fluidity of ethnic identity. Thus, the development of ethnic identity could be a continuous process of modification. It is renewable and has new dimensions after a certain lapse of time.

Ethnicity could be, in a certain sense, compared to what Benedict Anderson termed nationalism as, an "imagined community" (Anderson 1991). The ethnic group is also an imagined community where ethnic affinity is underscored. This affinity could be shared cultural, religious, blood, or other related bonds. As it is a community imagined, members of the community believe that they have a shared past and common destiny in terms of ethnic ties (Chandra 2019, 35). Nonetheless, this could lead to popular demand for a fair distribution of material benefits and social welfare among different ethnic communities. Consequently, in a modern multiethnic nation-state, ethnic consciousness is constantly raised to call for social, political, and economic justice. If nationality is a modern invention of statehood, ethnicity has also become a highly politicized category in the modern state. Tambiah said:

> One setting for the politicization of ethnicity is the advent of "modern" states committed to welfare policies in the "developing" third world, which have become crucial and direct arbiters of economic well-being, as well as political status and the benefits that flow from that. Within democratic governmental systems, there are many occasions, such as elections at municipal, regional, and central levels, for like-minded members to mobilize and make claims on behalf of ethnic groups and successfully win concessions for them. (Tambiah 1996, 334–335)

Making use of ethnic identity for political gains thus frequently occurs in electoral democracy. Consequently, ethnicity often becomes a potentially disruptive issue in the modern state, and ethnic identity could be a very contentious matter as well. However, identity as a sense of belonging depends on variables changeable. It does not remain static but may change constantly. Also, identity could be multi-dimensional as it varies according to various contexts. Thus, the matter of identity could be an open-ended question. It is debatable, arguable, questionable, and pluralistic rather than monolithic. Amartya Sen argued:

> Belonging to each one of the membership groups can be quite important, depending on the particular context. When they compete for attention and priority over each other…the person has to decide on the relative importance to attach to the respective identities, which will, again, depend on the exact context. There are two distinct issues here. First, the recognition that identities are robustly plural, and the importance of one identity need not obliterate the importance of others. Second, a person has to make choices—explicitly or by implication—about what relative importance to attach, in a particular context, to the divergent loyalties and priorities that may compete for precedence. (Sen 2007, 19)

Here, Sen gives an interpretation of identity as a matter adjustable, flexible, and contextual. It also depends on the circumstances and personal choice. Ethnic identity is without exception. For example, forty years ago, the majority of people in Taiwan

considered themselves Chinese, but now most people think that they are Taiwanese. The process of change has been steady but irreversible and the lift of martial law in 1987 is crucial. However, the connotations of Taiwanese and Chinese are also transformed in this nonviolent, democratic, and debatable process. In Taiwan, ethnic identity could be used as political propaganda to consolidate power. Nonetheless, once democratization starts and the socio-political context is altered, an identity shift is also reflected in the course of modification. Admittedly, being Taiwanese or Chinese also carries grave political implications in contemporary Taiwan (Wachman 1994).

Non-violence as the Remedy of Violence: Mahatma Gandhi and *Ahiṃsā*

As ethnic conflict is rampant in the present era, what is a good remedy for this devastating disease? On a practical level, ethnic conflict management needs political and diplomatic expertise to tackle with. It is an intricate, sophisticated, demanding, and difficult task. Reaching peace may take a long and acrimonious negotiation but it is far better than resorting to violence.

As we live in a global village, peaceful coexistence rather than sharp antagonism is what humanity needs at the present critical juncture. Using violence to solve conflict will never end in a durable peace.[4] If the conflict continues, there is no chance for peace to prevail and human suffering would never come to an end. What is the possible resolution to untangle antagonistic conflict?

Violence easily begets more violence and to meet violence with violence will perpetrate violence. We need to look for an alternative to violence. Non-violence is assuredly a viable alternative. Indeed, non-violence is a powerful antidote against violence. To prevent further violence, the remedy of non-violence must be proposed. Assuredly, only non-violence can effectively unravel twisted knots of animosity. We have to take non-violence as a peaceful and adequate solution to violence seriously.

The modern thought of non-violence (*ahiṃsā*) started with Mahatma Gandhi. His ideals and practices of *ahiṃsā*—the philosophy of non-violence-have created far-reaching global influence in the modern world (Iyer, 1994) People like Martin Luther King or the Dalai Lama acknowledged their deep debt to Gandhi. One certainly would wonder how Gandhi started *ahiṃsā*. For Gandhi, it started with food. We know that Gandhi was a very strict vegetarian throughout his entire life. He said:

> I believe that there is no religion greater than *ahimsa*, and yet I cannot escape the himsa which is inevitably involved in the process of eating and drinking. The ideal of *ahimsa* is, however, ever before me; even in these processes, I do endeavor to restrain myself. I am striving every moment to reduce even those functions to a minimum. (Iyer 1986, 1, 322–323).

Gandhi's scrupulousness about food is assuredly religiously orientated. To be sure, if

all living beings are united in non-violence, i.e., no one inflicts mischief on other beings, then they will stay together in complete harmony. Consequently, non-violence is not confined to human relationships only. It is a virtue by which all sentient lives of the entire universe are connected. Non-violence is arguably the all-important ideal for which Gandhi is remembered by the world. He transformed a religious ideal into a political praxis with outstanding success. Non-violence is also the manifestation of Truth, which for Gandhi is also a manifestation of God. It is a universal truth.

It has to be pointed out that *ahiṃsā* as the highest virtue started with Śramaṇic traditions in India. Both Jainism and Buddhism espouse *ahiṃsā*. The Buddha praises the bloodless sacrifice and Gandhi also considers that *ahiṃsā* is an important message of the Buddha (Iyer 1986, 1, 507–9; 511–2). On the other hand, Jainism considers *ahiṃsā* the foremost moral precept. In an episode related to the birth of Mahāvīra, the Jain leader contemporary with the Buddha, the fetus Mahāvīra displayed a highly elaborate sense of *ahiṃsā*. He lay completely still, lest his kicks should cause his mother pain. Only perceiving with his supernatural knowledge that his mother feared death did he stir slightly to reassure her. It is said:

> Now, Śramaṇa Bhagavān Mahāvīra, out of compassion for his mother, did not move, nor stir, nor quiver, but remained contracted and motionless.[5](*Kalpa Sūtra* 1:92)

It is compassion (Prakrit *aṇukaṃpaṇa*, Sanskrit *anupampana*) that connects all sentient beings. Unable to bear the sufferings of others, the fetus Mahāvīra practiced the virtue of *ahiṃsā* to get rid of the anxieties of her mother. Her mother then was in high spirits again:

> Feeling her child in the womb quivering, trembling, moving and stirring, kṣatriyāṇī Triśalā became happy, pleased, and joyful, highly delighted in her mind, her heart was throbbing with ghee.[6](*Kalpa Sūtra* 1:93)

In one of the Jaina texts, we find the following words of Mahāvīra:

> No being in the world is to be harmed by a spiritually inclined person, whether knowing or unknowingly, for all beings desire to live and no being wishes to die. A true Jaina therefore, consciously refrains from harming any being, however small.[7] (*Daśavaikālika-sūtra*, iv # 11)

Refraining from harming any being (Prakrit *prāṇāivāyāo veramaṇaṇ*, Sanskrit *prāṇātipātādviramaṇaṃ*) is the ideal relationship among different modalities of sentient beings. The practice of non-harming is what we need in dealing with others. Mindful of the vital importance of *ahiṃsā* is a duty incumbent upon all of us in their daily lives. Gandhi grew up in Gujarat, where Jainism had been a stronghold and he also

acknowledged Jaina influence on his life. His meticulous attitude toward food also reminds us of Jain mendicants.

To be sure, Gandhi had made himself a fearless bodhisattva in his insistence on pursuing *ahiṃsā*. The power of *ahiṃsā* is truly immeasurable as Gandhi understands it:

> In its positive form, *ahimsa* means the largest love, the greatest charity. If I am a follower of *ahimsa*, I must love my enemy. I must apply the same rule to the wrong-doer who is my enemy or a stranger to me, as I would to my wrong-doing father or son. The active *ahimsa* necessarily includes truth and fearlessness. A man cannot deceive the loved ones; he does not fear or frighten him or her. The gift of life is the greatest of all gifts. A man who gives it in reality disarms all hostility. He has paved the way for an honorable understanding. And none who is himself subject to fear can bestow that gift. He must therefore be himself fearless. A man cannot then practice *ahimsa* and be a coward at the same time. The practice of *ahimsa* calls forth the greatest courage. (Iyer 1986, 2, 212–213)

For Gandhi, *ahiṃsā* means the highest human virtue and the practice of *ahiṃsā* is not confined to vegetarianism or meticulous religious observance. He has made *ahiṃsā* a positive ideal to embrace the whole living universe. He gave many talks on *ahiṃsā* and wrote numerous essays on *ahiṃsā* to explore his ideals of new *ahiṃsā*. As we have seen, Gandhi has made *ahiṃsā* a powerful political persuasion as *hiṃsā* is most visible in the realm of political struggle against the British Raj. Gandhi imparted a new and important dimension to the meaning of *ahiṃsā*. This Indian Śramanic ideal has been magically transformed into people power unrivaled in modern political practices.

Haewon-sangsaeng as a Non-violent Resolution of Conflict

On the other hand, the idea of *Haewon-sangsaeng* (解冤相生, the resolution of grievances for mutual beneficence) in Daesoon Jinrihoe offers a non-violent resolution of conflict. The noble ideal of *Haewon-sangsaeng* embodies the spirit of non-violence propounded by Gandhi as it can constructively unravel the knot of hatred and animosity. It is a pacific means to end ethnic enmity between antagonistic groups. As a wholesome prescription, *Haewon-sangsaeng* could provide a remedy for treating collective violence.

Haewon-sangsaeng has East Asian origins. There is an important perspective in terms of the mode of relation among cosmic and human affairs in Chinese thought. In traditional Chinese cosmology, there are five elements in the universe: water, fire, metal, wood, and earth as vital forces. Relations among them could be reciprocally restricting or mutually supportive, that is to say, either antagonism (相克) or coexistence (相生) in Chinese terms. As a binary, antagonism (or restriction) and coexistence (or harmony) take turns in cosmic and human realms. Ideally, antagonism and coexistence rotate to keep the entire universe moving forward.

Furthermore, the rotation of antagonism and coexistence can be applied to political history. There is a correlation between different dynasties and the five elements of the universe and the ascendancy of one natural force will produce the domination of the correlative dynasty.[8] However, Throughout Chinese history; however, antagonism rather than coexistence has prevailed as each former dynasty was replaced by the next dynasty. In dynastic China, the overwhelming prevalence of mutual contention is the major theme constantly appearing in the name of revolution. It becomes a vicious cycle where humankind is trapped in an unending ruthless succession of dynasties. Indeed, violent revolutions were a chronic illness in traditional Chinese political history. There is no solution to this recurring crisis within the traditional framework of Chinese political theology.

In *The Canonical Scripture* of Daesoon Jinrihoe, *Haewon-sangsaeng* is considered one of the core concepts. Related to this concept is a new cosmology of Daesoon. According to this cosmology, the Former World (先天) and the Later World (後天) are two contrasting eons in human history. Whereas conflicts dominate in the Former World, reconciliation prevails in the Later World. As an eon of mutual contention, the Former World has to be transformed so that the universe can be spiritually renewed. Sangje said in *The Canonical Scripture* :

> The world has been filled with grievances and grudges because mutual contention has prevailed over human affairs in the Former World. Accordingly, the Three Realms of Heaven, Earth, and Humankind have been obstructed from contacting one another, which has led this world to wretched calamities. This is the reason for the lack of renewal of the Three Realms. (*Prophetic Elucidations*, 1:8)

The Former World and the Later World are central yet opposing epochs of the human condition in *The Canonical Scripture* . They point to two diametrically different human existential concerns and could be seen as two modes of human destiny. While the Former World is an era of human conflict and suffering, people in the Later World live together under immense blessing. It is the millennium of peace and harmony. Here, one finds an East Asian type of millenarianism in Daesoon Jinrihoe as it is proclaimed in the following passage:

> The Reordering Work of the Three Realms refers to the Great Opening (Gaebyeok) of Heaven, Earth, and Humankind. This Great Opening means not to imitate what others have already made but the creation of something perfectly new. It has never existed in the past or the present, and is not inherited from others nor do these works belong to destiny. They could only have been created by Sangje, Himself. (*Prophetic Elucidations* 5)[9]

Sangje, therefore, put forth his ideal of resolution of grievance for mutual beneficence to renew the three realms. This renewal of the universe opens up the millennium for

human destiny. It is also said in *The Canonical Scripture*:

> Sangje intended to resolve all the grievances derived from the mutual contention of the Former World and save myriads of people by the Dao of mutual beneficence through rectifying the Degree Number of the Former World and opening the path to the Later World's paradisiacal land of immortals. His will has already been confidentially revealed in the world. (*Prophetic Elucidations* 6)

To contrast two disparate eras is to expose the stern reality of the world in constant conflict which has to be replaced by a high vision of reciprocal benevolence. The resolution of grievance for mutual beneficence is a pacific solution to terminate the mutual contention of human relations around the globe. It is an antidote to resolve all the grievances derived from mutual conflict. Indeed, political and social conflicts should be resolved non-violently so that human suffering can be relieved. In my essay on *Haewon-sangsaeng* as a religio-ethical metaphor, I concluded:

> *Haewon-sangsaeng* is arguably the most important and noble ideal in Daesoon Jinrihoe…It is a fully embodied religio-ethical ideal with a profound concern for the spiritual welfare of humanity. In its essence, *Haewon-sangsaeng*can be divided into two parts: ***haewon*** and ***sangsaeng***. ***Haewon*** conveys an important message of reconciliation for the future of humanity. ***Sangsaeng*** expresses an earnest hope for the sustainability and beneficence of humanity. It is through the practice of ***haewon*** that lofty ideals ***of sangsaeng*** can be realized. (Huang 2021, 119)

Haewon-sangsaeng as a sensible approach to conflict first concerns itself with untying the knots of enmity. Only in the situation of non-enmity can the antagonistic parties sit down and be reconciled with each other. An amicable settlement can be reached only if hostility is put on hold. To live together concordantly is to discard hatred and grudge readily. It is also said in *The Canonical Scripture*:

> There is a saying 'mu-cheok jal sanda (one lives very well),' which can also be interpreted as people can live happily only without cheok (grudge). Do not provoke grievances from others, or those grievances will turn into a cheok that will come back to you. Furthermore, do not hate others. Even if that hatred is not consciously known, their spirits will notice it first and return it back upon you as a cheok. (*Dharma* 2: 44)[10]

Grievance needs to be redressed. If not, the cycle of hatred will constantly bring grievance to each other. To break this cycle is to let go of hatred first. It is important to remove a grievance between two parties to dissolve bitter enmity between them. *Haewon-sangsaeng* which gives conflicting ethnic groups the prospect of accepting one another as family members should. Only harmonious coexistence rather than violent

antagonism can bring mutual beneficence of all life in a country to resolve grievances. Finding common ground and reaching a consensus for the benefit of all is the best tactic to resolve the resentment and suffering of the people involved. *Haewon-sangsaeng* has become a categorical imperative in this age of conflict.

Nonviolence as the Proper Way to Ethnic Rapprochement: Weaponized Buddhism and Victimized Minorities in Sri Lanka

Violence will emerge when potential conflict cannot be dealt with adequately. Likewise, if conflicting parties only resort to violence to assault the other side, peace will never be attained. A political reconciliation must be taken to ensure that the voices of the suffering are truly heard, and possible solutions are seriously pondered. Here, Sri Lanka will be used as an example to explicate the possible solution to ethnic violence.

The communal violence between Sinhala-Buddhists and Tamil-Hindus in Sri Lanka turned into civil war after 1983.[11] Hundreds and thousands of people died for it. Anthropologist Tambiah wrote three consecutive monographs updating the communal violence in South Asia: the first two books are devoted entirely to Sri Lanka(Tambiah 1986; 1992; 1996). Although the civil war ended in May 2009, the creation of a federation in which different ethnic groups can live in concord remains a daunting challenge for the government to take up.

One cannot help but ask the following questions: How can an "other-worldly" universal religion, like Buddhism eventually become a "this-worldly" and parochial social-political ideology? How can a religion of non-violence become deeply involved in violent, mundane struggle? How can a universal religion subject to ethnical consciousness, become the emblem of nationalistic politics? How can a religion of equality become politically hegemonic, discriminating against minorities?

Although Buddhism teaches non-violence, resorting to violence has become a daily occurrence in the political scene of Sri Lanka by Sinhalese Buddhists. They weaponize Buddhism to threaten the minorities. Thus, political violence in Sri Lanka has nothing to do with Buddhism as a tolerant and pacifist religion. It is the politicization of Buddhism as the national emblem and Sinhalese identity which antagonizes the minorities. Hindus, Christians, and Muslims are made the scapegoats for Sinhalese Buddhist chauvinism. Since its independence in 1948, Sri Lanka has been hopelessly stuck in ethnic conflict. However, this conflict is not nursed by a deep-seated animosity between different ethnic groups through generations. Rather, hatred is incited by politicians and Sinhalese Buddhists (monks included) in the name of safeguarding Buddhism (*sāsana*) for political gains and communalistic interests. It is an adverse political environment that nurtures terrorism and fratricide. In Sri Lanka, ethnic conflict takes a terrible toll of human lives and the haunting fear of continuing civil wars grips the minority's hearts.

In discussing the scene of ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka, Tambiah pointed out the fundamental problem of Sri Lankan politics and Sinhalese society. It is the practice of

violence to solve dispute that leads Sinhalese Buddhists to victimize the minorities:

> On their part, large segments of the Sinhalese population have engaged in a shameful violation of the basic tenets of a religion on nonviolence, noninjury, compassion, and detachment. The new face of political Buddhism is ugly. The ethnic riots have shown a fairly high propensity to violence in Sinhalese society at many levels, and the government in power has grossly violated basic human rights. The danger in Sinhalese belligerence is that the Sinhalese may be tempted to resort to violence in a situation of increasing entropy in order to settle all contentious political issues. Moreover, if today it is Sinhalese Buddhist versus Tamil, tomorrow the victims may be the Muslims, and the day after the Christians. (Tambiah 1986, 122)

Unfortunately, the situation in Sri Lanka has been in disarray even after the termination of the civil war as predicted by Tambiah. Although the civil war of Sri Lanka between the government and rebel Tamils was bloodily ended in 2009, another ethnic conflict ensuued. Militant Sinhalese Buddhists found Muslims as another scapegoat for their targeted ethnic enemy.[12] On 21 April 2019, Easter Sunday, three Catholic churches and three luxury hotels in the Colombo area were targeted in a series of Muslim terrorist suicide bombings. Two smaller explosions ensued later that day. 269 people were killed, including at least 45 foreigners. Christians became victims of new conflict. The country suffered another serious setback and ethnic tension lingered. Eventually, in July 2022, under the devastation of the pandemic, Sri Lanka's economy went bankrupt. It will take time and effort for Sri Lanka to return to economic, social, and political normalcy.

Ethnic strife has become an incurable disease in Sri Lanka. To put an end to ethnic conflict is a political imperative. However, the ethnic conflict seems to be eternally doomed in Sri Lanka. To be sure, critical problems related to ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka cannot be resolved by mindless violence. They can only be solved by peaceful and skillful means. Sri Lankan people have to approach this problem in a new way. Tambiah already gave a prescription for the future of Sri Lanka at the beginning of the civil war. His remedy, although rudimentary for a democratic society, is an appropriate medicine for chronic illness of ethnic violence in Sri Lanka. His proposal includes:

1. The country should restore the rule of law, recognize the necessity to normalize its politics, and designate citizenship without religious or ethnic tinge.
2. The nation should be a plural society and recognize pluralism as a fact of life. Conclusive quotas as a division of spoils on behalf of any particular group should not be legislated.
3. Tamils must relinquish not only terrorism but also separatism, i.e., the idea of a sovereign state of Eelam.
4. A devolution of power as envisioned in a district-council plan.

> 5. The government should admit that many monuments, archeological sites, and literary and cultural assets are neither Sinhalese nor Buddhist. The "Buddhist Sinhalese" should not disregard the legacies of many different peoples living on the island for centuries. (Tambiah 1986, 123–126)

This scenario put forth by Tambiah for the future of Sri Lanka makes sense in terms of prospects for reconciliation. His suggestions are pertinent and beneficial for solving entangled problems caused by ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. Indeed, pluralistic culture has to be implemented and chauvinism should be condemned and discarded in a democratic state. Moreover, history should not be monopolized to extol the glory of certain people. Intolerance and uncurbed political domination easily lead to unpredictable violence and war.

Sadly, ethnic conflict, civil war, and terrorism have dominated the political scene in Sri Lanka since its independence in 1948. The tension between Sinhalese and other ethnic communities has not been alleviated. Minorities are highly apprehensive of their uncertain future. Long-time ethnic violence also brings ignominy to Sri Lankan democracy. There is bound to be another calamity if a desirable solution to this unresolved problem is not found.

In retrospect, the feeling of helpless desperation of the minority sooner or later leads to violence. This is what has been happening in Sri Lanka for the past decades. Years of bitter antagonism after independence finally erupted into violent conflict. Hatred and resentment between irreconcilable communities fatefully escalated into an atrocious civil war. Moreover, hostile antagonism thwarts all possibility of benevolent relations among different ethnic groups. In this regard, federalism as the devolution of power should be honored so that the political rights and human dignity of minorities can be safeguarded. Minorites should be protected from a tyranny of the majority. However, the prospect of power-sharing is thwarted by the Sinhalese monopoly of real power. As the majority, they have a minority complex. This is the real problem.

Today, the tyranny of the majority is still prevalent in the Sri Lankan political scene. Majoritarian politics dominates and pluralism is eliminated.[13] It is majoritarianism rather than respect for the law that is in power. To prevent the deplorable situation from worsening, Sri Lankans must make every effort to save their country from another disaster.

Has there been a long history of deep-seated and communal hatred among ethnic communities in Sri Lanka? Surprisingly, the ethnic relations in Sri Lanka before the independence were relatively peaceful except for the eruption of the Buddhist-Muslim riots in 1915 (Tambiah 1996, 36–81). It was not the conflict between Sinhalese Buddhists and Tamil Hindus. Thus, the antagonism between these two ethnic groups is not deep-seated and irreconcilable. However, the surge of Sinhala chauvinism and the monks' involvement in politics after independence has made the knots of ethnic tension complicated to untangle. The minorities have become targeted victims of Sinhala majoritarian politics one after another. This is a dead-end situation. For a hopeful future

in Sri Lanka, the Buddhist majority in Sri Lanka must learn how to live tolerantly with people of different faiths and ethnicities in a democratic yet multiethnic society. Forsaking violence as a means of settling conflict is the basic premise. Reconciliation has to take the place of antagonism and a healthy democracy has to be restored. To be sure, only non-violence can guarantee Sri Lankan people against unrestrained violence. It is the prescription of *Haewon-sangsaeng*that will bring about encouraging prospects of mutual understanding and respect among different ethnic groups in Sri Lanka.

Conclusion

Ethnic conflict is a serious complication of modern civilization especially in a nation-state. It is the assertion of distinct identity and the competition of interests—economic, political, and so forth—that cause tension between different ethnic groups in a multi-ethnic country. The majority often resorts to brutal force to monopolize interests and disregard the principle of fair sharing that the minority deserves. Conflict could lead to violence if a political reconciliation is not brought about. Across the globe, ethnic conflict presents a daunting challenge to leading politicians who face this pressing problem day-to-day.

Admittedly, the non-violence (*abiṃsā*) advocated by Gandhi should be taken seriously as the basic guideline when dealing with issues related to violence. *Abiṃsā* has a long history in Indian religious traditions and Gandhi ingeniously changed it into a political persuasion. His intellectual endeavor offers a new insight into political struggle. It is a peaceful yet powerful means to untangle conflict and violence. *Haewon-sangsaeng* as a religio-ethical ideal with the spirit of non-violence surely can be applied to the socio-political realm to resolve conflicts for the welfare of humanity. Ethnic antagonism is one of them. Antagonism creates mutual distrust and hostility and leads to total disruption of society if not carefully curbed and well managed. *Haewon-sangsaeng* calls for reconciliation between the two conflicting ethnic groups so that they can live together without grievance.

Unfortunately, in a modern populist state, hatred is often deliberately incited for political gains. Ethnic identity can be manipulated easily and lead to mobocracy if unchecked. Sri Lanka is a conspicuous example. It is a country that was torn apart by endless ethnic conflict and brutal violence. *Haewon-sangsaeng* is most needed to reconcile each other so that human sufferings can be alleviated. Also, in fighting ethnic politics, the rule of law constitutes a safeguard against government abuse and majoritarian violence. For long-term communitarian well-being, hatred politics has to be discarded and fraternal love should be nurtured in Sri Lanka. The government should make every effort to be conciliatory so that amicable ethnic relations can be cultivated. Otherwise, the conflict will continue and peace will never be achieved and the ethnic minorities will fall into a bottomless abyss of despair. In this regard, ethnic conflict needs the remedy of *Haewon-sangsaeng* not only to heal painful wounds but also to open up

a hopeful future.

Conflict of Interest

Huang Pochi has been on the Editorial Board of *JDTREA* since July 2021 but had no role in the decision to publish this article. No potential conflict of interest relevant to this article was reported.

Notes

[1] Horowitz (Horowitz, 1985) gives us a comprehensive overview of global ethnic conflicts. Among many informative books on ethnic conflict, *Ethnic Conflict*, *Critical Concepts in Political Science* (4 vols) as a collection of essays on themes related to ethnic conflict, extensively covers topics like ethnicity, nationalism, self-determination, theory of ethnic conflict, and ethnic conflict management.

[2] For a summary of global ethnic conflict among nation-states after World War II (called by Tambiah and some others as ethnonationalist conflict), cf. Tambiah (2016, 3–19). For a valuable anthropological study of some known cases of global ethnic conflict, see Eller(1999).

[3] Sen's critique of Huntington's clash of civilization is worth quoting: 'There are…distinct difficulties with the theory of civilizational clash. The first, which is perhaps more fundamental, relates to the viability and significance of classifying people according to the civilizations to which they allegedly "belong." This question arises well before problems with the view that people thus classified into cartons of civilizations must be somehow *antagonistic*—the civilizations to which they belong are *hostile* to each other. The relations between different persons in the world can be seen, in this reductionist approach, as relations between the respective civilizations to which they allegedly belong.' (Sen 2007, 40-41, italics mine.) He also points out problems connected with the term "civilization" used by Huntington: 'It is obvious that Huntington's characterization of India as a "Hindu civilization" has many descriptive difficulties. It is also politically combustible. It tends to add some highly deceptive credibility to the extraordinary distortion of history and manipulation of the present realities that Hindu sectarian politicians have tried to champion in trying to promote a "Hindu civilization" view of India. Huntington is indeed frequently quoted by many leaders of the politically active "Hindutva" movement, and this is hardly surprising given the similarity between his seeing India as a "Hindu civilization" and the promotion of a "Hindu view" of India that is so dear to the political gurus of Hindutva.' (Sen 2007, 48)

[4] Peace is very different from a ceasefire or truce in a state of belligerency. It is not a deal of temporality prepared for future conflict. It means the very end of the war. Most importantly, hostilities must be terminated for true peace. In his enlightening and stimulating essay on perpetual peace (*Zum ewigen Frieden*) , Kant sketched out a jurisprudential basis of peace-safeguarding for the international community. He drew up some preliminary articles on peace between states. First of all:

> 'No conclusion of peace shall be considered valid if it was made with a secret reservation of the material for a future war.'
>
> For if this were the case, it would be a mere truce, a suspension of hostilities, not a *peace.* Peace means an end to all hostilities, and to attach the adjective 'perpetual' to it is already suspiciously close to pleonasm. A conclusion of peace nullifies all existing reasons for a future war, even if these are not yet known to the contracting parties, and no matter how acutely and carefully they may later be pieced together out of old documents. (Kant, 1970: 93–94)

It is well known that Kant's essay greatly influenced modern international law and organizations like the League of Nations or the United Nations. It provides a framework for working out an international forum so that the prospect of lasting world peace can be orchestrated and eventually brought about. Here, securing the peace of nations is the highest priority. Ideally, ending hostilities-either deep-seated animosity or armed conflict-should be the desired goal of a lasting peace.

[5] *tae ṇaṃ samaṇe bhagavaṃ mahāvīre māu-aṇukaṃpaṇāṭṭhāe ṇiccale ṇipphaṃde ṇireyaṇe alīṇa-pllīṇa-gutte yāvi hoththā.*

[6] *tae ṇaṃ sā tisalā khattiyāṇī taṃ gabbhaṃ eyamāṇaṃ vevamāṇaṃ calamāṇaṃ phaṃdamāṇaṃ jāṇittā haṭṭhu- haṭṭhu jāva hiyayā.*

[7] *tasya bhaṃte paḍikkamāmi niṃdāmi garihāmi appāṇaṃ vosirāmi/ paṭhame bhaṃte mahavvae uvṭhṭhiomi savvāo pāṇāivāyāo veramaṇaṃ.*

[8] For an elucidation of correlative cosmology, see Schwartz (1985, 350–382).

[9] The idea of The Great Opening (Gaebyeok) is an intellectual legacy of Donghak (Eastern Learning). However, Kang Jeungsan made important innovations in the idea of the Later World where peace and harmony prevail. For Donghak, Lallander said: 'In trying to make sense of the country's tumultuous situation between the 1870s and 1890, Ch'oe Sihyŏng [the second Donghak leader] embraced the term "creation" (kaebyŏk—gaebyeok)…Like the founder, Ch'oe Sihyŏng also employed the term to describe the beginning of the universe, but he broke from Ch'oe Cheu by expanding the coverage of the term to the present affairs: "This world's fate is the fate of creation [*kaebyŏk*]. Heaven and earth are not at ease. The mountains, streams, flowers, grass, and trees are not at ease…The birds of the air and the beasts of the fields are not at ease. So do only people who wear warm clothes and eat their fill seek the Way with ease? The fate of former creation [*sŏn'gaebyŏk*] and later creation [*hugaebyŏk*] interact and replace each other; therefore, everything fights…'(Kallander 2013, 106) Clearly, the proclamation of the sharp contrast between former creation and later creation by Donghak begins a new era in modern Korean religious history.

[10] For the meanings of cheok, it is explained: "During the Joseon Dynasty, a defendant in civil suits was called 'cheok. (隻)' If party A filed a suit against party B, party B would incur the enmity of the cheok. In this regard, cheok became a term for grudges. In Daesoon Thought, cheok (隻) is written as cheok (感), which refers to a situation wherein a devotee is aware that someone bears a grievance or grudge against them. 'Cheok (隻)' refers to 'the aggrieved party' in such a situation and the character 'cheok (感)' originally meant 'sadness.'" (*The Canonical Scripture,* 347) The grudge-harboring spirits (感神, cheok-shin) as the embodiment of grudge show the correlative response of wronged grievance from heaven.

[11] To be more precise, violence related to ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka should be termed "ethnoreligious violence", as ethnic identity is often intertwined with religious persuasion. Thus, we have Sinhala-Buddhist vis-à-vis Tamil-Hindu.

[12] "Between 2012 and 2015, hundreds of incidents were documented in which Muslims, their homes and their places of worship and business were attacked by Sinhala Buddhists who had mounted a public campaign envisaged as a defense of their country and religious culture." (Holt 2016,1).

[13] DeVotta (2017) gives a very useful account of Majoritarianism in Sri Lankan politics.

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The Sublime Beauty of Divine Manifestation: An Aesthetic Interpretation of *Cheonji Gongsa* in Daesoon Thought

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Abstract

This study explores the aesthetic dimensions of *Cheonji Gongsa* (天地公事, Reordering Works of Heaven and Earth) in Daesoon Thought, offering a novel perspective on how new religious movements articulate and propagate their central doctrines through aesthetic means. Applying the framework of theological aesthetics, particularly as developed by Hans Urs von Balthasar, the research illuminates the intricate relationship between divine manifestation, sensory perception, and spiritual experience in Daesoon Jinrihoe.

The study interprets *Cheonji Gongsa* as a profound aesthetic event in which divine beauty becomes tangible and perceptible in the physical world. Key findings include: (1) the complex interplay of sensory perception, emotional response, and spiritual insight in the incarnation of Kang Jeungsan and the unfolding of *Cheonji Gongsa*; (2) the relevance of the concept of the sublime in understanding the overwhelming and transformative nature of *Cheonji Gongsa*; (3) the comprehensive aesthetic framework created by the features of *Cheonji Gongsa*, including its embodiment of holiness, rich symbolic language, and vision of cosmic transformation; (4) the significant contribution of sensory and emotive aspects of Daesoon practices to spiritual experiences and the formation of religious beliefs; and (5) the central role of aesthetic vision in Daesoon soteriology.

This aesthetic approach not only enriches our understanding of Daesoon Jinrihoe but also contributes to broader discussions on the role of aesthetics in religious experience and cognition. It provides a complementary method to traditional doctrinal studies, bridges etic and emic perspectives in the study of new religious movements, and facilitates comparative analysis with other religious aesthetic traditions. The study concludes by suggesting directions for future empirical research to further explore the aesthetic dimensions of religious experience in Daesoon Jinrihoe and other new religious movements.

Keywords: *Cheonji Gongsa*; theological aesthetics; divine manifestation; sublime

Introduction

The concept of divine manifestation has been a central theme in religious thought throughout human history. In the context of Korean new religious movements, the Daesoon Jinrihoe (大巡眞理會) offers a unique perspective on this phenomenon through its doctrine of *Cheonji Gongsa* (天地公事), or the Reordering Works of Heaven and Earth. This article aims to explore the aesthetic dimensions of *Cheonji Gongsa*, focusing on how the divine is perceived and experienced within the sensory realm of human existence.

Daesoon Jinrihoe, founded on the teachings of Kang Jeungsan (姜甑山, 1871–1909), presents a cosmology in which the supreme deity directly intervenes in the world to rectify cosmic imbalances and usher in a new era of harmony. The incarnation of Kang Jeungsan as the embodiment of the supreme deity, Sangje (上帝), marks a pivotal moment in this religious narrative. *Cheonji Gongsa*, the divine work carried out by Kang Jeungsan during his earthly life, serves as the cornerstone of Daesoon Thought and practice.

Traditionally, religious studies have approached such phenomena through theological, historical, or sociological lenses. However, this article proposes that an aesthetic approach can offer valuable insights into the nature of divine manifestation and its impact on religious adherents. By employing the framework of theological aesthetics, particularly as developed by Hans Urs von Balthasar, we can explore how the concept of beauty intersects with religious experience and understanding.

The central thesis of this article is that *Cheonji Gongsa* can be interpreted as an aesthetic event, one in which the divine beauty becomes tangible and perceptible in the physical world. This interpretation not only enriches our understanding of Daesoon Thought but also contributes to broader discussions on the role of aesthetics in religious experience and cognition.

Through an examination of key texts, narratives, and reported experiences within the Daesoon tradition, this article will investigate how the sublime beauty of divine manifestation is conceptualized, experienced, and transmitted. By focusing on the sensory and emotional aspects of religious experience, we aim to shed light on the unique ways in which Daesoon Thought engages with the divine through aesthetic means.

This aesthetic approach to *Cheonji Gongsa* offers a novel perspective on how new religious movements articulate and propagate their central doctrines. It also provides a framework for understanding the transformative power of religious experiences that are often described as beyond rational comprehension. By bridging the gap between sensory perception and spiritual insight, this study aims to contribute to a more holistic understanding of religious phenomena in general and the Daesoon tradition in particular.

Theoretical Framework: Aesthetic Approaches to Divine Manifestation

The application of aesthetic theory to religious phenomena, particularly in the context of new religious movements, necessitates a robust and multifaceted theoretical framework. This chapter aims to establish such a framework by examining the intersection of theological aesthetics, phenomenology of religion, and contemporary theories of perception and cognition. By synthesizing these diverse approaches, we can develop a nuanced understanding of how divine manifestation, as exemplified in Daesoon Jinrihoe's concept of *Cheonji Gongsa*, can be interpreted through an aesthetic lens.

Hans Urs von Balthasar's Theological Aesthetics

Hans Urs von Balthasar's (1905–1988) theological aesthetics provides the cornerstone of our theoretical framework, offering a paradigm for understanding the relationship between divine revelation and human perception. Balthasar's magnum opus, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics* (1961–1969), represents a radical departure from traditional theological methodologies by prioritizing the category of the beautiful as a fundamental mode of divine self-disclosure.

Central to Balthasar's approach is the concept of "form" (Gestalt), which he understands not merely as external appearance but as the manifestation of inner essence. As Balthasar states, "The beautiful is above all a form, and the light does not fall on this form from above and from outside, rather it breaks forth from the form's interior" (Balthasar 1982, 151). This understanding of form as the locus of divine self-revelation provides a valuable framework for interpreting the aesthetic dimensions of *Cheonji Gongsa*.

Balthasar's insistence on the inseparability of beauty, truth, and goodness (the transcendentals of classical philosophy) offers a holistic approach to understanding divine manifestation. He argues that the perception of beauty is not a subjective, arbitrary experience but a genuine encounter with objective reality. This perspective allows us to consider how the aesthetic experiences reported by followers of Daesoon Jinrihoe in relation to *Cheonji Gongsa* might constitute authentic encounters with divine reality, rather than mere subjective impressions.

Furthermore, Balthasar's work on the "theo-drama" – the divine action in history – provides a useful lens through which to view the cosmic drama of *Cheonji Gongsa*. This concept emphasizes the dynamic, participatory nature of divine revelation, which resonates strongly with the active role of believers in Daesoon Thought.

The Concept of Beauty in Religious Thought

To fully contextualize Balthasar's approach and its application to Daesoon Thought,

we must consider the broader history of beauty as a concept in religious and philosophical traditions. This historical perspective allows us to situate our aesthetic interpretation of *Cheonji Gongsa* within a rich intellectual lineage.

In Western thought, the association between beauty and divinity has deep roots. Plato's conception of beauty as a transcendent form laid the groundwork for much subsequent thought on divine beauty. In the *Symposium*, Plato describes a ladder of love ascending from physical beauty to the Form of Beauty itself, which he associates with the divine (Plato 1989).

Medieval Christian thinkers, particularly Thomas Aquinas, further developed these ideas. Aquinas saw beauty as a transcendental property of being, alongside truth and goodness. He famously defined the beautiful as "that which, when seen, pleases" (Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 5, a. 4, ad 1), emphasizing the cognitive aspect of aesthetic experience.

In East Asian traditions, beauty is often closely associated with concepts of harmony and balance. The Chinese concept of *li* (理, principle) in Neo-Confucianism, for instance, represents an underlying order or pattern in the universe that can be aesthetically apprehended. Similarly, the Japanese notion of *wabi-sabi* embraces the beauty of imperfection and transience, reflecting Buddhist insights into the nature of reality.

Korean aesthetic traditions, particularly relevant to our study of Daesoon Thought, include concepts such as *sinmyeong* (神明, divine illumination) and *han* (恨, unresolved resentment). These ideas provide a cultural backdrop against which the aesthetic impact of *Cheonji Gongsa* can be more fully understood.

By exploring these diverse approaches to beauty in religious thought, we can better appreciate both the continuities and innovations represented by Daesoon Jinrihoe's approach to divine manifestation. This comparative perspective enriches our understanding of how *Cheonji Gongsa* functions as an aesthetic event within a specific cultural and religious context.

Aesthetics as a Mode of Spiritual Perception

Having established the theological and philosophical foundations for understanding beauty in religious contexts, we now turn to the cognitive and experiential dimensions of aesthetic perception in spiritual life. This section integrates insights from phenomenology of religion, cognitive science, and theories of embodied cognition to elucidate how aesthetic experiences can serve as modes of spiritual perception and insight.

Rudolf Otto's (1869–1937) concept of the "numinous" as the non-rational aspect of religious experience, characterized by the mysterium tremendum et fascinans (the mystery that is both terrifying and fascinating), provides a valuable framework for understanding the aesthetic impact of divine manifestation (Otto 1917). Otto's work highlights the emotional and sensory components of religious experience that often

elude rational analysis but are crucial to understanding phenomena like *Cheonji Gongsa*.

Mircea Eliade's (1907–1986) work on hierophanies (manifestations of the sacred) further enriches our understanding of how the divine becomes perceptible in the physical world. Eliade's assertion that "the sacred always manifests itself as a reality of a wholly different order from 'natural' realities" (Eliade 1959, 10) resonates with the extraordinary nature of *Cheonji Gongsa* as described in Daesoon texts.

Recent developments in cognitive science and philosophy of mind have emphasized the embodied nature of human cognition, challenging traditional dichotomies between mind and body, reason and emotion. Scholars such as Mark Johnson (2007) and Shaun Gallagher (2005) have argued for an "embodied aesthetics" that recognizes the crucial role of bodily experience in shaping our understanding of the world, including our aesthetic and religious experiences.

This embodied approach to aesthetics is particularly relevant to our study of *Cheonji Gongsa*, as it allows us to consider how bodily practices, ritual gestures, and sensory experiences associated with Daesoon Jinrihoe might contribute to followers' aesthetic apprehension of divine reality. As Johnson argues, "Meaning and thought emerge from our visceral connections to life and the bodily conditions of life" (Johnson 2007, ix).

By integrating these phenomenological and cognitive approaches with Balthasar's theological aesthetics and the broader history of beauty in religious thought, we can develop a comprehensive framework for understanding how aesthetic experiences function as modes of spiritual perception and cognition in the context of Daesoon Jinrihoe.

This multifaceted theoretical approach allows us to consider not only the content of aesthetic experiences associated with divine manifestation but also the cognitive processes, cultural contexts, and bodily practices that shape these experiences. As we proceed to examine specific aspects of *Cheonji Gongsa* in subsequent chapters, this theoretical framework will provide the necessary conceptual tools to interpret the complex interplay between sensory perception, emotional response, and spiritual insight that characterizes the aesthetic engagement with divine reality in Daesoon Jinrihoe.

The Aesthetics of Divine Manifestation in Daesoon Thought

Kang Jeungsan's Incarnation as an Aesthetic Event

The incarnation of Kang Jeungsan as the embodiment of Sangje, the supreme deity in Daesoon Thought, represents a pivotal moment in the religious narrative of Daesoon Jinrihoe. This divine manifestation can be understood not merely as a theological doctrine but as an aesthetic event that engages the sensory and emotional faculties of believers. Drawing on Balthasar's concept of the "form" (Gestalt) as the locus of divine self-revelation, we can analyze Kang Jeungsan's incarnation as a unique aesthetic

phenomenon within the landscape of new religious movements.

The narrative of Kang Jeungsan's birth, as recorded in *The Canonical Scripture* (典經, *Jeongyeong*), is replete with aesthetic elements that signify divine presence. For instance, the text describes:

> When Sangje was born, the delivery room became unusually bright, and two fairy maidens descended from Heaven to attend to the baby Sangje. The room was filled with a mysterious fragrance, and a brilliant light enveloped the entire house, stretching up to the sky (*Acts* 1:10).

This description engages multiple sensory modalities–visual (brightness, light), olfactory (fragrance), and potentially auditory (implied in the presence of the fairy maidens)–creating a synaesthetic experience that marks this birth as extraordinary. The aesthetic impact of this narrative serves to reinforce the belief in Kang Jeungsan's divine nature, creating what Eliade would term a "hierophany"–a manifestation of the sacred in the profane world.

Moreover, the physical appearance and bearing of Kang Jeungsan throughout his life are often described in aesthetic terms that evoke a sense of the sublime. *The Canoncal Scipture* recounts numerous instances where his countenance is said to radiate divine light or where his mere presence induces a state of awe and reverence in observers. These descriptions align with Rudolf Otto's concept of the "numinous" as an overwhelming, fascinating, yet terrifying encounter with the divine.

Cheonji Gongsa as the Ultimate Form of Divine Beauty

Cheonji Gongsa, or the Reordering Works of Heaven and Earth, constitutes the central divine act in Daesoon Thought. This cosmic drama of renewal and restoration can be interpreted as the ultimate expression of divine beauty, a "form" in Balthasar's sense that reveals the inner essence of the deity's salvific will.

The aesthetic dimension of *Cheonji Gongsa* is multifaceted, encompassing both the grand cosmic scale of divine action and the intimate, personal experiences of believers. At the macro level, the reordering of Heaven and Earth involves a restructuring of the very fabric of reality, a process that can be understood in terms of cosmic harmony and balance – concepts deeply rooted in East Asian aesthetic traditions.

For instance, *The Canonical Scripture* describes the commencement of *Cheonji Gongsa* by Kang Jeungsan as a moment of cosmic significance:

> The 'Gaebyeokjang' (開闢長, Master of the Opening) mentioned in common parlance refers to the Gaebyeokjang who presides over the great authority of the Three Realms and saves the divine beings and all living things trapped in grievances. In the winter of the year Sinchuk (1901), after completing his meditation at Daewonsa temple, Sangje began the Reordering Works of Heaven

> and Earth for nine days, during which he did not paste paper on the windows, did not light a fire in the kitchen, changed into clean clothes, and completely abstained from food. During this time, even when rice was dried in the yard, birds could not fly in, and people found it difficult to pass in front of the house. (*Reordering Works* 1:1).

This description evokes a sense of the sublime, combining elements of awe, terror, and beauty in a manner reminiscent of Kant's discussion of the mathematical and dynamical sublime. The vastness of the cosmic scale (the Nine Heavens, the Three Realms) and the overwhelming power displayed (the trembling of Heaven and Earth) create an aesthetic experience that transcends ordinary human perception.

At the micro level, individual acts of *Cheonji Gongsa* often involve aesthetic elements that engage the senses and emotions of participants. These can include ritual actions, the use of symbolic objects, or the manipulation of natural phenomena. For example, *The Canoncal Scipture* recounts instances where Kang Jeungsan controls the weather, creates celestial phenomena, or transforms ordinary objects into vehicles of divine power. These acts, while serving theological and soteriological purposes, also function as aesthetic performances that reinforce belief through sensory and emotional impact.

Sensory Perception and Spiritual Experience in Daesoon Practice

The aesthetic dimension of divine manifestation in Daesoon Thought extends beyond narrative accounts to inform the lived religious experiences of believers. Drawing on theories of embodied cognition and the phenomenology of religious experience, we can analyze how sensory perception and bodily practices contribute to spiritual insights and experiences within the Daesoon tradition.

Ritual practices in Daesoon Jinrihoe often involve multisensory engagement that facilitates an aesthetic apprehension of divine reality. For instance, the practice of *Gido* (祈禱, prayer) involves specific bodily postures, rhythmic chanting, and the use of symbolic objects. These elements create a synaesthetic experience that can induce altered states of consciousness, facilitating what believers interpret as direct encounters with divine reality.

The concept of *Taeulju* (太乙呪), a sacred mantra believed to embody the essence of *Cheonji Gongsa*, provides a particularly rich example of how aesthetic experience and spiritual practice intersect in Daesoon Thought. The rhythmic recitation of *Taeulju* is said to not only invoke divine power but also to attune the practitioner's body and mind to the cosmic order established through *Cheonji Gongsa*. This practice exemplifies Johnson's notion of "embodied meaning," where abstract spiritual concepts are grounded in concrete sensorimotor experiences.

Furthermore, the aesthetic dimension of Daesoon practice extends to the design and use of sacred spaces. Temples and ritual areas are often arranged according to principles that reflect the cosmic order revealed through *Cheonji Gongsa*. The visual and spatial

aesthetics of these environments serve not merely as decorative elements but as "forms" that mediate divine presence and facilitate spiritual experiences.

In conclusion, the aesthetics of divine manifestation in Daesoon Thought, as exemplified in Kang Jeungsan's incarnation and the unfolding of *Cheonji Gongsa*, represents a complex interplay of sensory perception, emotional response, and spiritual insight. By analyzing these phenomena through the lens of theological aesthetics, phenomenology, and cognitive science, we gain a deeper understanding of how aesthetic experiences contribute to the formation and transmission of religious beliefs in the context of new religious movements. This approach not only enriches our understanding of Daesoon Jinrihoe but also contributes to broader discussions in religious studies about the role of aesthetics in shaping religious experience and understanding.

The Sublime in *Cheonji Gongsa*

Theories of the Sublime: From Longinus to Kant and Beyond

The concept of the sublime, with its long history in Western aesthetic thought, provides a valuable framework for understanding the overwhelming and transformative nature of *Cheonji Gongsa* in Daesoon Thought. This section traces the development of sublime aesthetics and applies these theories to the divine works described in Daesoon texts.

The discourse on the sublime begins with Longinus's "*On the Sublime*" (Περὶ ὕψους), a 1st-century CE treatise that defines the sublime as a form of elevated language that fills the reader with Joy and Pride (Longinus, trans. 1995). Longinus's focus on the emotional and psychological impact of the sublime provides a useful starting point for understanding the effects of *Cheonji Gongsa* on believers.

Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757) marks a significant development in sublime aesthetics. Burke distinguishes the sublime from the beautiful, associating it with terror, obscurity, power, and infinity. He writes, "The passion caused by the great and sublime in nature, when those causes operate most powerfully, is astonishment; and astonishment is that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror" (Burke 1757/1990, 53). This conception of the sublime as a overwhelming force that suspends normal cognitive functions resonates strongly with accounts of *Cheonji Gongsa* in Daesoon literature.

Immanuel Kant's treatment of the sublime in his *Critique of Judgment* (1790) further refines the concept, distinguishing between the mathematical sublime (associated with vastness) and the dynamical sublime (associated with power). Kant argues that the experience of the sublime involves a two-step process: first, a feeling of inadequacy in the face of something that exceeds our comprehension or power to resist, followed by a

realization of our own supersensible faculty of reason, which can conceive of the infinite or the absolutely powerful (Kant 1790/1987).

Contemporary theorists have expanded on these classical conceptions of the sublime. For instance, Jean-François Lyotard's postmodern sublime emphasizes the unpresentable nature of certain ideas or experiences, which can only be negatively evoked (Lyotard 1984). This notion of the sublime as that which exceeds representation offers intriguing possibilities for analyzing the often-ineffable nature of *Cheonji Gongsa*.

Manifestations of the Sublime in *Cheonji Gongsa* Narratives

Applying these theories of the sublime to *Cheonji Gongsa* reveals a rich tapestry of sublime aesthetics woven throughout Daesoon narratives. The very scope of *Cheonji Gongsa* – the reordering of Heaven, Earth, and Humanity – evokes Kant's mathematical sublime, presenting a concept so vast that it strains the limits of human comprehension. Consider this passage from *The Canonical Scripture*:

> In April of the following year, Sangje conducted the work of renewing the Three Realms at Kim Hyeong-ryeol's house. At this time, Sangje said to him, 'We should not follow what others have made, but create anew. To use an analogy, even if it's wealth accumulated by parents, when children use it, they feel uncomfortable every time they use it, as if their parents' faces are watching them. Similarly, living in an old house as it is can be very distressing due to the worry that it might collapse. Therefore, we must renew everything. In general, my work (Gongsa) has never existed before, neither in the past nor now. It is not a continuation of others' work, nor is it a matter of fate. It is solely what I create and make. I will preside over the great authority of the Three Realms, completely revise the existing order of the Former World, open the limitless good fortune of the Later World, and establish Paradise.' He then instructed, 'Believe in me and do your utmost.' (*Reordering Works* 1:2)

The sheer scale of this divine undertaking creates a sense of awe and astonishment characteristic of the sublime. The idea of reordering the universe exceeds normal human categories of understanding, forcing the believer to confront the limitations of their own cognitive faculties.

Similarly, descriptions of Kang Jeungsan's power over natural phenomena often evoke Burke's notion of the sublime as terrible power. For instance:

> Sangje exercised the great authority of the Three Realms (三界大權) at will. When he wished to clear away heavy rain, he would sometimes order his disciples to surround a brazier with fire, sometimes to circle wine cups, sometimes he would do it by words alone. Whether exercising the great heavenly authority to cause

> wind and rain, frost and snow, or thunder and lightning, or in other matters, he followed no fixed method (*Reordering Works* 1:4).

Such displays of divine power over nature align with Kant's dynamic sublime, presenting a force that would be irresistible were it directed against the observer. The believer's realization of their own physical insignificance in the face of such power, coupled with their ability to comprehend it through reason, creates the characteristic sublime experience.

The Interplay of Awe and Attraction in Religious Experience

The concept of the sublime in *Cheonji Gongsa* can be further understood through the lens of religious experience theory, particularly as it relates to the interplay of awe and attraction in followers' encounters with the divine. This dynamic is crucial in understanding the phenomenology of religious experience in Daesoon Thought.

Rudolf Otto's seminal work *The Idea of the Holy* (1917) provides a foundational framework for analyzing this aspect of religious experience. Otto's concept of the "numinous" as mysterium tremendum et fascinans (a mystery that is simultaneously terrifying and fascinating) offers a theoretical basis for understanding the complex emotional responses elicited by encounters with the divine in Daesoon practice.

The tremendum aspect of the numinous experience, as described by Otto, corresponds to the overwhelming and potentially frightening nature of divine manifestation in *Cheonji Gongsa*. This can be seen in the descriptions of Sangje's cosmic authority and the vast scale of his works as described in *The Canoncal Scipture*. For instance, the passage describing Sangje's commencement of *Cheonji Gongsa* (*Reordering Works* 1:1) evokes a sense of divine power that transcends normal human understanding, potentially inspiring a feeling of awe or even fear in the believer.

Conversely, the fascinans element of the numinous speaks to the attractive power of the divine, which draws believers deeper into their faith despite, or perhaps because of, its overwhelming nature. In the context of Daesoon Thought, this can be observed in the devotional practices and commitment of followers to the teachings and works of Sangje.

Mircea Eliade's concept of hierophany, or the manifestation of the sacred, provides another useful theoretical tool for analyzing this aspect of *Cheonji Gongsa*. Eliade's work suggests that encounters with the sacred are characterized by a paradoxical combination of attraction and repulsion, mirroring Otto's numinous experience. This theoretical framework can help explain the complex emotional and psychological responses of Daesoon adherents to the sublime aspects of *Cheonji Gongsa*.

Furthermore, contemporary cognitive approaches to religion, such as those proposed by Pascal Boyer and Justin Barrett, suggest that religious concepts that are "minimally counterintuitive"—that is, those that violate some but not all of our intuitive expectations about the world - are particularly memorable and transmissible. The sublime elements

of *Cheonji Gongsa*, which combine familiar concepts with transcendent or counterintuitive elements, may function in this way, contributing to the cognitive appeal and cultural stability of Daesoon beliefs.

In the context of Daesoon Jinrihoe, the interplay of awe and attraction serves important social and theological functions. By framing divine action in terms that evoke sublime experiences, the movement creates a shared aesthetic and emotional language that reinforces group cohesion and doctrinal commitment. The sublime becomes a means of negotiating the boundary between the human and the divine, allowing believers to approach the transcendent while maintaining a sense of its ultimate incomprehensibility.

This theoretical approach to understanding the experiential aspects of *Cheonji Gongsa* provides a framework for future empirical research. Potential areas of investigation could include phenomenological studies of Daesoon practitioners' experiences, cognitive research on the processing of sublime religious concepts, and comparative studies with other new religious movements that emphasize cosmic or transcendent themes.

Aesthetic Features of *Cheonji Gongsa*

The Concept of Holiness in Daesoon Thought

The aesthetic dimension of *Cheonji Gongsa* is inextricably linked to the concept of holiness (神性) in Daesoon Thought. This section explores how the notion of the sacred is aesthetically constructed and experienced within the context of Daesoon Jinrihoe, drawing on both Western and East Asian conceptualizations of holiness.

In Western religious thought, Rudolf Otto's concept of the "holy" as the "wholly other" (*das ganz Andere*) provides a useful starting point. Otto argues that the holy is experienced as something fundamentally different from ordinary reality, evoking feelings of awe, fascination, and even terror (Otto 1958 [1917]). This understanding resonates with the way *Cheonji Gongsa* is presented in Daesoon texts as a cosmic event that transcends ordinary human categories.

However, the Daesoon conception of holiness also draws on East Asian religious traditions, particularly Korean shamanism and Neo-Confucianism. The Korean concept of *sin* (神), which can be translated as "divine" or "spirit," encompasses a broader range of phenomena than Western notions of the holy. In Daesoon Thought, this expansive concept of the divine allows for a more fluid boundary between the sacred and the profane, with holiness potentially manifesting in various aspects of daily life.

The aesthetic manifestation of holiness in *Cheonji Gongsa* can be observed in several key areas:

1. Sacred Time: The performance of *Cheonji Gongsa* is described as inaugurating a new cosmic era, creating a sense of sacred time that is qualitatively different from profane time. This temporal aesthetic is reflected in ritual practices that commemorate key events in Kang Jeungsan's life and works.
2. Sacred Space: The sites associated with Kang Jeungsan's activities become imbued with sacred qualities, forming a sacred geography that shapes the aesthetic experience of believers. The design and layout of Daesoon temples and ritual spaces further reinforce this sacred aesthetic.
3. Sacred Persons: Kang Jeungsan himself, as the incarnation of Sangje, embodies the aesthetic of holiness. Descriptions of his appearance and actions often employ aesthetic language to convey his divine nature.
4. Sacred Actions: The various works performed as part of *Cheonji Gongsa* are presented as manifestations of divine power, often involving dramatic natural phenomena or miraculous events that create a sense of aesthetic wonder.

The aesthetic of holiness in Daesoon Thought thus serves to create a sensory and emotional environment that reinforces belief in the divine nature of *Cheonji Gongsa* and its transformative power.

Symbolic Representations in *Cheonji Gongsa*

Cheonji Gongsa is rich in symbolic representations that contribute to its aesthetic and theological significance. These symbols serve as conceptual tools for understanding complex ideas and as aesthetic objects that engage the senses and emotions of believers.

One of the most prominent symbolic concepts in Daesoon Thought is the *Taegeuk* (太極), the Great Ultimate. In Daesoon contexts, the *Taegeuk* symbolizes the harmony and balance of cosmic forces. It represents the dynamic interplay between yin and yang, which is central to the cosmology underlying *Cheonji Gongsa*. The visual representation of *Taegeuk*, with its intertwining red and blue swirls, serves as a powerful aesthetic symbol that encapsulates the principle of cosmic renewal central to Daesoon theology.

Another significant symbolic aspect of *Cheonji Gongsa* is the concept of *Haewon-sangsaeng* (解冤相生), or mutual beneficence through the resolution of grievances. This principle is often represented through various ritual practices and teachings. The aesthetic dimension of *Haewon-sangsaeng* is evident in the way it is enacted in Daesoon rituals, where symbolic actions and objects are used to represent the resolution of cosmic and personal grievances.

The symbolism of numbers also plays a crucial role in *Cheonji Gongsa*. For instance, the number nine is of particular significance, as evidenced by the nine-day period during which Sangje began the Reordering Works of Heaven and Earth. This numerical symbolism adds a layer of aesthetic and conceptual depth to the understanding of *Cheonji Gongsa*.

The concept of the Three Realms (三界)—Heaven, Earth, and Humanity—is another

key symbolic representation in Daesoon Thought. This tripartite division of the cosmos provides a framework for understanding the scope and significance of *Cheonji Gongsa*. The aesthetic implications of this concept are evident in the way it structures Daesoon rituals and practices, creating a symbolic landscape that believers can navigate and engage with.

These symbolic representations in *Cheonji Gongsa* create a rich aesthetic language that helps believers conceptualize and engage with complex theological ideas. The visual and experiential nature of these symbols contributes to an immersive religious experience that reinforces key doctrinal concepts of Daesoon Thought. By engaging with these symbols, believers are able to aesthetically experience the cosmic drama of *Cheonji Gongsa*, making abstract theological concepts tangible and emotionally resonant.

The Aesthetic Transformation of the World Order

A central claim of Daesoon Thought is that *Cheonji Gongsa* effects a fundamental transformation of the cosmic order. This transformation is not merely conceptual but is described in terms that emphasize its aesthetic dimensions.

The concept of *Hucheon Gaebyeok* (後天開闢), or the Great Opening of the Later World, is particularly rich in aesthetic implications. This new cosmic era is described as a time of perfect harmony and balance, where the divisions and conflicts of the present world are resolved. *The Canoncal Scipture* describes this transformed world in vivid sensory terms:

> In the Later World, the world will become one family, and harmony will govern all living beings according to the law without the use of force or punishment. Those who hold office will have their authority opened to them, and there will be no excess beyond their position. The people will be free from all the anxieties of grudges, greed, and resentment. They will be free from the suffering of illness and the burden of burying the dead, achieving immortality. There will be no distinction between rich and poor, and people will be able to come and go as they please. Heaven will be lowered so that ascending and descending will be possible at will. Wisdom will become clear, allowing understanding of the past, present, future, and all realms of the world. The three disasters of water, fire, and wind will disappear from the world, transforming it into an earthly paradise overflowing with auspicious signs (*Prophetic Elucidations* 81).

This description evokes a kind of aesthetic utopia, appealing to multiple senses and creating an image of perfect natural and social harmony. The aesthetic vision of the transformed world serves as a powerful motivator for believers, providing a concrete (if idealized) image of the goals of *Cheonji Gongsa*.

Moreover, the process of transformation itself is presented in aesthetic terms. The reordering of Heaven and Earth is often described using metaphors of artistic creation

or cosmic music. For instance, Kang Jeungsan is sometimes portrayed as a divine artist, reshaping the universe according to a grand aesthetic vision. This framing of cosmic transformation as an aesthetic act aligns with long-standing traditions in both Western and Eastern thought that view the universe as a work of divine art.

The aesthetic transformation extends to the human realm as well. Daesoon teachings suggest that individuals who align themselves with the principles of *Cheonji Gongsa* will undergo a kind of spiritual-aesthetic transformation, developing enhanced perceptual and cognitive abilities that allow them to appreciate the divine beauty of the transformed cosmos.

In conclusion, the aesthetic features of *Cheonji Gongsa*–its embodiment of holiness, its rich symbolic language, and its vision of cosmic transformation–create a comprehensive aesthetic framework that shapes the religious experience of Daesoon believers. This aesthetic dimension is not merely ornamental but is integral to the theological and soteriological claims of Daesoon Thought. By engaging in the senses and emotions through these aesthetic elements, *Cheonji Gongsa* becomes not just an abstract concept but a lived reality for its adherents, demonstrating the power of aesthetic experience in shaping religious belief and practice.

Sensory Perception and Spiritual Experience in Daesoon Practice

The Role of Emotion and Sensation in Religious Cognition

The study of *Cheonji Gongsa* in Daesoon Thought provides a unique opportunity to explore the intricate relationship between sensory perception, emotional response, and religious cognition. This section examines how the sensory and emotive aspects of Daesoon practices contribute to spiritual experiences and the formation of religious beliefs.

Recent developments in cognitive science and the psychology of religion have highlighted the crucial role of embodied experiences in shaping religious cognition. Scholars such as Ann Taves (2009) and Robert McCauley (2011) have argued that religious experiences are grounded in ordinary cognitive processes, including sensation and emotion. This perspective allows us to analyze the sensory-rich practices associated with *Cheonji Gongsa* as cognitive tools that facilitate religious understanding and commitment.

In Daesoon practice, the recitation of sacred mantras, particularly the *Taeulju*, exemplifies the integration of sensory experience and spiritual cognition. The practice engages multiple sensory modalities:

1. Auditory: The sound of the chant creates a sonic environment that may influence the practitioner's state of consciousness.

2. Proprioceptive: The physical act of vocalization involves bodily sensations that reinforce the experiential aspect of the practice.

These multisensory engagements create what anthropologist Thomas Csordas (1993) calls "somatic modes of attention," bodily ways of attending to and engaging with the sacred. Through these embodied practices, abstract theological concepts associated with *Cheonji Gongsa* may become more tangible experiences for practitioners.

Emotional responses play an equally crucial role in the religious cognition of *Cheonji Gongsa*. Drawing on the work of emotion theorists like Antonio Damasio (1994), we can understand how the intense emotional experiences often reported by Daesoon practitioners–feelings of awe, ecstasy, or profound peace—serve as powerful reinforcers of belief. These emotions are not mere epiphenomena but integral components of the cognitive processes through which practitioners come to understand and internalize the teachings of *Cheonji Gongsa*.

The Transformation of Perception through Divine Encounter

In Daesoon Thought, the concept of transformation of perception is intrinsically linked to the understanding and experience of *Cheonji Gongsa*. This transformation can be understood as a fundamental shift in how adherents perceive and interact with the world around them, based on their understanding of Sangje's teachings and works.

The transformation of perception in Daesoon Thought can be analyzed through several key aspects:

1. Cosmic Restructuring: The idea of *Cheonji Gongsa* implies a complete reorganization of the universe. This concept likely influences how followers perceive the world, encouraging them to see beyond surface appearances and recognize the underlying spiritual processes at work.
2. Temporal Perspective: Daesoon teachings about the Former and Later World suggest a transformation in how adherents perceive time. Followers may come to view current events and circumstances as part of a larger cosmic narrative, leading to a more expansive temporal perspective.
3. Interpersonal Relations: The principle of *Haewon-sangsaeng* implies a shift in how adherents perceive and approach relationships. This concept may encourage followers to view conflicts and grievances as opportunities for mutual growth and cosmic resolution, rather than as mere personal or social problems.
4. Nature of Reality: The teachings about the Later World suggest a transformation in how followers perceive the nature of reality itself. The vision of a world without traditional limitations may influence how adherents interpret their current experiences and possibilities.

5. Self-Perception: As followers engage with Daesoon teachings, their self-perception may also transform. They might come to see themselves as active participants in a cosmic drama, rather than passive observers of worldly events.
6. Ethical Perspective: The emphasis on creating a harmonious world may lead to a transformation in how followers perceive ethical issues, potentially encouraging a more holistic and interconnected view of moral responsibility.
7. Sensory Perception: While we cannot make claims about specific sensory experiences without evidence, it's possible that the practices and beliefs of Daesoon Thought influence how followers interpret their sensory experiences, perhaps attributing new significance to certain phenomena.

It's important to note that these aspects of perceptual transformation are theoretical constructs based on the teachings of Daesoon Thought. The actual experiences of individual followers would likely vary and would require empirical research to be documented accurately.

This concept of perceptual transformation provides a rich area for future studies. Potential research directions could include phenomenological studies of practitioners' experiences, cognitive studies on how religious beliefs influence perception, or comparative analyses with other new religious movements. Such research could provide valuable insights into the ways religious beliefs and practices shape human perception and experience.

Implications for Understanding Daesoon Thought

Aesthetics as a Complementary Approach to Doctrinal Studies

The aesthetic analysis of *Cheonji Gongsa* offers a valuable complementary approach to traditional doctrinal studies of Daesoon Thought. While doctrinal analysis provides crucial insights into the intellectual content of religious beliefs, an aesthetic approach illuminates the experiential and affective dimensions that are often equally important in shaping religious commitment and understanding.

This complementary approach aligns with recent trends in religious studies that emphasize the importance of lived religion (McGuire, 2008) and material religion (Meyer et al. 2010). By focusing on the aesthetic aspects of *Cheonji Gongsa*, we gain insight into how abstract theological concepts are embodied and experienced in the daily lives of Daesoon adherents.

For instance, the doctrine of *Haewon-sangsaeng*, or mutual beneficence through the resolution of grievances, takes on new dimensions when viewed through an aesthetic lens. The emotional catharsis and sensory rituals associated with grievance-resolution practices can be understood as aesthetic experiences that reinforce and give tangible form to this central Daesoon teaching.

Moreover, an aesthetic approach can help bridge the gap between etic and emic

perspectives in the study of new religious movements. By paying attention to the sensory and emotive aspects of religious experience, scholars can develop a more nuanced understanding of how practitioners themselves perceive and engage with their religious traditions.

The Role of Beauty in Daesoon Soteriology

The analysis of *Cheonji Gongsa*'s aesthetic dimensions reveals the significant role that concepts of beauty play in Daesoon soteriology. Unlike some religious traditions that view the material world as inherently flawed or illusory, Daesoon Thought posits a vision of cosmic renewal that is deeply aesthetic in nature.

The concept of *Hucheon Seongyeong* (後天仙境), or the Paradise of the Later World, is particularly rich in aesthetic implications. This ideal state is described not just in terms of moral or social perfection, but as a world of supreme beauty and harmony. *The Canoncal Scipture* provides a vivid description of this future world:

> In the Later World, everyone will achieve immortality and longevity. When they open their chests, clothes and food will come out. All nations will be at peace, and jealousy and war will cease. (*Prophetic Elucidations* 80)

This description paints a picture of a world that is not only morally perfect but also aesthetically pleasing. The absence of aging and death, the miraculous provision of necessities, and the global peace all contribute to a vision of beauty that transcends mere physical appearance. It suggests a world where the very fabric of existence is harmonious and beautiful.

This aesthetic vision of salvation suggests that the appreciation of beauty is not merely incidental to spiritual development but is integral to it. The ability to perceive and create beauty becomes, in this context, a spiritual capacity that reflects one's alignment with cosmic principles. The beautiful world described is not just a reward for spiritual development, but a manifestation of the divine order established through *Cheonji Gongsa*.

Furthermore, the aesthetic dimension of Daesoon soteriology offers interesting parallels with and departures from other religious traditions. While it shares some similarities with Buddhist concepts of the Pure Land or Christian visions of the New Jerusalem, the Daesoon emphasis on the transformation of the physical world rather than transcendence to another realm presents a unique soteriological aesthetic.

Comparative Perspectives with Other Religious Aesthetic Traditions

The aesthetic study of *Cheonji Gongsa* provides valuable opportunities for comparative analysis with other religious aesthetic traditions. Such comparisons can

illuminate both the unique features of Daesoon Thought and the broader patterns in how religious movements employ aesthetic elements to convey spiritual truths. For instance, the use of natural phenomena as signs of divine activity in *Cheonji Gongsa* narratives bears some similarities to shamanic traditions in Korea and elsewhere. However, the systematic integration of these phenomena into a comprehensive cosmological framework distinguishes the Daesoon approach.

The emphasis on harmony and balance in Daesoon aesthetics resonates with traditional East Asian aesthetic principles, particularly those found in Neo-Confucianism and Daoism. The concept of *Taegeuk*, central to Daesoon iconography, exemplifies this connection. However, the dynamic and transformative aspects of *Cheonji Gongsa* introduce a unique temporal dimension to these aesthetic principles.

Comparisons with Western theological aesthetics, such as Hans Urs von Balthasar's work on the transcendentals of being (truth, goodness, and beauty), reveal both parallels and divergences. While Daesoon Thought shares the idea that beauty can be a medium of divine revelation, its more immanent conception of the divine and its emphasis on cosmic transformation present a distinct aesthetic theology.

The aesthetic practices associated with *Cheonji Gongsa*, such as the use of mantras and visualization techniques, invite comparison with similar practices in other traditions, such as Tantric Buddhism or hesychastic Christianity. These comparisons can shed light on the universal and culture-specific aspects of religious aesthetic experience.

In conclusion, the study of *Cheonji Gongsa*'s aesthetic dimensions offers significant implications for our understanding of Daesoon Thought and its place within the broader landscape of religious traditions. By complementing doctrinal studies with aesthetic analysis, we gain a more holistic understanding of how this new religious movement operates on both intellectual and experiential levels. The central role of beauty in Daesoon soteriology highlights the movement's unique vision of cosmic renewal, while comparative perspectives situate Daesoon aesthetics within a global context of religious aesthetic traditions.

This approach not only enriches our understanding of Daesoon Jinrihoe but also contributes to broader discussions in religious studies about the role of aesthetics in shaping religious experience, belief, and practice. It underscores the importance of considering aesthetic dimensions in the study of new religious movements and offers a model for how such analysis might be conducted.

Conclusion

This study has explored the aesthetic dimensions of *Cheonji Gongsa* in Daesoon Thought, offering a novel perspective on how new religious movements articulate and propagate their central doctrines through aesthetic means. By applying the framework of theological aesthetics, particularly as developed by Hans Urs von Balthasar, we have illuminated the intricate relationship between divine manifestation, sensory perception,

and spiritual experience in Daesoon Jinrihoe.

Our analysis reveals that *Cheonji Gongsa* can be interpreted as a profound aesthetic event, one in which divine beauty becomes tangible and perceptible in the physical world. This interpretation not only enriches our understanding of Daesoon Thought but also contributes to broader discussions on the role of aesthetics in religious experience and cognition.

Key findings of this study include:

1. The incarnation of Kang Jeungsan and the unfolding of *Cheonji Gongsa* represent a complex interplay of sensory perception, emotional response, and spiritual insight.
2. The concept of the sublime provides a valuable framework for understanding the overwhelming and transformative nature of *Cheonji Gongsa*, evoking feelings of awe, fascination, and even terror in believers.
3. The aesthetic features of *Cheonji Gongsa*, including its embodiment of holiness, rich symbolic language, and vision of cosmic transformation, create a comprehensive aesthetic framework that shapes the religious experience of Daesoon believers.
4. The sensory and emotive aspects of Daesoon practices contribute significantly to spiritual experiences and the formation of religious beliefs, highlighting the importance of embodied cognition in religious understanding.
5. The aesthetic vision of *Hucheon Seongyeong* plays a central role in Daesoon soteriology, suggesting that the appreciation and creation of beauty are integral to spiritual development.

This aesthetic approach to studying *Cheonji Gongsa* offers several important implications for religious studies:

1. It provides a complementary method to traditional doctrinal studies, illuminating the experiential and affective dimensions of religious belief and practice.
2. It helps bridge the gap between etic and emic perspectives in the study of new religious movements, offering insights into how practitioners themselves perceive and engage with their traditions.
3. It facilitates comparative analysis with other religious aesthetic traditions, highlighting both unique features of Daesoon Thought and broader patterns in religious aesthetics.

However, this study also has limitations. The theoretical nature of our analysis could be complemented by empirical research, including phenomenological studies of practitioners' experiences and cognitive studies on how religious beliefs influence perception. Future research could also explore how the aesthetic dimensions of *Cheonji Gongsa* are experienced and interpreted by different demographic groups within

Daesoon Jinrihoe.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates the value of aesthetic analysis in understanding new religious movements. By examining how divine beauty is conceptualized, experienced, and transmitted in Daesoon Thought, we gain deeper insights into the power of aesthetic experience in shaping religious belief and practice. This approach not only enriches our understanding of Daesoon Jinrihoe but also offers a model for how aesthetic analysis might be applied to other religious traditions, contributing to a more holistic understanding of religious phenomena in the contemporary world.

Conflict of Interest

Lee Gyungwon has been on the Associate Editor of *JDTREA* since July 2021, but has no role in the decision to publish this article. No potential conflict of interest relevant to this article was reported.

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The Spiritual Nexus: Daesoon Jinrihoe and Its Diverse Connections to World Religions

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Abstract

The emergence and development of Daesoon Jinrihoe in the late 19th century on the Korean Peninsula have placed it as a significant modern religious tradition in contemporary Korea. In consideration of its origin, roots of Daesoon Jinrihoe are found to be tightly connected to both the formal and material contents of diverse Eastern and Western religious traditions. The purpose of the current study is to explore the social background of Daesoon Jinrihoe and unveil its strong bond and relationships with other world religions and systems of philosophical thought. Additionally, it seeks to examine the distinctive features of Daesoon Jinrihoe, assessing whether it remains as a New Religion or has already qualified its status as an established religious tradition, akin to major world religions. In terms of research methodology, this study employs a discourse analysis approach within a qualitative research framework. Secondary sources are utilized extensively, supplemented by primary sources that are necessary and mandatory for a comprehensive understanding.

Keywords: animism; ancient religious system; Korean traditions; acculturation; new religions; Kang Jeungsan; Daesoon Jinrihoe

Introduction

Historically, no form of social turmoil—whether religio-cultural or politico-economic—has gone unchallenged (Ahmed 2009). During periods of tension, resistance movements often emerge in various forms, aiming to counter the hegemonic dominance of established organizations. Korea, for example, have faced numerous challenges and undergone significant changes since Japanese colonial rule (1910–1945) and the Korean War (1950–1953), with none of these events going unchallenged because various religious movements emerged alongside many other forms of resistance. In the middle of social chaos (Yongbok 2018) new Korean religions started to emerge. This dynamic created the potential for new religious movements to arise, challenge mainstream religions and encourage marginalized groups to break away and establish reformed or new movements. Throughout history, new religions have often stemmed from mainstream traditions to pursue new aims, objectives, and ideologies. The era of Cold War globalization also encouraged religions to adopt new, revised, or reformed social, moral, and political agendas (Hartney 2022). Daesoon Jinrihoe is an example of a new religious movement that was officially established and developed during the era of Cold War globalization. Its predecessor movement emerged on the Korean Peninsula in 1901 through Kang Jeungsan, inheriting ancient traditions and modern ideologies shaped by interactions with anti-colonialist nationalist politico-religious movements. Although Daesoon Jinrihoe is a new religion, it is deeply rooted in traditional religions that arrived in Korea during various periods of antiquity. Confucianism, for example, along with Chinese characters arrived on the Korean Peninsula around the beginning of the Christian Era. Buddhism arrived in 372 AD during the formative period of the national system in Korea, and Daoism was introduced in 624 AD during the Tang Dynasty of China. History attests to the harmonious coexistence of these traditions, including Korean folk religions, from the Goryeo to the late Joseon Dynasty (1392–1897). This harmonious coexistence is clearly manifested in Yoon Yongbok's (2018) observations on Korean religions and culture. Daesoon Jinrihoe is an Asia-centric homogeneous tradition and the largest indigenous Korean new religion (Chryssides 2022). It has incorporated borrowed elements into its own practices without losing its cultural identity. Similarly, the Vietnamese origin of Cao Dai represents a harmonious synthesis of both Eastern and Western elements without losing its native identity (Alam 2020).

Following Kang Jeungsan (Sangje or Supreme God), his two successors, Jo Jeongsan (Doju or Lord of the Dao) and Park Wudang (Dojeon or Leader of Principle), played pivotal roles in successfully fulfilling the divine mandate (Chong 2016). However, the success story of Daesoon Jinrihoe faced numerous challenges and difficulties. In this context, it should be noted that in addition to the Japanese colonialism from 1910–1945, Jeungsan-related religions had to face the Korean War from 1950–1953; a Buddhist-backed political regime from 1962–1979; and a succession of authoritarian regimes from 1948–1987 that mobilized a strong civil religion for political purposes. It is reportedly

true that, just before significant changes in Korean culture occurred, the culmination of Daesoon Jinrihoe's formal founding occurred in 1969. Its full-fledged development took place during this period of cultural change. According to Don Baker (2001), subsequent changes continued taking place over the last four decades since 1971, and he deemed these to be dramatic and significant transformations in Korean culture. Amid these changes, Daesoon Jinrihoe emerged as a prominent New Religion in Korea. At this point, it is crucial to highlight the current situation of Daesoon Jinrihoe in modern Korea before examining its linkages with other religions. Therefore, before exploring the relationship between Daesoon Jinrihoe and other religions, the concept of New Religious Movements (NRMs) and Daesoon Jinrihoe should be reexamined from both global and Korean perspectives. This includes understanding the academic focus on Daesoon Jinrihoe, evaluating its position as a new religion, assessing its progress and influence, and then briefly looking at its connections with other religions.

Understanding New Religious Movements (NRMs) and Daesoon Jinrihoe

In this section, the concept of "new religions" based on Henry Van Straelen's (1963) analysis will be reassessed to understand the position of Daesoon Jinrihoe in terms of its classification through via the comparative lenses of both Western and Eastern scholars. When grappling with the term "New Religions," one often encounters the challenge of terminology or delineation. Straelen's exploration sheds light on this issue, revealing that it hinges on fundamental questions concerning the notion of "new," a term inherently relative in nature. These questions include: Temporally, what constitutes "new"? At what juncture does "new" transition into "old"? Conceptually, when does a body of doctrine or an organization qualify as a new religion rather than a sect within a larger religious tradition? However, further inquiries emerge concerning Daesoon Jinrihoe: Under which precise classification does Daesoon Jinrihoe fall? Should it be categorized within Daoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism? How does it relate to other religions? Traditionally, the Judeo-Christian heritage has been regarded as one of the principal sources of new religious movements. Alongside this, the nebulous realm of nonofficial religious practices or the cultic milieu is also acknowledged as a wellspring of New Religions. The Judeo-Christian tradition, with its inherent proclivity for cycles of renewal, reform, and schism, has been particularly influential in shaping new religious movements in the Western context. While many new religions draw inspiration from the cultic milieu in terms of ideas and ritual practices, they distinguish themselves by organizing these elements into coherent structures. Notably, some new religious movements claim antiquity, asserting origins predating historical religions such as Christianity. For instance, the roots of Daesoon Jinrihoe can be traced back to Korean Shamanism, an ancient tradition predating Christianity. Historically, the decline of an old tradition can lead to the emergence of a new religion as an institutional or official

model (Allport 1950). This article presents the argument that in the aftermath of the ancient religious system, Daesoon Jinrihoe took root and developed into a modern new religion. Therefore, while officially founded in 1969, Daesoon Jinrihoe's lineage intertwines with Korean shamanism and later influences from Chinese and Indian traditions such as Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism. McGuire's analysis corroborates this narrative, demonstrating how many new religions, including Daesoon Jinrihoe, draw from Eastern spiritual traditions like Zen Buddhism, Hindu yoga, Sikhism, and Taoism.

However, most of the new religions often trace their origins to identifiable clusters of prior beliefs and practices as social phenomena. It is frequently observed that certain recurring factors contribute to the development of New Religions. H. Neill McFarland's (1960, 60) analysis, widely accepted, identifies at least five such factors: 1) social crises exacerbated by an invasive culture, 2) the presence of a charismatic leader, 3) the occurrence of apocalyptic signs and wonders, 4) expressions of ecstatic behavior, and 5) the adoption of syncretic doctrine. However, in addition to five factors, different categories of foundations in terms of the emergence of new religions in Korea are reported. Pokorny (2018) identifies twelve categories of foundations that have shaped the development of new religions on the Korean Peninsula since the 1860s. Turning our attention to Daesoon Jinrihoe and scrutinizing its major features and structure, we find it significantly influenced by these aforementioned factors in its development. Consequently, Daesoon Jinrihoe amalgamates essential elements of native Shamanism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Daoism, and Chinese lore. Others seek to interpret the emergence of new religions through various lenses, including social, cultural, economic, political, and psychological factors, which collectively create a spiritual vacuum within specific societies and situations. Most observers concur that the rise of new religions reflects a resurgence of old folk religious ethos (Alam 2020). Indeed, new religions, including Daesoon Jinrihoe, appear to offer a response to this vacuum, which may explain their dynamic nature.

Emergence of New Religions in Korea

Historically, new Korean religions emerged in the 19th century where Confucianism, Buddhism, Daoism and Shamanism are found to be the bedrock of the new Korean religions. Although the nature of new Korean religions is shaped by conventional religions they emerged with a new and indigenous Korean unorthodox or nationalistic identity (Lee 2016). All new religions in Korea are syncretic in nature and are tightly connected to four traditional religions and typical Korean components. Historically, there is no dispute among the scholars of Korean NRMs in terms of the beginning of the emergence of new religious developments on the Korean peninsula in 1860 with the foundation of Donghak (Pokorny 2018). Il-Sup depicted a religious phenomenon of the emergence of new religions in Korea during and after the Korean War (1950–1953) that

catalogs 170 movements (1985). Lee defines new religions in terms of integral parts of Eastern Learning (Donghak) as opposed to Western Learning (Seohak or Christianity). The four traditional religions had shaped the nature of the new Korean religions. In other words, for Lee, new Korean religions emerged in the 19th century, absorbed all existing religions, both orthodox and unorthodox, and integrated them into an ethnic Korean or nationalistic movement in character (Lee 2016). The purpose of the emergence of Donghak as a new religion was to make a religious stand against alien beliefs, especially Catholicism. This may also be considered as one of the major factors of emerging a counter movement or new religious movement. For Lee, (2016) the new Korean religions contain many unique Korean components or common heritages such as blood relations, regional ties, and historical senses of common destiny or collective community, with which they tried to ward off foreign invasion or threat by staging massive opposition movements for the Korean people who were in search of national freedom and glory, and thus it naturally contains more nationalistic components or connotations than otherwise. Byeonggil Jang, defines new religion in terms of the popularity as found among the people in the lower classes of society who were poor and powerless in traditional Korean society. He continues that the religions before the 1930s in general should be called new religions, whereas those after the 1930s are called the newly risen religions which are regarded as distinctively different from the earlier ones (as cited in Lee 2016).

As far as the number of the followers of the new religions is concerned, between World Wars I and II, Korean new religions had more members than traditional religions (19th Population and Housing Census 2015). Although the numbers are undercounted in the government census, today, they still count their numbers in the millions. During and after the Korean War (1950–1953), new religions in Korea began to gain credibility, emerging as significant providers of social and educational services and presenting themselves as viable alternatives to traditional religions and mainline Christianity. This trend is exemplified by Daesoon Jinrihoe, which, without dispute among scholars of Korean new religions, stands out in the landscape of new religious movements due to its distinctive theological development, unique practices, and rapid growth within Korea. Historically, the reality is that all new religions were strongly opposed to Western encroachments in the middle of the 19th century. More specifically, most of the new religions on the peninsula had political ambitions. But the failure of Donghak Revolution in 1894 brought a change within the attitudes of Korean new religions. Indeed, in 1894, most of the movements shifted from political activism to social welfare and charity (Zoccatelli 2018).

The Number of Movements on the Korean Peninsula from 1860–1997

The number of movements that emerged on the Korean Peninsula since 1860 is

presented here

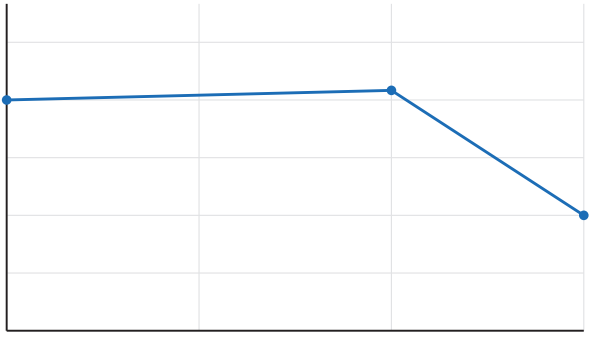


Figure 1. Trends in Number of Religious Movements in Korea (1860–1997)
Data Source: (Kim 2013; Ro 2008; Kim, Yu and Yang 1997 as cited in Pokorny 2018)

The graph illustrates the dynamic nature of religious and social movements on the Korean Peninsula over the specified period, with periods of growth, decline, and stability.

The History of Korean NRMs

The history of Korean NRMs, for Pokorny (2018, 236), is divided into five periods: 1860–the end of Joseon Dynasty 1910, 1910–1945 (the time of the Japanese colonial rule), 1945–1960 (the traumatic post-pacific war years exacerbated by the devastations of the Korean War 1950–1953), 1960–1980 (the era of accelerating industrialization and urbanization), and 1981–1987 (marked by increasing globalization, rapid technologizing). A timeline chart can be more suitable to focus on the situations that tremendously influenced Korean NRMs.

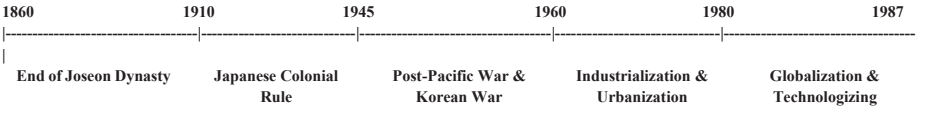


Figure 2. The Five Periods of Korean NRMs

Each period is represented by a segment along the timeline. The significant situations of each period are mentioned below the timeline. The timeline stretches from the end of the Joseon Dynasty in 1860 to the year 1987. This visualization highlights the different

situations that influenced the development of NRMs in Korea across the specified periods.

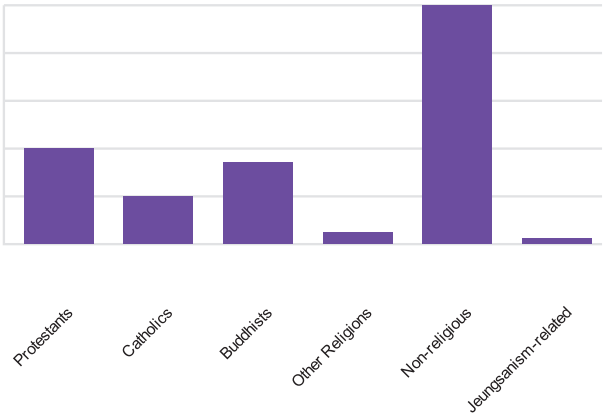


Figure 3. Religious Demographics in Korea

This bar graph presents the data as per the "2023 Religious Perception Survey (2023 Korea Research Regular Survey 'Public Opinion in Public Opinion')". According to Kim Taesoo, Research Professor of the Daesoon Academy of Sciences at Daejin University, the survey was conducted 22 times from January to November 2023. He claims that, according to the interviewee, in religious population surveys, members of new religious movements (NRMs) often either do not respond or, when they do, find that their specific religion is not listed among the options. Consequently, they frequently mark "no religion," resulting in only 2% being categorized as "other religions." While precise statistics are unavailable, Kim estimated that the actual number of adherents across all Jeungsan-based religious movements would not exceed 10 million. He further elaborated that, based on South Korea's 2023 population of 51.71 million, 20% would equate to 10,342,000 people. Thus, if the estimate of 10 million followers is correct, it would represent about 20% of the total population (Personal interview with Kim Taesoo , May 2024). However, this graph shows that:

> The largest segment represents those who claim no religion, at 50%.
> Christians make up 31% of the population, with Protestant comprising 20% and Catholic 11%.
> Buddhists account for 17% of the population.
> The remaining 2% is attributed to other religions such as ethnic or indigenous religions, new religious movements, Confucianism, Daoism, Islam, Hinduism, Judaism, Sikhism, Shintoism, and the Baha'i Faith.
> Notably, followers of Jeungsan-related Religions are less than 2%.

This graph approximately represents the revised data, with the non-religious category still being the largest group. However, as per the religious demographics, there is no leading religion in Korea. All religions are actively propagated. Although many countries of the world have one or more leading religions, Korea is considered a unique country where no religion takes the lead in socio-political or cultural aspects (Kang 2018). However, according to the South Korea National Statistical Office's 19th Population and Housing Census (2015), the number of non-religious people is increasing, while the number of people affiliated with other religions is dramatically falling.

Study of New Religions in South Korean Academia

With special reference to the *Handbook of East Asian New Religious Movements,* Lukas Pokorny reported that South Korean academics are found to have adopted the term *sinjonggyo* (new religion) by the end of the 1960s. More specifically, *sinjonggyo* is included in the *Great Encyclopedia of Korean National Culture* (Han'guk minjok munhwa daebaekkwa sajeon) published in 1979. Since then, for Yi (2011 as cited in Pokorny 2018), Korean academe started to use the term *sinjonggyo* as the fixed designation for "new religion." Later on, *sinheung jonggyo* (newly-arisen religion) also appears to be synonymous with *sinjonggyo*. To go back in history now, the beginning of the academic study of 'new religions' in modern Korea laid its foundation in the 1930s. As Lee Gyungwon (2016) mentions Neunghwa Yi to have used the term 'new religion' (shin jonggyo) first in 1930 in his work, the *History of Daoism in Korea*. However, what is relevant to our understanding of Korean academia in terms of its attachment to 'new religions' there is no disagreement that the term 'new religion' began to be used in the late 1960s. Thus, the Association for History of Korean Religions in 1968, the Korean Association for Religious Studies in 1970, and Sin-Jonggyo-Yeongu (the *Journal of the Korean Academy of New Religions)* are clear examples of the gradual development of Korean academia of 'new religions.' There is a widespread perception that since the early 1990s, scholars in Korea have studied it more objectively through research and creative discussion that significantly encouraged scholars from around the world in growing interest in the study of new religions on the Korean peninsula with great curiosity. This observation, thus, draws recognition that as a result of this trend of academic study of new religions in modern Korea, the term *shinheung jonggyo* (new religions) was at the height of its popularity in the early 1990s. In 1992, for example, Yi Kango is reported to have popularized the term new religions (shinheung jonggyo) in his monumental work, *General Reports on the Newly Rising Korean Religions* (Hanguk shinheung jonggyo chonggam) which includes all available new religions in Korea (Lee 2016).

From scholars' point of view, the academic study of Daesoon Thought is coeval with the establishment of Daejin University and the Daesoon Academy of Sciences in the year 1991 (Ko and Greenberger 2023). For scholars of Korean new religions, based on the researcher's direct observations during a brief field research in Korea from 2–13 Aprill

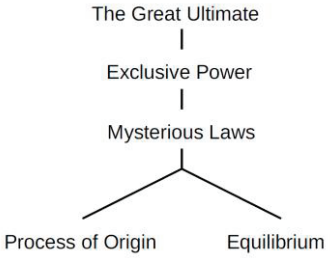
2024, it is evident that Daesoon Jinrihoe holds significant importance both socio-historically and theologically, making it a focal point of research. For scholars of Korean new religions, as the researcher's direct observation both socio-historically and theologically, Daesoon Jinrihoe has long been a major focus of research. However, as George Chryssides (2022) aptly contends, the engagement of a new religion with the academic community, both within and beyond its country of origin, can prove to be an effective strategy for expanding its influence, as has been more recently demonstrated by the Daesoon Jinrihoe in collaboration with the Department of Daesoon Studies and the Daesoon Academy of Sciences.

Understanding Daesoon Jinrihoe and Daesoon Truth

Daesoon Jinrihoe is pronounced as "Daesoon-jill-lee-h'weigh," meaning "the Fellowship of Daesoon Truth". What is actually meant by the term "Daesoon Truth"? Although the Daesoon is translated as "widely touring the world" (Park 2016) the meaning of Daesoon is diverse, complex and comprehensive. In this regard, the Daoist concept of cosmic transformation, Buddhist ontological existential reality and Confucian social morality are also applied to the "widely touring the world" (*daesoon*). Park terms this threefold combination of Daesoon as the concept of trinity. Jin Y. Park (2016), "Truth and Spatial Imagination: Buddhist Thought and Daesoonjinrihoe," quoted Yang Moo Mock as providing a fivefold expression of the term *Daesoon*: 1) The Great Ultimate, 2) Exclusive Power of the Great Ultimate, 3) Mysterious Laws and Transformations of the Great Ultimate, 4) Process of Origin and Gradual Development of the Creation of the Great Ultimate, and 5) Equilibrium in Nature or Balance of Nature controlled by the Great Ultimate as Yang cited in Park (2016, 127) so. Park has summarized Yang's clarification and argued *daesoon* as an "exclusive power of the Lord on High (the Great Ultimate), the principle of the universe, and the foundation of all existence". Consequently, as *Daesoon* is assumed to be the foundational principle of everything, no individual existence can be separated from it. The metaphysical understanding of 'Daesoon' represents Sangje's Great Itineration of the world. In addition, for some scholars, the term 'Daesoon' is considered the 'Ultimate Truth' i.e., the Supreme God Sangje. To Chung (2016), for example, the term 'Daesoon' suggests the truth of all truths since it has examined all the truths in thorough and critical ways. Here in Chong's investigation, we find a sense in which none but only the Supreme Being can be the Truth of all truths. However, to search for the abstract notions of 'Daesoon', Massimo Introvigne (2018) has identified that the term is used by Daesoon Jinrihoe with a plurality of meanings, including the cosmic movement of truth (*jinri*), which comes to permeate the world. What is the cosmic movement that permeates the world? It may be assumed that the 'cosmic movement' indicates the Exclusive Power of Great Ultimate that is all pervading.

However, by investigating diverse expressions of *Daesoon*, it seems highly probable

that these expressions are tightly interconnected with each other centered on the Great Ultimate. To visualize the connection between the four attributes and The Great Ultimate, we can use a network diagram. In this case, the entities are the four attributes, and the central node represents The Great Ultimate.



In this network diagram, "The Great Ultimate" is at the center, and the four attributes are connected to it. The arrows indicate the connection between each attribute and The Great Ultimate. This representation visually shows how each attribute is connected to The Great Ultimate.

Figure 4. Visualizing The Great Ultimate

The background to the origin of Daesoon Jinrihoe can be understood from both narrow and broad perspectives. Broadly speaking, Daesoon Jinrihoe's roots extend to encompass all traditional Korean religions, including shamanism. On a more specific level, for Chryssides (2022), its lineage can be traced back to the Donghak movement (Eastern Learning). Is Daesoon Jinrihoe a *minjung jonggyo* (popular religion) or *minsok jonggyo* (folk religion) or *minjokjeok jonggyo* (ethnical religion) or *jasaeng chonggyo* (indigenous religion) or *guksan jonggyo* (native religion) or *boguk jonggyo* (nationalist religion), *Hyeondae sinjonggyo* (contemporary new religion), *geundae sinjonggyo* (modern new religion), *sinsinjonggyo* (new new religion)? As Daesoon Jinrihoe is distinctively a religion of Korean origin, its roots are tightly connected to both indigenous and native religio-cultural elements and traditional religions, especially of Chinese and Indian origins such as Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism. As per the structure and characteristics of Daesoon Jinrihoe, it seems to be based upon shamanism (Musok) Buddhism (Bulgyo), Confucianism (Yugyo), Daoist (Dogyo) based.

Kang Jeungsan took national risk during the transition period of modern Korea. Japan invaded Korea and strengthened its position on the peninsula right after its victory over the First Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895) and the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905). The colonial policy of imperial Japan was applied to the Korean Peninsula (Kim 2023).

Daesoon Jinrihoe, officially established in 1969, just ten years before the assassination of Park Chung Hee in 1979, claims to have represented the wisdom and spirit of Founder Kang Jeungsan's teachings. As per the new paradigm of new religions, the timeframe of the origination of Daesoon Jinrihoe falls into the category of both new and old religions. Scholars suggest using two key periods, World War II and the 1960s or 1970s, to determine whether a religion is still new or already old. Religions that originated after these periods are considered new. This particular religion is new in the sense that it was officially established in 1969, yet old because its formative period began with Jeungsan's

religious movements and his opening of the great Dao of Heaven and Earth in 1901. However, it should be noted that this periodization is not mandatory for religions that emerged outside the Western world. Nonetheless, in the case of Korea, it is accurate to say that a new religious movement began with the emergence of Donghak in 1860 (Woo 2010).

Turning to the historical challenges of Daesoon Jinrihoe, we find that like almost all historical religions, its formation underwent many ups and downs. It should be mentioned, for example, that after the passing of Jeungsan in 1909, many small splinter groups appeared. For this situation of the growing organization, two major causes are marked such as the increasing Japanese control in Korea and the lack of leadership among followers of Jeungsan-related religions. However, the exact number of the splinter groups is not recorded. With regard to this issue there are two different versions. One study says about 60 groups with 10.2 million followers while the other suggests different figures such as 2.4, 4.8, or 7.2 million. Although we are not actually concerned with the interaction of these groups, each and every group is reported to have claimed to be the only legitimate followers of Jeungsan and his teachings (Chong 2016).

Moreover, regarding to the population issue again, Scholars, including Jeungsanists, acknowledge the difficulty to accurately account for the number of Jeungsan-worshipping devotees or calculate their percentage. To address this issue, several scholars of Jeungsan-related religions were interviewed. Their opinions are presented below:

Jason Paul Greenberger stated, “It would be rather difficult to find an accurate number.” For Greenberger(2024), the number of Daesoon Jinrihoe members registered by the Yeoju Headquarters Temple Complex was supposedly close to one million, spread across six different regions in Korea. Data from Korea’s Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism in 2018 suggested that Daesoon Jinrihoe had around 1.63 million members, making it the fourth largest religion in Korea. Greenberger speculates that errors in other parts of the study led to its eventual retraction but believes the order of religions in the 2018 study feels accurate and is at least directionally correct. He explains that many surveys do not list Daesoon Jinrihoe or other Jeungsan-inspired NRMs as options. When they are listed, the results are quite impressive. An attempt to create an umbrella term, “Jeungsan-gyo,” failed as Daesoon Jinrihoe members identified themselves as “other” instead. He also notes that data on religious affiliations in Korea is often suspected of being inaccurate due to inflated membership numbers by various religions (Personal interview with Greenberger, May 2024). Kim Taesoo noted, “Many ordinary members of Daesoon Jinrihoe practice other religions simultaneously, making it difficult to determine the exact population. Based on estimates, the number of followers would be around 1.5 million,” though he acknowledges this is not a precise answer. Kim Taesoo noted, “Many ordinary members of Daesoon Jinrihoe practice other religions simultaneously, making it difficult to determine the exact population. Based on estimates, the number of followers (affiliated with the Yeoju headquarters temple) would be

between 1.5 million and 2 million households," though he acknowledges this is not a precise figure (Personal interview with Taesoo, May 2024).

Lee Gyungwon also mentions, "I cannot provide an exact answer because the percentage has never been calculated before, and there are significant differences between statistics prepared by the religious order versus those collected by the government." He references a 1997 publication by Daesoon Jinrihoe Headquarters, which recorded 1,953,483 households as devotees, whereas the 2015 government census reported only 41,176 individuals. He notes that many scholars have criticized this discrepancy (Personal interview with Lee, May 2024).

However, estimates of the total number of devotees across all Jeungsan-related religions in Korea vary widely due in part to differing assumptions. Although a rough estimate of around six million is quite common, an influential source for this figure was a 1995 census report by the government census which forecasts that Jeungsanists numbers are a little over 6.2 million. At the same time, it also pointed out that as a proportion of followers of all religions in South Korea, the percentage of followers from Jeungsan-related religions will have fallen from less than 2% in (year) and the number would increase. It is important to note that this presumably undercounted study would still show Daesoon Jinrihoe to be the 6th largest religious community in Korea, behind only Buddhists, Protestant and Catholic Christians, Confucians and Won Buddhists (Baker 2016).

Thus, the history of Jeungsan-related movements reached a matured stage when it produced a formidable new religious organization, Daesoon Jinrihoe, in South Korea in 1969. Moreover, there is also an important but often understated shamanistic legacy within the country's religious landscape (Horak and Yang cited in Kim and Connolly.2021). More developments of the Jeungsan-related movements can be traced in this stage.

Daesoon Jinrihoe and Its Relation to Other Religions: A Comparative Analysis

Daesoon Jinrihoe encompasses rudimentary, national, and universal forms of religion. From the perspective of religious classification, Daesoon Jinrihoe could be said to be both an organized form of religion and an official model of religion (McGuire 1997). Furthermore, it is a rudimentary form of religion because its roots can be traced back to the primitive religious systems of Korea. It is considered a national religion because, in line with the historical development of religion (Edwards 1965), Daesoon Jinrihoe shows no tendency to extend beyond its native boundaries through deliberate overseas propagation or missionary work. While Daesoon Jinrihoe may not be akin to Buddhism, Christianity, or Islam, it displays some tendencies toward becoming a universal religion. The central theme of a universal religion is missionary zeal, which includes propagation, proselytization, and expansion both within and beyond national boundaries, along with

offering diverse social welfare activities. Although Daesoon Jinrihoe does not exhibit traditional missionary zeal, at least internationally, it is involved in various social engagements that suggest the "blossom of universalism" (Edwards, 1965) within the religion.

A thorough study of some aspects of religious beliefs and rituals of Daesoon Jinrihoe consisting of symbolic actions suggest their links to the rudimentary form of religion. They are, for example, symbolic animal deities representing four seasons and four directions; twelve animal deities corresponding to the twelve months; the idea of twelve animals corresponding to twelve directions; twenty-four divinities overseeing the twenty-four seasonal subdivisions; the images of the twenty-eight divinities in charge of constellations etc. At this point, it should be mentioned that the characteristics of the rudimentary forms of religion or the primitive nature religions are found to be roughly similar everywhere (Hopfe 1983). This, according to the study of the Ministry of Culture & Information, Republic of Korea (1977, 150), is noted as "ingrained Korean habit of religious syncretism." However, the characteristics of these religious beliefs and rituals of Daesoon Jinrihoe are also not free of such "ingrained Korean habit of religious syncretism." In addition, as the rudimentary form of religion is based on animism or shamanism called *mudang* in Korean (Ministry of Culture & Information, Republic of Korea 1977), it refers to the direct involvement of Daesoon's roots with *mudang* as a persisting background. Moreover, as the traditional beliefs and religions of Chinese origin (or introduction) in Korea played a pivotal role as survivors of the most ancient religious system on the peninsula, it is assumed that almost all of the New Religions of modern Korea, with some exceptions, are tightly connected to Korean indigeneity (Ministry of Culture, 1977). At this point, it makes clear that Daesoon Jinrihoe, as a syncretic religion, had its strong footing not only on the ancient religious system but also on Daoism, Confucianism and Buddhism. According to Daesoon theology, the images of the twenty-eight divinities in charge of constellations represent the highest position of Sangje (the Supreme God), who reigns over the universe. The symbolic tower of these twenty-eight divinities in Daesoon resembles the Cao Dai concept of the roofless tower, the highest place where God reigns over the universe (Gobron 1950; Oliver 1976; Blagob 2001 & Alam). In addition to animal deities and divine images, devotional offerings to mountain deities in Daesoon Jinrihoe correspond to the Shinto concept of kami. Elements of Daesoon Jinrihoe's beliefs and rituals appear more or less similar to various indigenous religious systems. This proposition actually demonstrates that Daesoon Jinrihoe holds a clear position as a polytheistic, panentheistic, and syncretic religion, while also encompassing aspects of complex monotheism.

The Deity or divinity in Daesoon Jinrihoe is a complex phenomenon when it is compared to the Abrahamic monotheisms such as Judaism, Christianity and Islam including Bahai Faith. According to McGuire (1997, 15), "The entire enterprise of theology out of which formal beliefs are developed represents a highly specialized and intellectualized approach to religion. But religion also includes less formal kinds of

beliefs such as myths, images, norms, and values." If we consider McGuire's view and analyze it, our understanding suggests that although Daesoon's highly specialized and intellectualized approach is similar to that of Abrahamic traditions, there is a notable distinction. Specifically, the beliefs and practices of Daesoon Jinrihoe appear to be less formal compared to those in Abrahamic traditions.

God's communication through individuals is a concept acknowledged by nearly all religions worldwide. In *A Lion Handbook: The World's Religions*, R. Peirce Beaver (1982) delineated three primary conduits through which divine messages are conveyed: prophets, priests, and wise men. Among these groups, prophets often received direct communication from God, a phenomenon evident in both Judeo-Christian and Islamic traditions. While God did not directly speak through priests and wise men, the former were tasked with imparting God's revelations, and the latter were entrusted with elucidating God's will. Christianity, while acknowledging the Old Testament as divine revelation, regards the New Testament as the ultimate expression of God's message. Notably, Daesoon Jinrihoe diverges from Judeo-Christian and Islamic traditions in terms of its understanding of divine revelation. However, in Daesoon Jinrihoe, God Gucheon Sangje is believed to have descended to earth in the historical figure of Kang Jeungsan, akin to the Christian concept of God incarnating in the form of Jesus. In this light, it is crucial to note the parallels between the Christian notion of God's incarnation and the Daesoon understanding of Sangje's manifestation in Kang Jeungsan (Introvigne 2021). At this juncture, it is crucial to note that preceding Kang Jeungsan, Sangje communicated his messages through Choi Je-Wu (1824–1864). As one of the most prominent visionaries in Korea, he claimed to have a divine mandate as the basis for founding the Donghak religion in the late 19th century (Chryssides 2022).

It rather comes close to the pantheon of Shintoism, Hinduism, and Caodaism. The Chinese concept of the "God Gucheon Sangje" and "Jade Emperor", present within Daesoon theology, exemplifies Daesoon's assimilative and syncretic approach. This approach, as one of the fundamental principles of NRMs, seamlessly incorporates this idea from the ancient Chinese religious system without hesitation. The concept of Bahá'í and Sikh God differs from the concept of Daesoon Jinrihoe God. The concept of God in Judeo-Christian-Islamic traditions is strictly monotheistic where no other entities are claimed to be gods or goddesses neither treated as part of the Supreme Being nor confess any partnership with the Supreme Being. The Hindu concept of the avatar appears in Daesoon theology, where Kang Jeungsan is referred to as the avatar of the Supreme God (Zhang and Greenberger 2023). It is argued that this concept is not directly borrowed from Hinduism rather from Mahayana Buddhism that developed and diffused throughout the length and breadth of China and later on the Korean peninsula and Japan.

The narrative with regard to Kang Jeungsan's position in Daesoon Jinrihoe pantheon presents him as a deity though available argumentation challenges this narrative and countered that rather followers respected him as the grand master (*Daeseonsaeng*) until 1919. But we can see later developments in terms of his position in the pantheon such

as *Daeseonsaeng* is changed to *Cheonsa* (Celestial Master) while *Cheonsa* is finally changed to Gucheon Sangje (九天上帝, the Supreme God of the Ninth Heaven). This evolutionary development of Kang Jeungsan's position as a Supreme Being is confirmed on the basis of Kang's reconstruction work (*Authority and Foreknowledge* 1:9). Notably, Kang's self-declaration as Supreme Being resembles the cry of the early Islamic mystic Hussain bin Mansur al-Hallaj, an'al-ḥaqq (Arabic: أنـا الحقـيقـة, "I am the Truth," one of the divine names of Allah). Although there is a point of agreement between the two announcements, Hallajs announcement did not mean that he declared himself to be God but rather the truth. However, the orthodox misunderstood him to mean that he claimed to be God (Allah in Islam) and he was executed on charges of heresy. The sad story is that based on the ground of confusing justification he was killed on charges of heresy. Another similar story lies in the *Upanishad Mahavakya*: "Aham Brahmasmi" which means I am Brahman (the Ultimate Reality in Hinduism). With regard to "Aham Brahmasmi" and "Anal Haq" many like Vaikom Muhammad Basheer, a South Indian Sufi mystic, abandon the concept of "Aham Brahmasmi" and Anal Haq (Rahman, et.al. 2009).

In examining the aforementioned fivefold expression of Daesoon, especially the fifth one, we can see this equilibrium in close relation to the concept of Chinese harmonism, where humanity assumes an anthropocentric role bridging heaven and earth, aiming to restore balance to our world. Acknowledging our capacity to disrupt the natural order, humans bear the responsibility to cultivate a sense of unity and stewardship toward Mother Earth. Wang's insight resonates strongly in this context: "The whole world is regarded as a family. If we harm others, that means we harm ourselves" (Wang 2022, 42). His elucidation underscores the importance of harmony and collaboration over competition. It becomes evident that in the era of globalization and industrialization, lack of cooperation threatens human civilization with destruction, a reality we must confront.

Donald A. Westbrook (2023) applied Roy Wallis's typology of new religious movements—categorizing them as world-rejecting, world-affirming, or world-accommodating—to Daesoon Jinrihoe and preliminarily argued that the group appears to be both world-affirming and world-accommodating. This perspective aligns Daesoon Jinrihoe with religious traditions such as Judaism, Islam, the Bahá'í Faith, and Caodaism, which also do not necessarily reject the world. In contrast, this differentiates Daesoon Jinrihoe from Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christianity, which often promote priesthood, monkhood, and celibacy, thus encouraging a renunciation or rejection of worldly life. However, the differentiation from Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christianity focuses on the aspects of these religions that promote renunciation and celibacy. However, this analysis might oversimplify the complexity within these traditions. For instance, not all branches or denominations of Christianity, Buddhism, or Hinduism advocate for complete renunciation or celibacy. Many adherents of these religions actively engage in worldly life and responsibilities.

Kang Jeungsan's methodology, when properly understood, emerges as both more

peaceful and more fundamental compared to the leader of the Donghak movement. While the leader of Donghak exhibited political ambition, historical accounts reveal Jeungsan's adoption of a positive, constructive, and integrative approach, aimed at mitigating what Hiheon Kim describes as "massive deaths and fatal destructions" (Kim 2016). Within Daesoon theology, Jeungsan is regarded as the incarnation of the Great Ultimate, a position akin to the Hindu concept of Lord Krishna, the eighth avatar of Lord Vishnu. Notably, in Hinduism, the exact date or year of Sri Krishna's incarnation is not definitively known. Introvigne (2018) proposes that in Daesoon Jinrihoe, the year 1871 marks the incarnation of Kang Jeungsan as God Sangje. However, in contrast to Lord Krishna, who possessed 16 divine qualities, including compassion, patience, forgiveness, and justice (Sugunan 2022), Jeungsan shared these divine attributes but did not approve of revolutionary action. While Krishna instructed Prince Arjuna to engage in a righteous war against evil forces, Jeungsan viewed revolutionary methods as inevitably leading to calamity for the people. In this aspect, Jeungsan's stance aligns with the teachings of Jesus, "Love your enemies" (*Matthew* 5:44, *Luke* 6:27). This nonviolent aspect of Jeungsan's historical movement bears resemblance to Mahatma Gandhi's nonviolent resistance against British colonial rule in the early 1930s.

Conclusion

In summary, the classification of Daesoon Jinrihoe as either a new or established religion varies between scholars from the Occident and the Orient. According to Western scholars, it can be claimed that Daesoon Jinrihoe is no longer a new religion, as its origins date back to Kang Jeungsan in 1901. Conversely, Oriental scholars, especially Korean who do not adhere to this standard, regard Daesoon Jinrihoe as a New Religious Movement. The socio-political conditions, timing, and needs of the Korean social milieu necessitated the emergence of Daesoon Jinrihoe, which aims to achieve human salvation by fostering a heavenly culture on earth, guided by God (Sangje). Daesoon Jinrihoe is a syncretic religion, incorporating persistent elements through the process of acculturation. As an organized and official model of religion, akin to Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Bahá'í Faith, Caodaism etc. Daesoon Jinrihoe is also seen to demonstrate how Jeungsan-related movements organize themselves to focus on shared meanings through four major aspects: religious belief, religious ritual, religious experience, and religious community (McGuire 1997).

Moreover, this article's clarification asserts that although Daesoon Jinrihoe is considered a New Religion, its roots trace back to the ancient religious systems of Korea, signifying its native or indigenous nature. As it has developed as a national religion, its social engagement projects demonstrate a tendency towards universalism, indicating its potential to evolve into a universal religion in the future.

A crucial theological element, according to Michael Hill (1973), is the belief that priests and wise men are of little help, and that God can only be known directly by the

chosen. This idea is reflected in the Daesoonist concept of the incarnation of Sangje (the Supreme God) as Kang Jeungsan, who claimed to be an incarnation of God and communicated directly with his disciples. This concept is similar to the Hindu Avatar Sri Krishna and the Cao Dai God *Duc Cao Dai*, who are also reported to have communicated directly with the chosen. However, a key difference is that no historical date is assigned to the incarnation of Sri Krishna, and the Cao Dai God never revealed Himself directly to the chosen.

Daesoon Jinrihoe stands as a multifaceted religion that blends rudimentary, national, and universal elements. Its deep-rooted connections to Korea's primitive religious systems, coupled with influences from Daoism, Confucianism, Buddhism, and folk religion, highlight its syncretic nature. The religion's rich tapestry of beliefs and rituals along with its theology centered on Sangje, positions Daesoon Jinrihoe as a polytheistic, panentheistic, and syncretic religion with complex pseudo-monotheistic aspects. Despite its native and national focus, the religion's social engagements suggest a potential for broader universal relevance. However, while Daesoon Jinrihoe does not offer a grand theory of universalism, its position aligns with the universal tenets found in religions like Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam, as well as later movements such as the Bahá'í Faith and Caodaism.

Conflict of Interest

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

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Actualizing Interconnectedness: Dao, World, and Humanity

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Abstract

Most current crises facing the world center on war and climate change. Both lead to refugees, migration, poverty, famines, natural disasters, and globally spreading diseases. Also, both are fundamentally related to dominance thinking, that is, the understanding that there must always be a winner and loser, that one gets all and the other nothing, there is ultimately a zero-sum reality. This way of being in the world can be counteracted by actualizing interconnectedness both in thought and action, by changing the basic paradigms of thought toward a more holographic way of looking at things. In Western culture, this is most vividly expressed in environmental ethics, notably Deep Ecology as developed by the Norwegian thinker Arne Naess; in Daesoon Thought, it is noted in Sangje's writings on wisdom; and in Daoism, it appears in the *Daode jing* and *Zhuangzi* as admonitions toward tolerance and respect as well as guidelines for non-interference and harmony. In all cases, the focus is on a system of environmental cooperation, biospherical egalitarianism, or organic holism. Daoists in particular integrate all natural features, plants and animals, in a comprehensive coexistentialism. They see everything as interconnected in a natural pattern of complementarity, described in terms of yin and yang, proposing a way of being that is at one with the flow of Dao, a return to organic harmony and a stable, homeostatic order.

Keywords: Daoism; ecology; Daesoon; connection

Introduction

Most current crises facing the world center on war and climate change. Both lead to refugees, migration, poverty, famines, natural disasters, and globally spreading diseases. Also, both are fundamentally related to dominance thinking, that is, the understanding that there must always be a winner and loser, that one gets all and the other nothing, there is ultimately a zero-sum reality.

This way of being in the world can be counteracted by actualizing interconnectedness both in thought and action, by changing the basic paradigms of thought toward a more holographic way of looking at things. In Western culture, this is most vividly expressed in environmental ethics, notably Deep Ecology as developed by the Norwegian thinker Arne Naess; in Daesoon, it is noted in Sangje's writings on wisdom—where Sangje (上帝, the Supreme God) refers to the historical figure, Kang Jeungsan (姜甑山, 1871–1909); and in Daoism, it appears in the *Daode jing* and *Zhuangzi* as admonitions toward tolerance and respect as well as guidelines for non-interference and harmony.

In all cases, the focus is on a system of environmental cooperation, biospherical egalitarianism, or organic holism. Daoists in particular integrate all natural features, plants and animals, in a comprehensive coexistentialism. They see everything as interconnected in a natural pattern of complementarity, described in terms of yin and yang, proposing a way of being that does not interfere with nature but is at one with the flow of Dao, a return to organic harmony and a homeostatic, interconnected order.

Environmental Ethics

The key facet of Daoism when speaking about the contemporary world crisis is its overarching emphasis on mutual recognition, respect, tolerance, and acceptance—not only among all people but also among all beings, including the animal and natural world. In other words, Daoists propose a form of environmental ethics.

Environmental ethics is a relatively new field of philosophical inquiry, concerned with values relating to the world beyond humanity, "constructing a system of normative guidelines governing human attitudes, behavior, and actions toward the natural environment" (Ames 1989, 114). Its main focus is ecology, a word that literally means the "study" (*logos*) of "habitat" (*eco*), i.e., the science of the relationship between living things and their natural environment. Applying conventional philosophical categories to emergent practical environmental problems and asking questions about the nature of nature and how to relate to it (1989, 113), it is concerned with issues of wilderness, biodiversity, pollution, climate change, global warming, and various other elements of the ecocrisis of the planet.

Growing rapidly since its inception in the 1970s—heralded by the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1962—environmental ethics can be divided according to five major approaches. The first is anthropocentrism. This considers human beings as

the most significant entity of the universe, regards the world in terms of human values and experiences, and assumes humans to be the ultimate goal of life (1989, 141). Critically also called human chauvinism, speciesism, or anthropo-parochialism, this view sees the natural world as a resource to be used for human ends, believes humans to be capable of managing earth to perfection, especially with newly arising methods of science and technology (e.g., genetic engineering), and subscribes to the principle of sustainable development that "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own" (Curry 2006, 47–50).

Another approach is social ecology, which argues that human despoiling of nature is directly related to domination over other humans, represented as the universal social pattern of hierarchy—"the cultural, traditional, and political systems to which the terms class and state most appropriately refer" (Bookchin 1991, 68). Human power structures are thus at the root of the treatment of nonhuman nature; they have to change first before the environment can be protected properly (Curry 2006, 50). That is to say, the full realization of human rights (dignity, freedom, justice, and welfare) is essential in the attainment of environmental goals.

Ecofeminism, next, follows a similar thrust, arguing that the "master mentality" which causes environmental degradation is a core characteristic of the patriarchal or masculinist structures of human interaction. It focuses on the inherent pattern of domination pervasive in modern societies (Curry 2006, 95) that sees the female—as much as the natural world—as lowly, filthy, and dark, to be suppressed, controlled, and exploited (Birdwhistell 2001, 37). Language often conflates the two. For example, just like women are mothers and subject of sexual assault, so the environment is described as Mother Nature and its exploitation called "the rape of the wild" (Cheng 1986, 354). To counter the ongoing oppression and subordination of the natural world, ecofeminists accordingly work with a multi-systems approach, have a strong focus on women's liberation, and aim for an overall cultural shift toward greater respect and equality.

A more biocentric approach, i. e., centered on life itself as a major value and on the respect for the good of other individual creatures, especially animals (Curry 2006, 61), appears in moral extensionism or "ethics of respect" (2006, 56). It argues for the liberation of animals and animal rights, works for the preservation of endangered species, and emphasizes the "interdependence of all living things in an organically unified order, whose balance and stability are necessary conditions for the realization of the good of its constituent communities" (Taylor 2003, 75). Based on the biological theory of evolution, this approach sees human beings as relatively recent arrivals among vibrant plant and animal communities, closely connected to and completely dependent on the ecological soundness and health of the latter (2003, 77). As a result, all living entities on the planet need to be treated with care and respect, supported in their particular expression and growth.

Deep ecology, last but not least, is an expression of ecocentrism, where the system of environmental cooperation as a whole is the center of concern (Curry 2006, 44). It is a

form of biospherical egalitarianism and organic holism that connects to chaos theory and the science of complexity with its principle of self-organization and understanding of a "holistic, participating universe" (Jones and Culliney 1999, 644, 646). Developed by the Norwegian thinker Arne Naess, it sees the flourishing of all life and species as having intrinsic value and their role in the earth's community as interdependent and equal (Curry 2006, 45; Birdwhistell 2001, 39). The diversity of life is essential, and human beings have no right to diminish it in any way. Not only are there too many people on the planet, but their interference in the natural world is excessive; ideologies, politics, and methods must thoroughly change to shift the balance toward favoring the environmental equilibrium as a whole (Curry 2006, 72). The ultimate norm in deep ecology is "maximize Self-realization," allowing all beings to unfold toward a large comprehensive Self (with a capital 'S') that "embraces all life forms on the planet (and elsewhere?) together with their individual selves" (Naess 2003, 271). Not only are all beings interdependent, but their realization is joined in universal symbiosis: for each being to realize itself more fully, it relies on the realization of others; at the same time, with each being becoming more fully itself, the universe as a whole becomes more whole (2003, 272).

Interconnected Natural Processes

The Daoist position most closely echoes the last two, the biocentric and ecocentric approaches. It focuses on personal self-realization in accordance with one's heaven-given inherent tendencies and circumstantial trajectories, closely matching the agenda of Deep Ecology, In addition, Daoism also integrates plants and animals in "coexistentialism" and generally has a deep admiration for nature (Jung 2011, 38). Going beyond the boundaries between species, the *Zhuangzi* often notes that different beings have different needs, preferences, and standards. Painfully aware of the intricate food chain of nature (ch. 20; Watson 1968, 218), it points to the close interconnectedness of all natural elements, emphasizing not only how they transform from one into another, but also how different environmental circumstances impact development (Goldin 2005, 81). For example,

> The seeds of things have mysterious workings. In the water they become Break Vine, on the edges of the water they become Frog's Robe. If they sprout on the slopes they become Hill Slippers. If Hill Slippers get rich soil, they turn into Crow's Feet. The roots of Crow's Feet turn into maggots and their leaves turn into butterflies. Before long the butterflies change and turn into insects that live under the stove; they look like snakes (ch. 18; Watson 1968, 195)

Modern chaos theory describes this interconnectedness of species in terms of fractal geometry, i.e., the fact that "intricate, repetitive patterns appear in the universe over a

vast range of scale" and that "nature creates structure in a continuum of seamless dimensionality." This tendency of nature "to develop an integrating structure" is close to the concept of Dao, which too "creates perfect flair or fluency in its affinitive systems" (Jones and Culliney 1999, 645–46).

In addition to chaos theory, Daoist thought in certain attitudes and concepts matches those of modern physics, biology, and environmental science. They share a deep appreciation of the inherent value of the nonhuman world, are essentially non-anthropocentric, and approach nature with childlike curiosity and enthusiasm.

They are also equally aware of the natural pattern of complementarity or "protocosmic polarity" that creates life in an ongoing process of never-ending interchange (Ames 1989, 119; Fox 2005, 49). Daoist texts express this in terms of yin and yang—active and resting, warm and cold, also expressed as pure vitality and consummate matter. Characterized as universal, relational, interdependent, relative, and creatively harmonious, they move dynamically in the rhythm of the five phases and constitute an extensive continuum of creative vitality (Cheng 1986, 364).

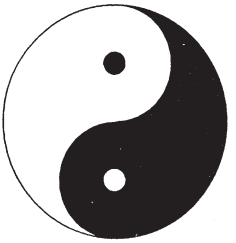


Figure 1. Taiji-Protocosmic Polarity

This is also central to Daesoon Thought, where Sangje defines wisdom in dynamic terms, noting that "as every affair starts from yin and develops to yang, one should first observe the darkness of yin and then watch the light of yang." He further emphasizes the cycle of the five phases and says, "After a man realizes the mechanism, he can be called a man of divine power" (DIRC 2020a, 291).

Modern biologists find such polarity in the structure of human DNA; in the brain, whose left and right hemispheres have different tasks and natures yet work in close cooperation; in the autonomic nervous system, which divides into the sympathetic (active) and parasympathetic (resting) aspects that turn off and on in alternation; in the two sexes, male and female, that come together to create life; and so on (Barnett 1986, 302–04).

Just like the classical Chinese symbol for yin and yang contains dots in each sphere, so there is an element of the other in each of the complementary pairs. Their interaction, moreover, is not "either or" but always "both and"—providing multiple sources of information and potentialities for action to the organism (1986, 305). Nature and nurture, competition and predation, rise and fall, all work closely together in a balanced

on-and-off, up-and-down mode. They are not fixed structures or firm categories, but inherent living processes (Cheng 1986, 353). The most complete and best way of being thus involves the complete interaction of both aspects, the dynamic integration of all complementary systems (Barnett 1986, 306; Ames 2001, 268).

Complementarity or polarity, moreover, manifests in the continuous process of reversion (復, *fu*), the cyclical pattern of growth and decline. The *Daode jing* has:

> The myriad beings are alive, and I see thereby their return.
> All these beings flourish, but each one returns to its root.
> Return to the root means tranquility, it is called recovering life.
> (ch. 16, 25, 40; Cheng 1986, 358)

Biologists and ecologists see this unceasing movement of things on a continuum between extremes in the continued ordering and disintegration (entropy) of life, the organic chemical transformations in living matter, and the homeostatic processes of the healthy body (Barnett 1986, 301). As part of this understanding, death in both Daoism and biology is seen as an "essential part of the process of organic change that includes life" (1986, 307). No new life can come forth without death, without the reversion of living, pulsating, breathing entities to a resting, latent, inanimate state.

On another level, both modern scientists and Daoists share a mode of gathering information. They rely on careful empirical observation, on the unbound, objective examination of phenomena with a clear mind. For example, Zhuangzi speaks to Huizi about watching the raccoon dog as "it crouches down and hides, watching for something to come along; leaps and races east and west, not hesitating to go high or low-until it falls into the trap and dies in the net" (ch. 1; Watson 1968, 35). He, as much as modern scientists, uses the phenomenon itself as the ultimate arbiter of any situation or object and is highly suspicious of any interpretation and classification as one-sided and dependent on opposites (Barnett 1986, 309–10).

Unlike Daoists, modern biologists engage in experiments that manipulate nature in a controlled setting and rely on technological devices for measurements and enhanced observation. They relish vibrant debate and the spirited exchange of data and theories, often relinquishing simplicity for more complex explanations to match the natural patterns. They also prefer a mathematical model and material view of the world (1986, 311–12), in contrast to Daoists who see the world also in mystical, spiritual, and numinous dimensions (Paper 2001, 17).

Belief Structure

Another point that ecologists share with Daoists is the realization that our attitude toward other beings and the environment is "deeply conditioned by beliefs about human nature and destiny" (2001, 6), by constricted views of humanity and the narrative

cultures develop about how to deal with nature (Birdwhistell 2001, 28, 24).

Thus, the prevailing view of nature in the Western world is determined by the Biblical injunction in Genesis.

> And God said: Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let him have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. (1:26)

This engenders dominance thinking and gives human beings the right, even the duty, to overcome and use animals and the natural world for their own purposes (Cheng 1986, 354; Jung 2011, 29–30), making forests into timberland and leading to a relationship of conquest and control. Coupled with the pervasive use of science and technology and the belief in perpetual progress as part of the linear trajectory of history (Ames 1989, 141), in recent centuries this has led to the situation where an instrumental rationality has "objectified, mechanized, rigidified, dehumanized, and de-enlivened" (Cheng 1986, 353) nature and the human body, just as through colonialism Christianity and Western culture have come to dominate the rest of the world.

Dominance, seen as the power to be like the deity and ultimately aimed at the ability to create, is central is the enterprise of the modern West: dominance of the flesh through conquering sexuality and passions; dominance of the mind through systematic training, education, and political propaganda; dominance of nature through agriculture and industry, doing away with wilderness and wild life while allowing nature to persist only in parks; dominance of the outer world by conquest of alien societies and the establishment of colonies; and dominance of all otherness though the increasing unification of world culture, the McDonaldization of society. The current environmental crisis is thus predetermined by the belief system of the Western world.

Daoists, although often romanticized as living "an ideal rustic life in small communities" (Paper 2001, 12), do not have any overall solution, nor do they offer specific research, political measures, or activist initiatives. However, they do have some alternative ways to contribute (Miller 2017). Most pertinently, they offer an archaic wisdom that sees life as universally interconnected or "interbeing" (Jung 2011, 31), values diversity as a fundamental condition for flourishing, and insists on the fundamental compatibility of all life forms as well as the need for humans to treat other species with respect (Birdwhistell 2001, 27, 32, 40). For them, nature is not a teleological realization of a fixed trajectory and end; rather, "wayfaring itself forms the way," i. e., living is more important than achieving (Ames 1989, 115).

Matching this overall pattern, Daoists see the world as aesthetically rather than logically ordered, understanding natural parity as the "noncoherent sum of all orders defined from the myriad perspectives," so that none is superior or dominant (Jung 2011, 36). With cooperation as their central focus, they generalize principles from human experience rather than classifying experience according to theoretical models. Applying

their *ars contextualis*, they move away from universal characteristics to see the uniqueness of the particular, examine everything in its concrete specific detail, and see a pleasing order in the relation of the one to the many—anarchic (not ruled by any one, single entity) and contingent (mutually dependent and interchanging) (Ames 1989, 117, 136; Paper 2001, 7). Daoists thus pursue a norm-less, non-theoretical characterization of the modalities of human and other experience, encourage mirroring rather than controlling, and apply a language of difference and deference rather than of domination.

Daoist texts have no specific word that matches the modern concept of "nature," but use *tian* (天) or *dao* (道) to refer to the natural processes of life. *Tian*, sky or heaven, is the generic term for all beings (物, *wu*); it signifies the origin and foundation of the world, and indicates its natural, spontaneous workings People should follow *tian*, identify and accord with it, and place themselves in its center, but they can also be at odds to or alienated from it.

Dao is somewhat more abstract, denoting the "process of living and growing" as well as the "constituents and conditions of life" (Cheng 1986, 353). Nameless, intangible, empty, simple, all-pervasive, eternal, life-sustaining, and nourishing, Dao is often described with the metaphor of water, which matches its original meaning of "way" or "channel" and shows its placidity, fluidity, regularity, and rhythm (Ames 1989, 131). Dao is the perfect force for the fulfillment of life, echoed in all beings through their inner potency (德, *de*) (Ames 1989, 124). Multicentric and supportive of all, it provides an ethos that "conduces most fully to the expression of the integrity of each constituent particular," deferring to all relevant "environing conditions to establish an efficacious and fruitful integration of all while at the same time fully disclosing the uniqueness of each particular" (Ames 1989, 135).

Daoists thus believe in the "all-embracing nature of the spontaneously life-generating process" and see the cosmos as the unfolding of continuous creativity in organismic, dynamic patterns of interlocking energy fields (Jones and Culliney 1999, 653). Free from distrust of the natural processes of life, their focus on continuity, wholeness, and dynamism, yet are "acutely aware that the world we live in, far from being the Great Unity (*datong* 大同) recommended in the classics, is laden with disruptive forces, including humanly caused calamities and natural catastrophes" (Tu 1989, 72).

Degradation of the environment, therefore, is not a modern issue, but has a long history—the idea that the ancients were more in tune with nature is a myth. The barrenness of Middle Eastern deserts was caused by overgrazing goats over millennia; the great North American prairies, originally forested, are the result of excessive use of slash and burn by Indigenous people; and even in the Pleistocene hunters and gatherers went into overkill, leaving large swathes of nature ravaged and permanently changed (Goldin 2005, 77).

China, too, has experienced environmental despoiling for millennia (Paper 2001, 13). Already Mencius deplores the stripping of trees from Ox Mountain (11.8), while the *Liezi* (ch. 5) and the *Huainanzi* (4.16) tell the story of Kuafu, whose never ending thirst

caused the rivers to run dry (Birdwhistell 2001, 27). The *Zhuangzi* bemoans the degree to which, under the rule of the so-called sage rulers of antiquity, the air was polluted, the light of sun and moon was fractured, the hills were stripped of trees, the streams were sluggish, and the seasons were upset. "Not a living thing was allowed to rest in the true form of its inner nature and destiny" (ch. 14; Birdwhistell 2001, 26).

Non-Interference

To remedy this situation, Daoists propose to return to organic harmony, a stable, homeostatic, and interconnected order that—like a low-maintenance garden—arises out of spontaneous, mutual adjustment among many elements and forces in a given system. Placing priority on situation over agency, they define things not by their "absolute essence" but "correlationally at any given time" (Ames 2001, 269). Each part in the Daoist universe is unique; "each pattern is novel and site-specific" (2001, 277). Interacting and interconnecting with this multilayered and multifaceted world, then, requires tolerance, integrity, and respect (Fox 2005, 51), the application of *wu* or non-processes which are non-objectified and encompass all existence, eliminating the need for control and the instrumentalizing aspect of desire. These include *wuyu* (無欲, non-desire), the achievement of deferential desire, and *wuzhi* (無知, non-knowledge), unprincipled, anarchic knowing.

The key concept in this context is another *wu* process, that of non-interference or nonaction (無為, *wuwei*), rendered variously as non-coercive action, non-interference, or effortless responsiveness (Goldin 2005, 79). This is not inaction but rather perpetual creativity where there is "nothing that is not done" (無不為, *wubuwei,*). It matches what Sangje called "changing without the need for action," that is, the natural process of ongoing "birth (生, *kr.saeng*), growth (長, *kr.jang*), harvest (斂, *kr.yeom*), and storage (藏, *kr.jang*) (DIRC 2020a, 247)."

People, moreover, can be trained to enter and maintain a firm interconnectedness or "steadfast congruence" with this "natural, unconscious, undirected action" of Dao, fully immersed in the cosmic flow while creating positive attractor fields from within (Jones and Culliney 1999, 645–47). Just as Dao always acts in accordance with its own nature, so we should follow our own accord and connect to others and the natural world without imposing on them (Cheng 1986, 357). Practicing a "non-confrontational style," we should make changes gently, slowly, and consciously in alignment with naturalness and without dramatic effects.

Careful about the interdependence of action and effect, non-interference means taking the most appropriate action under the circumstances, letting go of preconceived notions and adjusting rapidly to all constituting factors. The opposite of mastery, control, and conquest, it means merging with nature's flow and contributing to a new identity of the system from within (Jones and Culliney 1999, 647). Working with viability, it means "recovering the innocence of childhood" combined with the adult powers of

discrimination (1999, 647), then assisting nature to achieve masterly effects. These include building houses that blend completely into the natural setting, designing gardens that enhance and highlight natural forms, or training horses with gentle whispering to excel in their natural powers.

Science and technology in this understanding are not in themselves bad but need to be reconfigured so that they serve humanity and "contribute to the richness of life" (Cheng 1986, 369). Prosperity and wealth are beneficial, but in excess lead to great loss—just as an overemphasis on frugality will create waste. Harmony and balance being central virtues, non-interference is a synthesis of relaxing and doing, letting go and control, chaos and order, detachment and totalism.

Inevitably active, this means that we should remain on the edge of chaos, "functioning at the highest dynamic activity while still maintaining structure and integrity," neither in total randomness nor in the frozen realm, neither frantic nor stoic, neither too yang nor too yin (Jones and Culliney 1999, 649). Resting in the calm center of the system, the pivot of Dao, we should serve as nature's conduit, preserving balance in tension and allowing new levels of complexity to emerge, revert, and again emerge (1999, 650–51).

We should be neither passive nor proactive, neither doing too much nor too little. Doing too much means being assertive and calculating, subjecting the natural world to gratuitous interference (Fox 2005, 55). Imposing heroically on natural processes to their detriment like the farmer in the *Mengzi* who pulled up the sprouts in his field, hoping to "help the crop grow" —this leads to building dams inappropriately, releasing insects into new habitats, accumulating material goods far beyond one's needs or razing woodlands to build new developments then ironically called "The Woods" (2005, 55).

Passivity or "not doing" (不為, *buwei*), on the other hand, reflects the conviction that any human action is too much. The complexity of the universe being beyond human comprehension, we cannot judge or act on things that might be happening for a very good reason (Goldin 2005, 80). In this mode Zhuangzi accepts his wife's death as part of the natural changes (ch. 18), neither seeing death as a disaster nor the extinction of a species as anything but a natural process. As a result, he might potentially sit by the riverside, seeing an infant floating by or a crane on its way to extinction without doing anything, just watching the natural process at work. However, following his thought to its logical conclusion, he himself is also part of the circumstances at any given time. Thus, should he become aware of the child floating by and able to do something to save it, the situation would require his action—gentle and conscientious, but action nonetheless.

To find the right balance, Daoists advocate self-cultivation and self-realization, enhancing their inherent authenticity in contact with the deepest sources of creativity and allowing others to do the same (Cheng 1986, 368). In a step-by-step process of continuous letting go and purifying the mind, they free themselves from distractions and focus strongly on their inherent tendencies. Thereby they gradually become "superconductors" of Dao, minimizing friction, conflict, or resistance (爭, *zheng*) and learning to "sustain signals with minimal loss of integrity" (Fox 2005, 53). In the process,

they come to realize that, rather than atomistic and set in hierarchical structures, they are essentially net-like, interwoven, and relational—part of a universal webwork of equal connectivity (Birdwhistell 2001, 35).

A condensed dimension of the universe, Daoists connect to a font of energy and a cosmic capacity for order. Developing a subtle awareness that allows them to attend to the totality of any given situation, they are spontaneously disciplined by their connection to the collective without yet relinquishing their individual uniqueness (Ames 1989, 139). The more they transform, moreover, the more they have a beneficent effect on the world around them; the perfected or sages perform the same role in society as Dao does in the cosmos. As they "outgrow routinized language and ego-habituated preferences," they become instrumental in the "genuinely sustainable globalization of earth" (1989, 140).

For the world today, this means that a Daoist-based attitude to the environment supports the new understanding of evolution. While the basic paradigm is still the survival of the fittest, the definition of "fittest" has changed from the strongest and most aggressive—those with greatest firing power—to the most cooperative, i. e., those who create the best networks, garner the most support from the community, and furnish the best living conditions for everyone.

The increasing appreciation of the interconnectedness of all life, furthermore, is leading to a fundamentally different way of understanding reality. This includes new perspectives in science, ecology, economy, cosmology, governing, agriculture, and education, among the other basic intellectual structures that support human activity. As humanity, with the help of science and technology, connects and globalizes to ever new dimensions, at some point it will begin to act like one organism rather than as unrelated individuals and separate interest groups. We increasingly become planetary citizens, appreciating the ecological interconnectedness of all and seeing ourselves as an integral part of the system in which we live, bringing Dao and heaven fully to bear.

Conflict of Interest

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

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Examining Erotic Images and Features of Chinese Shamanism in the *Nine Songs* of the *Songs of the South*

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Abstract

As a religious phenomenon of humankind, shamanism has a very long history, and its earliest records go back several millennia even to the Stone Age. Although it is not universally present in every society, its global presence has been felt in nearly every corner of the world. Shamanism has also been and continues to be present throughout East Asia, and it has played a definite role in Chinese religions. It has also exerted a decisive influence in certain traditions of early Chinese poetry that continued throughout traditional China. This article discusses certain erotic images and features of a foundational collection of shamanic poetry from the southern state of Chu in early China, called the *Nine Songs*, which were collected into the anthology called the *Songs of the South*. This presentation looks at the logic of eroticism at the heart of these performances that functions in accord with yin-yang ideology, and it examines what the *Nine Songs* can show us about certain features of early Chinese religion and philosophy.

Keywords: the *Nine Songs*; *Songs of the South*; Chinese shamanism; Qu Yuan

Orientations to the Early Chinese Shamanism of the *Nine Songs*

The *Nine Songs* (九歌, *Jiuge*) are a collection of shaman songs found in the anthology called *The Songs of the South* (楚辭, *Chuci*), which provides the primary literary material for this study of early Chinese shamanism. The primary feature of this shamanism is its logic of eroticism between shamans and spirits. Other early Chinese writings also mention and discuss shamans, but their depictions differ from those of the *Nine Songs*. *The Rituals of Zhou* (周禮, *Zhouli*) shows them holding vital positions in the state bureaucracy, while others like *The Zuo Traditions* (左傳, *Zuozhuan*) depict them as pariah figures best left to themselves, whereas others still like *The Classic of Mountains and Seas* (山海經, *Shanhaijing*) portray them as half-human and half-animal figures living on semi-mythical mountains.

As understood in this article, "shamanism" refers to symbolic systems of representation merging myths, beliefs, rituals, traditions, and worldviews in ritualized events involving direct, face to face, and primarily verbal interactions between humans and spirits of the dead or the spirits of nature for the benefit of the community that thereby enjoys the blessings or other boons from the spirits (Michael 2015). I refer to these ritualized events as "shamanic séances." At the same time, "the shaman" is a title for those persons who are socially authorized to perform such events, and they do so by initiating direct, face-to-face communication with the spirits. This takes place in two ways: either through shamanic journeys, whereby the shaman journeys to the realm of the spirits, or shamanic possessions, whereby the spirits come to take possession of the shamans.

Shamanism is not a singular phenomenon that follows a universal history in tandem with the development of human civilization, a relatively popular conception these days (Michael 2017). There are many kinds of shamanism, and they are appropriate to different kinds of economies (Hamayon 1996). Specifically with regard to China, we can locate three different forms of shamanism in ancient and early China. The first is the royal shamanism of ancient economies with its logic of transformation in which the shaman transforms into the ancestral Master of Game to communicate with the spirits of the ancestors. This form is characteristic and pervasive in the shamanism of the Xia (2100–1600 BCE) and Shang (1600–1050 BCE) (Johnson 1988). Worth noting, however, is that it was the root from which subsequent forms of Chinese shamanism evolved and developed.

The second form is the bureaucratic shamanism of traditional mixed economies with its logic of affliction in which the shaman manages the pollutions of death and disease. This form is embedded within the structures of centralized state authority identified with the northern Zhou culture that appears in the Western Zhou (ca. 1046–771 BCE) and the Spring and Autumn (770–475 BCE). In this case, the shamans were appointed to official position in the institutions of the Zhou, but they were subordinated to other religious specialists, primarily the invoker or priest (Lothar von Falkenhausen 1995).

Their practices emphasized shamanic possession to the near total absence of shamanic flight.

The third form is the agricultural shamanism of traditional farming economies with its logic of eroticism in which the shaman seduces the spirits into temporary sexualized liaisons. This predominated in the southern lands of Chu that were characterized by a diversity of ethnic peoples. Not yet entirely subject to the rigid structures of state authority, Chu experienced weaker forms of centralization, and its shamans were often represented as independent actors not subordinated to other religious specialists. This shamanism maintained more direct links with the ancient royal shamanism with its more direct links to animal and natural spirits, and it gave equal emphasis to shamanic possession and shamanic flight, at least as it is demonstrated in the *Nine Songs*. Its legitimacy emerges from the success of the shaman in forming a temporary love affair with nature spirits, but never with the spirits of game or ancestral spirits.

This study focuses on the *Nine Songs* that exemplarily display the agricultural shamanism of the early southern Chu cultural sphere. They portray nine separate shamanic séances that receive their individual titles based on the spirit that the shaman either flies to or is possessed by. In them, the shamans are shown to be at home in the fertile and exuberantly lush world of life and abundance of southern Chu, where they augment the blessings and benefits of life through forging a relationship with a particular nature spirit through the logic of eroticism.

Shamanic eroticism can be approached through the ideas of Georges Bataille, a pioneer in the study of the philosophical nature of eroticism, and he uncovered three forms of it: physical, emotional, and religious; he writes,

> My aim is to show that with all of them the concern is to substitute for the individual isolated discontinuity a feeling of profound continuity. It is easy to see what is meant by physical or emotional eroticism, but religious eroticism is a less familiar notion. The term is ambiguous anyway in that all eroticism has a sacramental character, but the physical and the emotional are to be met with outside the religious sphere proper, while the quest for the continuity of experience systematically pursued beyond the immediate world signifies an essentially religious intention. (Bataille 1986, 15–16)

Physical and the emotional eroticism are mostly self-announcing, but religious eroticism significantly differs from them as a predominantly mystical phenomenon: profoundly personal, it is exclusively shared between a human being and a spiritual being. However, in addition to the three forms of eroticism recognized by Bataille, I recognize an additional fourth: shamanic eroticism. Although the shared features of both religious and shamanic eroticism are found in "the experience of profound continuity" that are difficult to separate from many forms of mysticism, they are quite different with respect to their separate practical realms, private mysticism for the former and public shamanism for the latter. And while both concern the erotic relationship between a

human and a spirit, their fundamental goals differ: religious eroticism is directed to the personal fulfillment of the individual, but shamanic eroticism is directed to the community benefit that accrues from bringing together the human and the divine in the public performance of the shaman in in the course of the séance event.

Shamanic eroticism is initiated by the shaman in the séance event, and it is activated in the direct encounter of the shaman and the spirit either in the shaman's flight or possession. Within the context of public performance, this eroticism is channeled into the production of a sense of the continuity of being with the divine experienced by and for a public community, in distinction to the religious eroticism normally performed in personal isolation that is channeled into the production of the individual's sense of a continuity of being with the divine. In these ways, the religious eroticism of the mystical experience fundamentally differs from the shamanic eroticism of the séance event.

All four forms of eroticism (physical, emotional, religious, and shamanic) refer to the experience of ravishment, but shamanic eroticism differs from each of the others because of it stems from the primal yearning for the renewal of human life in conjunction, alliance, or consummation with a spiritual being for the benefit of the community. All four forms, however, are typically expressed in the deeply personal feelings that energize love affairs, which proceed between humans in physical and emotional eroticism, but which proceed between humans and spirits in religious and shamanic eroticism. One clear instance of this is found in "The Greater Master of Fate" (大司命, *Da Siming*) when the female shaman anguishes over her separation from the male spirit to whom she directs her love:

> My constant thoughts of him torment my heart,
> What can I do with this torment?
> I wish only that our tryst of this day could last forever.
> Oh! Obstinate destiny, unchangingly fixed,
> Who is able to alter its dictates?
>
> 羌愈思兮愁人/ 愁人兮柰何/ 願若今兮無虧/
> 固人命兮有當/ 孰離合兮可為

Having introduced the logic of eroticism that anchors the *Nine Songs*, in ending this section, it is fitting to quote the words of Gopal Sukhu, who also has recognized its centrality for understanding the world conjured by this southern shamanism:

> The spirits in the *Nine Songs* descend, like most spirits in the Chinese ritual context, to enjoy food. But even more than food, they seek amorous contact with the shamans, who adorn themselves in various ways to make themselves attractive to the spirits. The central event in several of the *Nine Songs* hymns is the love affair between the spirits and the shamans. (Sukhu 2012, 77–78)

On the Southern Chu Cultural Background of the *Nine Songs*

Authorship of the *Nine Songs* is traditionally attributed to Qu Yuan (屈原), a nobleman during the reign of King Huai of Chu (楚懷王, r. 328–299 BC), but this attribution is certainly false. While the *Nine Songs* are literary masterpieces of a self-consciously poetic and romantic writer, the polished products of a sophisticated sensibility, they also express a *joie de vivre* that is presented in the first person voices of shamans and spirits, embodying a religious sensibility that feels more appropriate to a cultural consciousness rather than an individual poet. Sukhu writes, "Only a small fraction of the hymns that accompanied [early Chinese shamanic] rites survives. The *Nine Songs* and possibly some items from the *Shijing* are all that remain from the Warring States period … However, in quality, in the original at least, they rank among the best religious poetry in the world" (Sukhu 2012, 195–196).

Arthur Waley, the famous translator of many ancient Chinese texts who was enamored of the *Nine Songs*, wrote, "As regards the time when these Songs were put into their present form, I should say that the traditional dating (fourth to third century B.C.) seems quite reasonable. But of course the prototypes on which they were founded may in some cases go back to a much earlier period" (Waley 1955, 16–17). Although Waley is correct that *Nine Songs* reveal a performance structure that echoes ancient times past, I agree with him that they should still be taken as literary representations of religious performances carried out already in the 4th century BCE.

Wang Yi (王逸) was an important second century commentator of the *Songs of the South*, and he had much to say about the legend of Qu Yuan. Zhu Xi (朱熹), the famous Neo-Confucian of the Song Dynasty, polished, amended, and retold much of what Wang Yi had to say, and the following is his partial retelling of the origins of the *Nine Songs*:

> The *Nine Songs* are the work of Qu Yuan. Formerly, the custom of the people living between the Yuan and Xiang rivers in the district of Ying in the south of Chu was to believe in spirits and worship them. Their worship required the services of both male and female shamans who would make music and sing and dance to please the spirits. Among the coarse Jingzhou customs [of the shamans] were their crude lyrics. Placing themselves between *yinyang* and humans and spirits, they were confused and unable not to mix in disrespect and lewdness [toward the spirits]. Qu Yuan was banished there, and he witnessed their worship of the spirits and was moved. Thereupon he modified and fixed their lyrics by taking out their excesses, and he accorded with their sentiments in their service to the spirits to express his intention: "I am loyal to my lord, and I love my country. I yearn for them, and I will never forget them." This account provides a context for the genesis of the *Nine Songs*, however, alone among Qu Yuan's other writings, Wang Yi does not interpret them as Qu Yuan's personal creation: the "lyrics" (詞, *ci*) of the shaman songs that Qu Yuan "modified and fixed" (更定, *geng ding*) predated

> him and were originally at home in the shamans' séance events performed in the rustic environs of country folk agricultural life. (Zhu Xi, quoted in Hong 2002, 29)

The early Chinese shamanism of the *Nine Songs* is made more complex and interesting by the legends associated with their origins, for which two stand out. The content of the first legend is seen in some of the other texts collected in *The Songs of Chu*, *The Classic of Mountains and Seas*, as well as various other early writings. They agree that that the *Nine Songs* were given to Qi (啓), founder of the semi-mythic Xia dynasty, when he himself went on a shamanic flight to Heaven. While there, he was entertained with a complete performance of the *Nine Songs* by the spirits, after which, modified for performance by shamans and reflective of the Xia religious sensibilities, Qi had them performed after his father's funeral. The *Nine Songs* continued to be performed throughout the Xia and Shang dynasties at ritually auspicious times; the opening of the first song, "The Lord of the East Supreme One" (東皇太一, *Donghuang taiyi*), tellingly situates the ritual period of the *Nine Songs* with the characters *jiri*(吉日), referring to the "auspicious day" that begins the sexagesimal cycle of the Chinese calendar (the first day of the new year), although the traditional commentaries about them claim that they were performed twice a year, in spring and autumn.

When the Zhou defeated the Shang to establish their dynasty in 1050 BCE, the Duke of Zhou spearheaded a process of ritual reform structured around the centralized and authoritative position of the ruler in tandem with the development of their ritual calendar of sacrifice to their royal ancestors. The shamans lost much of their autonomy as their position in the religious bureaucracy was downgraded and made subordinate to all other religious functionaries, including priests, diviners, and astrologists, which was reflective of their position in the Confucian state religion of later times. The ruler no longer relied on the shamans to communicate with the spirits of heaven, the spirits of nature, and the ancestors to announce his works and seek blessing; this duty now fell into the province of the priests (祝, *zhu*). The shamans were primarily charged with purifying the residues of death and other forms of pollutants as well as exorcisms. However, according to the legends, the unreformed shamanism of the Xia was carried to the south by the northern émigrés who began to move there during the Shang and Zhou dynasties.

Now centered in the predominantly non-centralized southern lands of Chu, with its varied forms of religious practice and culture yet still performed with relative independence from the state, this southern shamanism nonetheless remained in tension with the expanding political reach of the northern Zhou, whose rulers were inexorably locating into its relatively virgin domains; soon, the Chu regions would form themselves into a major state player in the period of the Warring States. It was in this environment that the second legend of import surrounding the *Nine Songs* comes into play. It centers on Qu Yuan, the forsaken minister of King Huai who, because of his integrity in the face of the corrupted ministers that filled the court, was slandered to the king by them and was subsequently banished to the Chu hinterlands to spend the rest of his life in exile.

However, after a period living with his heartache, he is said to have thrown himself into the river to end his suffering. Before doing so, he was believed to have "composed" many if not all the separate pieces in *The Songs of Chu*, including the *Nine Songs*.

According to this legend, Qu Yuan personally witnessed the shamanic performances of some of the hinterland peoples, after which he "recorded" them under the title of the *Nine Songs*. This balance between anthropology and artistic creation is a central feature of the *Nine Songs*, since the tradition from earliest times to the present agree that they are not the product of a purely imaginative poetic mind, nor are they the written-up notes of a scholar in the field. The *Nine Songs* present highly stylized literary representations of nine separate séance events that are squarely situated in a performance context. Regardless of whether the historical Qu Yuan is taken as the author in any sense of the word, the *Nine Songs* are strongly reflective of actual performance material filtered through the mind of a literary genius, and the logic of shamanic eroticism shines through in full glory in each of the songs.

Orientations to the Logic of Eroticism in the Shamanism of the *Nine Songs*

A foundational component of most every shamanic worldview throughout the world rests on the nearness and approachability of the spirits, and shamanism claims that there are certain humans empowered or blessed with the ability to initiate direct communication with them. This is due in part to the belief that spirits inhabit liminal locales within this very world to which shamans have access: on mountains, above the clouds, in forests, or under water. In the *Nine Songs*, the spirits of nature are radically humanized in ways that ancestors never can be: they are erotic beings most susceptible to those most human of emotions: passionate joys and lustful delights together with rabid possessiveness and petty jealousies, but they feel such emotions all the way. The world is alive with their presence and shamans tap into it, they bring the spirits home to the community and openly share them with all who are present. Shamanic eroticism, with its succulent offerings of delicacies and liquors, its lush atmospheres of music and incense, its floral decors on head-dress and garments—this marks the celebration of life richly spiced with the flavors of death that inevitably accompany all forms of eroticism.

The ritual structures of the *Nine Songs* are relatively evident as seen through the lens of their literary depictions that are concentrated on the nine shamanic séances, and they altogether give compelling evidence for the complementarity of shamanic possession and shamanic flight, but in different ways. One way is in the intermixing of songs portraying shamanic flight and songs portraying shamanic possession in an otherwise random sequence from one séance to the next. Another way, in a few of the songs centering on female shamans, is in the sequence of shamanic possession immediately followed by shamanic flight within the same séance.

The *Nine Songs* portray the male shamans as only undertaking independent shamanic

flights, where they fly to the domains of the spirits to rendezvous with the female spirits, while the female shamans only undertake shamanic flight in the company of the male spirits. Shamanic possessions appear as the primary province of the female shamans since the male shamans are not once portrayed as ever becoming possessed.

As performed, these séances are understood as first-person narrations sung by the shamans describing their adventures and are enacted through dance and other pantomime forms for the benefit and participation of the congregation. The shaman's songs are accompanied and supported by orchestral performances with a plethora of bells and drums among other instruments that are described in several of the songs. Further, the *Nine Songs* incorporate personal and intimate dialogues between the shamans and the spirits, and some of them also present soliloquies of the spirit seemingly speaking to him/herself either prior to encountering the shaman or immediately upon leaving the shaman.

These literary depictions of the shamanic séance events of the *Nine Songs* that took place over two thousand years ago are at best pale reflections of their lived and experienced performances. Scholars to this day remain puzzled in their attempts to understand exactly what the *Nine Songs* actually are; David Hawkes, the foremost Western scholar of the *Songs of the South*, writes,

> The *Nine Songs* can best be described as religious drama; but though it is obvious that they were written for performance, the absence of stage directions indicating who at any given point was supposed to be singing, or what they were doing while they sang, makes it impossible to be sure how they were performed … It appears that the actors or dancers in these dramas were gorgeously dressed shamans; that musical accompaniment was provided by an orchestra of lithophones, musical bells, drums, and various kinds of wind and string instruments; that—to judge from one or two references to a "hall"—the performance took place indoors. (Hawkes 1985, 95–96)

Lisa Bresner, a contemporary leading French scholar of the *Songs of the South*, puts it nicely: "The ritual was erased in order to privilege the expression of the shaman and the reaction of the deity. Despite this mystery of their origins and position in Chu society, the *Nine Songs* remain the primary (but anything but exclusive) evidence for approaching the early Chinese shamanism of the southern Chu culture" (Bresner 2004, 101). She continues:

> The imagery of the fauna and flora, the musical indications and certain material emblems such as the harnesses or the costumes take the place of occult formulas in the *Nine Songs*. Their incantations were purged in the hands of the poets, the only witnesses who could let us know the unfolding of the seasonal performances. The vegetal elements, textiles, and minerals named throughout should remind us of the *mis en scene* which was prescribed, and it is only through the snatches of

> these scenic indications, reduced to a term which suffices to itself in the chant, that makes us imagine the gestures, the postures, and the orchestras. The chants retained the essentials of the ceremony as much as the process…The reputation of the kingdom of Chu was also constructed from the disposition to cultivate these performances. We can suppose that the inhabitants profoundly knew the meaning of these gestures. (Bresner 2004, 101)

Sukhu also recognizes the difficulties of fully comprehending the sheer vitality of the ritual environment within which the *Nine Songs* had their place in southern shamanism in ways that echo those of Bresner; he writes, "Given the apparent prevalence of the sort of ritual they [e.g., the *Nine Songs*] accompanied…another possible reason for their difficulty is the loss of the performative aspect of the rituals they accompanied" (Sukhu 2012, 196).

Still, Bresner and Sukhu are not alone in lamenting the devilishly abstruse nature of the *Nine Songs*, but more than that, even our efforts to make preliminary sense of them require a series of choices to be made in a sea of uncertainty: while there is much dialogue, it is difficult to know who is speaking, what is their gender, and where the actions take place. For instance, Waley writes, "The main difficulty in interpreting the songs lies in the fact that the subject of the sentence is so often left unexpressed. Add to this the absence of number, gender and tense, and you will readily agree that there is bound to be room for differences of interpretation" (Waley 1955, 15).

Adding to this uncertainty, Hawkes adds writes: "In some cases we cannot even be sure whether what we are reading is monologue or dialogue or dialogue with choric interruptions. Everyone who interprets the songs has to begin by making his own reconstruction; and because the uncertainties are so numerous, there are almost as many reconstructions as there are interpreters" (Hawkes 1985, 96). Finally, and almost comically, Sukhu adds, "The central event in several of the *Nine Songs* hymns is the love affair between the spirit and the shaman. Even the traditional commentators acknowledge that some sort of love affair is hinted at, but the question they have debated for centuries is, who is the male and who is the female?" (Sukhu 2012, 79).

Despite this long line of uncertainties, many of these questions have remained because it has been difficult to gain an appropriate perspective on them, but they can nevertheless be resolved by examining them through the perspective of the logic of eroticism at play in the séances (and Sukhu has come closest to gaining this perspective, but he stopped short of pursuing it to a sufficient degree). Thus, questions of who is speaking and what is their gender are clarified by recognizing that, for each song with its one séance event, either a male shaman appeals to a female spirit, or a female shaman appeals to a male spirit. Questions about where the action takes place are clarified by the functional mechanics of the shamanic séance itself, such that if the shaman is undergoing a shamanic flight, then the action takes place in the natural realm of the spirits, since that is where the shaman goes to meet or search for the spirit, but if the shaman is undergoing spirit possession, then the action takes place in the séance area,

since that is where the spirit comes to take possession of the shaman.

Recognizing that each of the songs is driven by the logic of eroticism further entails that, given the religious and cultural context of early China, it functions in tandem with the gendered ideology of *yin* and *yang*. This combination of the logic of eroticism and the ideology of *yin* and *yang*, which in a shorthand way can be called "the logic of gendered eroticism," decrees that males participate in *yang* by being active and mobile, since male shamans journey to the abodes of female spirits and male spirits descend to the female shamans in the séance arena, while females participate in *yin* by being passive and sedentary, since female shamans receive male spirits in the séance arena and female spirits receive male shamans in their rivers or mountains. My own readings and reconstructions of the *Nine Songs* are primarily based on the application of agricultural shamanism's logic of gendered eroticism, broadly illustrated by Zhang Jun:

> Among the responsibilities of Chu shamans was calling the spirits; this involved the shamanic practice of seeking a love relationship with them, and it had a strongly local and popular quality...Young girls with beautiful voices and beautiful complexions were used to call male spirits, and pubescent boys of outstanding beauty were used to call female spirits. (Zhang 1994, 426)

Shamanic Possession and Shamanic Flight in the *Nine Songs*

"The Lord of the East" (東君, *Dongjun*), titled after a spirit associated with the rising sun, sets the tone of eroticism that seethes through each of the songs. It opens with him beginning his journey through the skies when his curiosity is suddenly piqued by the female shaman who has just caught his attention:

> I see the shaman inspired and ravaging,
> Whirling through the air like a kingfisher in flight…
> The sound of her song and her beautiful face seduces me.
>
> 思靈保兮賢姱/ 翾飛兮翠曾/…羌聲色兮娛

In line with this logic of eroticism, the male shamans featured in three of the *Nine Songs* attempt to seduce female spirits by undertaking independent shamanic flights to the environs where the female spirits reside, as in "The Princess of the Xiang River" (湘君, *Xiangjun*):

> Skimming forth in my osmanthus boat,
> I command the Yuan and Xiang to quiet their waves,
> I order the waters of Jiang to soften their currents.
> Searching for my Goddess, she doesn't appear.
> Playing her bamboo flute, who stays in her thoughts?

I harness the flying dragons (of my boat) and skim to the north,
But I change my course, steering for Dongting Lake.
With my fig-leaf sail, my melilotus rigging,
My iris scull with orchid banderole,
I see the isle of Cenyang and its distant shore.

沛吾乘兮桂舟/ 令沅湘兮無波/ 使江水兮安流/ 望夫君兮未來/ 吹參差兮誰思/ 駕飛龍兮北征/ 遵吾道兮洞庭/ 薜荔柏兮蕙綢/ 蓀橈兮蘭旌/ 望涔陽兮極浦

The female shamans featured in the other six of the *Nine Songs* attempt to seduce male spirits by shamanic possession, but while their possessions are sometimes followed by flights, when they occur, it is only immediately after the male spirit has already taken possession of them, and they are never shown to undertake independent shamanic flight by themselves alone. It should be noted that although the shamanic possessions only involve female shamans, the possibility remains that the male shamans may also be taken possession of by female spirits, although none of the *Nine Songs* show this.

"The Lord of the East Supreme One" portrays the possession of the female shaman, after which the male spirit, in possession of her body, remains present in the séance area:

The spirit with sinuous movements descends into me, wondrously adorned.
Fragrant incenses wafting, their billows filling the hall…
The Lord takes his pleasure, happy and at ease.

靈偃蹇兮姣服/ 芳菲菲兮滿堂/ … 君欣欣兮樂康

In this line, the binomen (靈偃, *yanjian*) refers to either the postures and movements of the spirit's descent, or to the shaman's dance. In their commentaries, neither Wang Yi nor Zhu Xi provides any further details.

In "The Lord Among the Clouds" (雲中君, *Yunzhongjun*), this same mechanism of the possession event is at play where it says:

In a shower of radiance, the deity descends into me.

靈皇皇兮既降[1]

"The Greater Master of Fate" shows an instance of the female shaman being taken possession of by the spirit, which is then followed by their shamanic journey together. It opens from the point of view and in the voice of the male spirit soaring on his own spirit-journey; he sings:

Open wide Heaven's Gate,
In splendor I harness my dark cloud,

I summon the winds to clear the way before me,
And order the rains to wash away the dust.

廣開兮天門/ 紛吾乘兮玄雲/ 命飄風兮先驅/ 使涷雨兮灑塵

But then the spirit sees the erotic dance of the shaman in the séance arena, and it catches his attention, whereupon he swoops down to take possession of her, as she sings out:

Lord, in sweeping circles you descend into me,
I accompany you in crossing Mount Kongsang.

君迴翔兮以下/ 踰空桑兮從女

The consummation of their alliance is represented in images of ecstatic flight that call upon the symbolism of the union of *yin* and *yang*:

Our towering flight, soaring serenely,
Harnessing the pure vapors, steering through *yin* and *yang*,
Together with my Lord in pure velocity.
Leading the Emperor of Heaven through the Nine Mountains,
His sacred robes in billowing folds,
His jade pendants dangle and dazzle.
Now in the *yin*, now in the *yang*,
No one knows what it is that we do.

高飛兮安翔/ 乘清氣兮御陰陽/ 吾與君兮齊速/ 導帝之兮九坑/ 靈衣兮被被
/ 玉佩兮陸離/ 壹陰兮壹陽/ 眾莫知兮余所為

Her erotic ecstasy is depicted in the images of her riding through the skies with him "in pure velocity" (齊速, ***zhai su***) while "steering through the *yin* and the *yang*" (御陽陰, ***yu yin yang***). This does more than border on the orgasmic; it is in fact the consummation of shamanic eroticism. In the language of the *Nine Songs*, such consummations are never explicitly articulated; they linger, rather, at the hazy center of the mysteries of shamanic eroticism.

"The Earl of the River" (河伯, *Hebo*) provides another striking instance of the female shaman's spirit-journey. Her being taken possession of is not mentioned; rather, it opens in medias res during shamanic flight in the company of the male spirit over the semi-mythical mountains, and note the powerful imagery that announces their own eroticism:

I roam together with you along the Nine Rivers,
As a mighty wind arises, unleashing the waves.
Mounted on a water chariot, with its lotus dais,

Pulled by two dragons and flanked with serpents on all sides.
We ascend Mount Kunlun to survey the four quarters.
My heart is dizzy and flutters, overcome with giddiness.
Enraptured by you under the setting sun, I forget to go back.

與女遊兮九河/ 衝風起兮橫波/ 乘水車兮荷蓋/ 駕兩龍兮驂螭/ 登崑崙兮四望/ 心飛揚兮浩蕩/ 日將暮兮悵忘歸

The language of this passage also makes clear that they have achieved erotic consummation during their spirit-journey. Riding together in the chariot as they fly over mountains and rivers, this image directly recalls the erotically charged "pure velocity" (*zhai su*) of "The Lord Among the Clouds."

The Ritual Features and Ritual Arena of the *Nine Songs*

The three songs that show the shamanic flight of the female shaman after her becoming possessed pay little to no attention to the ritualized séance area. As well, the three songs that are centered on male shamans only portray their shamanic flights *in situ*, after they have already departed the séance area, so in them there is also no attention paid to the séance arena. Although these songs that portray the flight of the male shaman do not mention anything about the séance arena, they go to great lengths to describe the ritual offerings that the male shamans make to their target female spirits, including flowers and belt-buckles, and they also give precise details of the flowery adornments of their clothing and vehicles.

In contrast, the three songs that portray the female shaman becoming possessed without ensuing flight during which the male spirit remains in the séance area, there is much attention paid to the scenes of the performances, and they provide remarkable details concerning the ritual activities surrounding the shamanic events that are housed in the sacred temple dedicated to them, which "The Lord Among the Clouds" names:

In flutters and coilings, the spirit takes me, he lingers.
His brightness unhindered shines forth,
Lo! The spirit is coming to rest in the Temple of Longevity.
His radiance equals that of the sun and the moon.

靈連蜷兮既留/ 爛昭昭兮未央/ 蹇將憺兮壽宮/ 日月兮齊光

Describing this ritual scene, the second century commentator, Wang Yi, writes that:

The Lord Among the Clouds has already arrived at the Temple of Longevity, has happily received the offered wine and food, and is peacefully contented with no thought of departure. (Wang 2002, 58)

雲神既至壽官,歆饗酒食,憺然安樂,無有去意也

The séance events are surrounded with ritualized activities meant for the purification of the shamans and the séance arena to be made sufficiently cleansed that the spiritual purity of the spirits would not be compromised. For example, "The Lord Among the Clouds" describes the ritualized purifying floral baths requisite for the shamans before the numinous spirits could approach them:

> Having bathed in warm orchid water, my hair washed in sweet herbs
> I don my robe, richly brocaded with pollia.
>
> 浴蘭湯兮沐芳/ 華采衣兮若英

In addition to the physical state of the shamans, their costumes also carried the weight of ritual purity and ritual appropriateness. It is not simply that their costumes were pure, their materials dominated by floral additions, but they also were appropriate to the specific spirit being sought, especially regarding the female shamans who would be possessed by the spirit. In "The Lord of the East Supreme One," a rather martial spirit, the female shaman dons a costume befitting his nature, replete with sword and gemstones associated with him:

> Solemnly I please Highest August
> Grasping the long swords by their jade hilt
> Amidst the tinkling of my *lin-lang* gemstones.
>
> 穆將愉兮上皇/ 撫長劍兮玉珥/ 璆鏘鳴兮琳琅

As with many ritualized religious events that intend to invoke the presence of spirits, offerings of food and beverages play a central role, and this also is not lacking in the *Nine Songs*. Appealing to the gustatory and olfactory senses of the spirits, the shaman in "The Lord of the East Supreme One" is seen to display some of these luscious offerings to entice and attract the spirit, and it also mentions the burning of the "jade-branch incense" (瓊芳, *qiongfang*), whose billowing and pleasing smoke served the same purpose:

> The steamed meat wrapped in coumarou on a bed of orchids
> The libations of osmanthus wine and pepper beer.
>
> 蕙鯖蒸兮蘭藉/ 奠桂酒兮椒漿

As is also typical of shamanic performances, music plays a central role, and the moment of the arrival of the spirits, especially when it takes possession of the shaman, or when the shaman departs on the shamanic journey, is underscored by frenetic turns

of the orchestra and their instruments as the shaman's dance evokes the intensity of the occurrence. In the *Nine Songs*, the shamanic dance remains *de rigueur* the main source of the female shaman's erotic appeal to the male spirits. In its performance, shamanic dance is the central force for evoking the deepest erotic desires, and it remains the primary vehicle for the expression of shamanic eroticism. This eroticism excites the basic instincts for taking possession of the other, as occurs in shamanic flight, or for being taken possession of by the other totally and completely, as occurs in shamanic possession. Shamanic dance is inevitably transgressive, and in the *Nine Songs*, it demonstrates the fullness of shamanic eroticism unmasked and unleashed. "The Lord of the East Supreme One" presents this scene in stunning detail:

> Raise the mallets to beat the drums.
> The gradual beat softly pulses, a tranquil song.
> Then enter the ranks of reed-organs and flutes loudly sounding.
> The spirit with sinuous movements descends into me, wondrously adorned.
> Fragrant incenses wafting, their billows filling the temple
> The frenzy of the five notes comes to accord, the dazzling array!
> The Lord savors his pleasure in ease.
>
> 揚枹兮拊鼓/ 疏緩節兮安歌/ 陳竽瑟兮浩倡/ 靈偃蹇兮姣服/ 芳菲菲兮滿堂/ 五音紛兮繁會/ 君欣欣兮樂康

"The Lord of the East" presents a similar scene, but this time it is presented through the viewpoint of the male spirit on his own flight, whose attention is caught first by the music and then by the female shaman herself; here we hear the male spirit sing out:

> The sounds of her song and her beautiful face seduce me.
> I, the spectator enchanted, forget to go back.
> Yes! Strum loudly the zither to the beat of the drums!
>
> 羌聲色兮娛人/ 觀者憺兮忘歸/ 縆瑟兮交鼓

In keeping with the shamanic logic of eroticism, so very different from the religious eroticism described by Bataille, the séance events of this early Chinese southern agricultural shamanism were eminently public affairs, performed in the presence of the congregation for their own community benefit, and all that was required of them for pleasing the spirits was their simple presence in joy and celebration. Although this element is not widely seen in the *Nine Songs*, due their performative and pantomimic nature, "The Lesser Master of Fate" (少司命, *Shaosiming*) off-handedly remarks on the presence of the congregation, thereby announcing the public nature of the performances as revealed in a line of the female shaman's song that, due to the ideology of *yin* and *yang* in relation to a male spirit, would only pinpoint females; she sings:

The hall is filled with lovely women
But your eyes suddenly fix on me alone。

滿堂兮美人/ 忽獨與予兮目成

One of the central and defining features of shamanism is the direct face-to-face communication between humans and spirits, which takes place in one of two forms. The first form occurs after the spirit has taken possession of the shaman and has been installed in the temple, thereby enabling him to directly speak to and otherwise interact with the congregation. The congregation can now witness and bask in his presence, share in his dance and songs, and ask for personal blessing or valuable knowledge about the present and future state of concerns that affect them. However, since these sorts of activities are not directly included in any of the songs, we can only indirectly surmise their occurrences.

The second form of direct, face-to-face communication takes place between shamans and spirits in the spirit domains throughout the course of the shamanic flight, and such communication is abundantly present in many of the songs. These dialogues would be narrated in song and enacted by the shaman for the congregation during the séance, thereby underscoring, once again, the public nature of shamanic eroticism. "The Lady of the Xiang River" (湘夫人, *Xiangfuren*) is one of many that portray the direct communication between the shaman and the spirit; it states:

I hear my beloved beckoning to me.
We mount the chariot and race off together
To build a house in the water.

聞佳人兮召予/ 將騰駕兮偕逝/ 築室兮水中

In "The Lesser Master of Fate," the communication is somewhat more personal as the spirit directly questions the female shaman, whom he refers to as the "Fragrant One":

Each person has their own beautiful offspring
Why for this, Fragrant One, are you tormented?

夫人自有兮美子/ 蓀何以兮愁苦

The eroticism at the heart of the dialogue in "The Spirit of the Mountain" (山鬼, *Shangui*) is particularly dense. It opens with the male shaman having already arrived in the natural domain of the spirit, and when he finally finds himself in her presence, the description of her bespeaks her identity with the natural world all around as she directly engages the shaman on a thoroughly erotic level:

Her body covered in fig leaves and girdled with rabbit silk
With a seductive glance and a disarming smile
[She says,] "You desire me, for I am beautiful and gracious."
She then harnesses her red leopards, and striped lynxes follow astride
Upon her magnolia chariot waves her osmanthus banner
While she dons her wrap of stone-orchids sashed with asarum.

被薜荔兮帶女羅/ 既含睇兮又宜笑/ 子慕予兮善窈窕/ 乘赤豹兮從文狸/ 辛夷兮結桂旗/ 被石蘭兮帶杜衡

The Sensuous Flora of the Shamanic Eroticism of the *Nine Songs*

By itself, the shamanic eroticism of the *Nine Songs* is already evocative of the profusely sensual experience of the natural world. The prolific lushness of the settings, whether in the natural realm or in the séance arena, is highlighted by the richness of the visual and olfactory evocations brought out by the elegant variety of flora and their seductively stimulating fragrances.

However, the shamans still depend on their ability to attract and seduce spirits, and they do so through a variety of strategies. The energy of the séance event comes as a direct product of their displays of shamanic eroticism, and this is far and away the most effective of the several strategies that they employ, all of which serve the same end: to attract and seduce the spirits. Their erotic displays include offerings of flowers, food and alcohol, and music, song, and dance, as we have seen already in several of the songs. These strategies have deep implications for the ways in which the spirits are represented as being with the shamans. Thus, when male shamans go off to be with female spirits, they are at pains to collect only the most sensual flowers to offer as tokens of their desire. In "The Princess of the Xiang," the male shaman sings:

My osmanthus oars, my orchid paddles,
Chop against the ice and chunks of snow,
To gather fig leaves in the water,
To search for lotus flowers on the treetops.
I pick pollia from the fragrant islet,
To leave as a gift for my Goddess gone under the waters

桂櫂兮蘭枻/ 斲冰兮積雪/ 采薜荔兮水中/ 搴芙蓉兮木末/ 采芳州兮杜若/ 將以遺兮下女

In "The Spirit of the Mountain," we again see the male shaman gathering natural gifts in his effort to seduce the female spirit; he sings:

I gather sweet scents for the one of my affections,
Cloistered in the thickness of her bamboo forest where the sun is never seen.

折芳馨兮遺所思/ 余處幽篁兮終不見天

Certainly, the most striking and elaborate representation of erotic and amorous flower offerings from a male shaman to a female spirit comes in "The Lady of the Xiang," as he readies their love nest, the site of his expected tryst:

I build a house in the water,
The walls and roof of lotus,
The court of purple cypress,
The hall of fragrant xanthoxylum,
Beams f osmanthus with orchid rafters,
Shingles of magnolia, bowers of peony,
Lintels of woven fig-leaves,
Bed-curtain screens of plaited coumarou,
White jades driven to hold everything in place,
Stone-orchids spread for their fragrance,
The lotus chamber ceilinged with iris,
Woven together with stalks of asarum,
I place a hundred bouquets to fill the court,
Their aromas wafting through the porch and the walls.

築室兮水中/ 葺之兮荷蓋/ 蓀壁兮紫壇/ 播芳椒兮成堂/ 桂棟兮蘭橑/ 辛夷楣兮葯房/ 罔薜荔兮為帷/ 擗蕙櫋兮既張/ 白玉兮為鎮/ 疏石蘭兮為芳/ 芷葺兮荷屋/ 繚之兮杜衡/ 合百草兮實庭/ 建芳馨兮廡門

These lines particularly demonstrate the natural lush and sensual luxuriance of the shamanic eroticism of the *Nine Songs*. We sense the shaman's quiet confidence in expectation of his erotic consummation as he concentrates his entire attention on the preparation of the love nest; yet he is in no rush. The eroticism of the setting is highlighted by the richness of the visual and olfactory evocations brought out by the elegant variety of flora and their seductively stimulating fragrances.

One passage in "The Greater Master of Fate" depicts the female shaman with the male spirit as they undertake a spirit-journey; upon its completion, she stoops to pluck flowers for him as she sings:

I pluck the emerald flowers of the divine hemp
That I offer to my departed Lord.

折疏麻兮瑤華/ 將以遺兮離居

This is the only instance of a hemp flower offering in the *Nine Songs*, and it is notable because hemp (in this case a floral variety of the cannabis plant) has long been recognized and administered as an aphrodisiac intended to increase sexual desire; this too is a mark of the shamanic eroticism of the *Nine Songs*.

In every case, the female shaman's attire appeals to the male spirit's sense of erotic attraction, and all its materials come from natural flora; no mention is ever made of any of her articles having been constructed from human manufacture. Furthermore, her costume would have no lasting duration or remaining value: the flowers would have wilted already by the end of the séance, even if they could be imagined having kept their integrity during her erotic fury.

When the female shaman's costume is described, it is with special reference to the floral ornamentations and various other articles that are directly associated with the spirit whom the shaman intends to attract and seduce. Such accoutrements create an identifiable bond between them that the female shaman puts to her special advantage, but the flowers employed for enticing the spirit go even beyond the shaman's costume, as the following passage from "The Lesser Master of Fate" makes clear:

> Autumn orchids and asterid lovages,
> Their blooms carpet the floor at the foot of the hall.
> Verdant leaves with their white flowers
> Their luxuriant fragrance envelops me with their aromas.
>
> 秋蘭兮麋蕪/ 羅生兮堂下/ , 綠葉兮素華/ 芳菲菲兮襲予

In "The Lord Among the Clouds," the description of the shaman comes in the first two lines, where she is shown adorned with polis flowers which could only have been chosen for their particular appeal to the spirit, allowing her to be singled out apart from all other participants in the séance event by her costume first of all:

> My body bathed in warm orchid water, my hair washed in fragrant herbs,
> Here I am, wearing my robe richly brocaded with polis.
>
> 浴蘭湯兮沐芳/ 華采衣兮若英

In "The Lesser Master of Fate," these erotic strategies have their intended effect:

> Autumn orchids bloom luxuriant,
> Verdant leaves and mauve stems,
> The temple is filled with beautiful women
> But his eyes fix on me alone.
>
> 秋蘭兮青青/ 綠葉兮紫莖/ 滿堂兮美人/ 忽獨與余兮目成

The shaman's costume has been designed for maximum sensuality with its lush floral luxuriousness, all with the exclusive intent of appealing to the erotic nature of the spirit's desire, and it is only after the spirit has already come to possess the shaman that we get the description of his costume:

> A lotus robe, a sash of melilotus.
>
> 荷衣兮蕙帶

The dress of the spirits is also noted in several more of the songs, and they are similarly sensual; in "The Lord of the East," for example, the spirit is described as:

> Adorned in his pure cloud coat and a white-rainbow robe.
>
> 青雲衣兮白霓裳

That the shaman's costume primarily consists of floral materials certainly impresses but does not surprise, because the spirits are beings of nature who inhabit domains apart from (yet still next to) the human world. The burden of the shamans is to appeal to the spirits' sense of erotic attraction, and they manage this by relying primarily on their own natural beauty (at least for female shamans; male shamans rely primarily on their virility), enhanced by the pristine floral products of nature.

Conclusion

These are just a small number of the prominent features of the early Chinese southern Chu agricultural shamanism of the *Nine Songs* that display its logic of eroticism, which seethes with a relentless and overt sensuality. In each of the songs, the shamans continuously express either their ecstatic satisfaction or heart-searing disappointment that concludes their erotic trysts with the spirits, and sometimes a shaman will express both in the same song. The sexual congress between the shamans and the spirits can be read as an embodied cypher of the actual love and intimacy between the people in the southern lands of early Chu society and the natural spirits of the lands, waters, and skies who watch over, protect, and bless their lives and their works. The songs represent joyous celebrations of the love and adoration shared between spirits and humans.

By way of the shamanic possessions and shamanic flights represented in the *Nine Songs*, humans were able to gain the blessings of the gods and the good returns resulting from the power of their presence. This tradition of agricultural shamanism would continue to be an important feature of early Chu culture well into Han times, even as it became subject to state institutions. However, with the enthronement of Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty, the great imperial sponsor of Confucianism, the institutional presence

of shamanism was greatly curtailed and eventually faded from court society. However, it played a decisive role in the development of immortality literature that maintained the strong flavor of early Chu tradition. This immortality literature featured spiritual flights to the lands of the immortals, and it emerged from a remarkable coming-together of the motifs of shamanic flight (to the total exclusion of shamanic possession) with those of Daoist spirit liberation (Kirkova 2016). Nonetheless, agricultural shamanism would remain an important element of popular religions, albeit underneath the political radar screen, in the hands of local communities throughout the duration of traditional China.

Conflict of Interest

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

Note

[1] This last line uses the highly loaded term 降 *jiang*, whose meaning in relation to the shamanic séance is quite interesting and has caused much debate. The term also plays a crucial role in other early Chinese shamanistic texts, most importantly the *Guoyu* and the *Zhouli*, which have received more scholarly attention that its use here, but the same arguments apply. Many sinologists who deny the presence of shamanism in early China, for example David Keightley (1989), read the term to mean that the spirits "descend" to the ritual arena without taking possession of the shamans, but those who affirm the presence of shamanism, for example Dirk Bodde (1961), read it to mean that the spirits "descend into" and take possession of them. In his examination of the commentarial tradition to all these classical writings, Lin Fushi (2009) writes, "In classical Chinese, spirit possession is usually indicated in sentences where a spirit is the subject of the verb 'to descend' (降, *jiang* or 下, *xia*) and the object is a person… [In these instances,] the state of possession is described with a verb meaning 'to descend upon' and a direct object, 之 *zhi* [as pronoun]. A similar formula is used in the *Guoyu* in the earliest extant, and most frequently cited, account of what happens to people who become shamans. That text tells us that *ming shen jiang zhi* (明神降之, 'the bright spirits descend on them'), which is to say the spirits possess them" (Lin 2012, 76). However, this line from "The Lord Among the Clouds" marks the only use of *jiang* to mean the spirit "descended into" the shaman; more common is the term ling (靈, "spirit") used in a technical shamanic sense referring to the spirit taking possession of the shaman, or the shaman being possessed by the spirit.

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Nineteenth Century Chinese Temples in Australia: History, Religion and Heritagisation

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Abstract

In the nineteenth century, Chinese gold prospectors built between 100 and 200 joss houses (temples) in Australia, from Darwin in the north to Weldborough, Tasmania, in the south. In 1988, nine were still standing, though some were in poor repair. In the nineteenth century, non-Christian places of worship were unpopular and missionaries sought to convert the 'heathen Chinese'. In the twentieth century, the major threat to their survival was declining congregations (as non-White migrants were prohibited from entering Australia under the White Australia Policy). From the 1960s onwards, some surviving temples were restored. Yet they remain vulnerable to racism (Sze Yup Temple in Sydney was set on fire by an arsonist in 2008), neglect (in 2024 old electrical wiring caused a fire at the See Yup Temple in Melbourne), and modern development (in the 1960s the Castlemaine, Victoria temple was demolished). This article examines the material history of the Chinese in Australia, noting the White preference for a 'heritage' presentation (as at the goldfields theme park Sovereign Hill near Ballarat, Victoria, where the joss house is a reproduction, or at Launceston Museum, where the dismantled Weldborough temple was erected as an exhibit) rather than actual knowledge of the history, archaeology, and lived religion of historic Chinese settlers in Australia.

Keywords: Australia; Chinese immigrants; joss house; temple; Gold Rush; racism; Federation

Introduction

The first contacts between China and Australia are unknown, although it is possible that Chinese *junks* may have sailed into Australian waters in the late fifteenth century, while some scholars argue for a much earlier date, during the Han Dynasty (202 BCE–264 CE). The British colony of New South Wales was founded in 1788, and in the early nineteenth century a few free Chinese merchants settled there. Thus, Mak Sai Ying arrived in 1818, acquired land at Parramatta, and married Sarah Thompson, with whom he ran an inn, The Lion (Fitzgerald 1997, 11–17). Chinese indentured farmhands arrived from 1848, and male temporary migrants multiplied after the first goldfield opened in 1951. The White Christian colony did not welcome the Chinese miners: their large numbers, alien appearance, and non-Christian culture were deemed "undesirable" by colonial officials and prominent citizens, including churchmen (Fitzgerald 1997, 22–23). The Chinese were treated with suspicion and prejudice by Whites: they were almost all single men (fuelling concern they would prey upon White women); sent most of the wealth they generated home to China, which they periodically visited; and were such capable workers that "they could earn a living off [gold]fields abandoned by the whites as unprofitable ... [earning] the undying enmity of the diggers" (Birmingham 1999, 91). Their alien status was reinforced by the large number of temples erected by the Chinese across the island continent (Penny 2005). More than fifty were built in Victoria alone, and archaeologists and historians believe that there were upwards of two hundred joss houses erected between 1851 and 1901, when the colonies of Australia federated as a nation (Singer 1988).

The Chinese population of Australia peaked around 1880, when approximately 40,000 Chinese were resident, which was 1.7% of the population. The Chinese "originated mainly from the Siyi (Four Counties) and the Zhongsan localities in Guangdong" (Chan 2005, 634).[1] At the time, China was wracked by floods, famines, and the Tai Ping Rebellion (1851–1864), which increased the appeal of gold mining abroad. Australian colonial governments passed laws to restrict Chinese activities, and White workers went on strike, protesting their presence in the labour market; in the 1878 strike by Australian Steamship Navigation Company (ASN) workers, xenophobia was "a catalyst for an anti-Chinese movement, which opposed not only specially imported cheap Chinese labour, but also spontaneous Chinese immigration" (Curthoys 1978, 48). Abuse and racist stereotypes abounded; John Birmingham observes that anti-Chinese protestors were told millions of "flat-faced, flat-footed heathen Chinese" were a threat to Whites (Birmingham 1999, 93); and Ann Curthoys notes Angus Cameron, a Member of Parliament, "expressed horror at the over-crowded dwellings and immorality of Sydney's Chinese" and held the Chinese responsible for outbreaks of various illnesses (Curthoys 1978, 53). By 1888 laws restricting the activities of Chinese workers tightened. In 1891 the Royal Commission on Chinese Gambling and Immorality was set up. After Federation in 1901 the government passed the Immigration Restriction Act, an overtly racist law

which was not fully repealed till the early 1970s, which aimed to keep Australia White and Christian (Poon 1995, 53–54). This legislation, with a raft of other laws, constituted the White Australia Policy (Yuan 2001 [1988]).

Three Temples in Victoria: Nam Pon Soon Society, Sam Yup Temple, and Bendigo (Emu Point) Joss House

Upon arrival in Australia, Chinese migrants clustered together to form supportive groups that compensated for their lack of English and alien appearance, two traits that engendered White hostility. In Melbourne Little Bourke Street became a substantial Chinese community, which acted as a conduit to the Victorian goldfields, and also as a trading post for merchants. Two mutual assistance bodies, the Sam Yup Society (later renamed the Num Pon Soon Society) and the See Yup Society, were established in the 1850s. These organisations reflected the Cantonese background of the miners and merchants. Hing-wah Chau explains that:

> Sam Yup (or Num Pon Soon) and See Yup are places in Guangdong, in which Sam Yup [Three Districts] are the former counties of Nanhai, Panyu, and Shunde; whereas See Yup (sometimes spelled Sze Yap and variants) refers to the four former counties: Kaiping, Enping, Taishan, and Xinhui [Four Districts]. District associations played an important role among early Chinese migrants and organized regular events in their clubhouses on Little Bourke Street, such as the Num Pon Soon Society Building (Chau 2016, 111).

These societies were the owners of the two temples that were constructed in Melbourne to service both religious and social needs of the Chinese, the Num Pon Soon building on Little Bourke Street, and the See Yup Kuan Ti Temple (四邑關帝廟) in Emerald Hill (South Melbourne), Victoria (Couchman 2019).

The Num Pon Soon Society headquarters on Little Bourke Street is an elegant and elaborate building which was designed by John George Knight (1824–1892) and Peter Kerr (1820–1912). The architecture firm Knight and Ker also built Parliament House, Melbourne (1856–1892), indicating the wealth and standing of certain Num Pon Soon members. Lowe Kong Meng (1831–1888), a Malaysian Chinese businessman who spoke English and was one of the richest men in Victoria, arrived in Melbourne in 1853, was promptly elected President of the Sam Yup Society in 1854, and had a decisive input into the building's design (Chau 2016, 112). The building was a harmonisation of Western and Chinese architectural details. When it opened in 1861, it was called the "Chinese Exchange," and was a place of business that also served as a lodging house for new migrants. It incorporated an ancestral shrine, which is now the oldest continuous place of worship of Chinese deities in Australia.



Figure 1. Num Pon Soon Building, Little Bourke Street, Melbourne. Wikimedia Commons

The second Chinese "joss house" (from the Portuguese *deos*, meaning 'god', but in the case of Chinese temples referring to the White belief that the Chinese were 'idol worshippers'),[2] the See Yup Temple in Emerald Hill, was originally built of timber in 1856 (De Jong and Beynon 2012). An observer noted of this building:

> The building, which may be called the only pagan place of worship in Victoria, is situated some distance beyond the Orphan Asylum at Emerald Hill, and is a wooden edifice some 60 or 70 feet long by about 85 in width. It has two stories, the lower one being … the one devoted to religious ceremonies. The upper story is surrounded by a gallery and lighted from the roof. This is evidently a sort of joss house or assembly hall. The whole interior is painted and ornamented in the Chinese style and hung round with banners (cited in Chau 2016, 114).

This wooden temple was destroyed by fire and a new, brick-built structure was opened in 1866. The existing temple was built in four stages. Six trustees provided the land for the temple, the most important of whom was Louis Ah Mouy (1826–1918), a skilled builder from Guangdong by way of Singapore, who founded the See Yup Society in Melbourne in 1854 (Yong 2006 [1969]). The architect of the 1866 building was George Wharton; a second red brick memorial hall was erected in 1901. The strength of the community is shown by the need for a third, sandstone memorial hall which was opened in 2004. Sophie Couchman adds that "In 2002, a Kuanyin Pavilion designed by Cheung Sui Fung, an RMIT graduate and senior member of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects, was constructed in the courtyard outside one of the main buildings" (Couchman 2019, 52). This configuration of buildings can be viewed today, although there was a serious fire at the See Yup Temple in February 2024 during the Lunar New Year celebrations, which was likely caused by electrical faults due to old wiring (Crowe and Macmillan 2024). The interior of the central, oldest building was badly damaged by this fire.

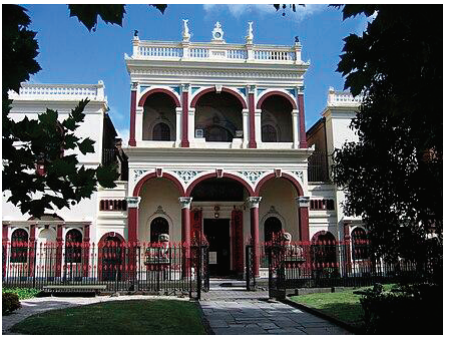


Figure 2. See Yup Temple, South Melbourne. Wikimedia Commons.

Of more than fifty Chinese temples erected by Cantonese speaking migrants from Guangdong in Victoria during the nineteenth century, only one goldfields joss house survives intact (National Trust of Victoria 1972). This is Bendigo Joss House Temple, formerly called the Emu Point Joss House. The second census of Victoria was conducted in 1857, and there were 25,000 Chinese in the state; working conditions were difficult, and as Whites sought to disadvantage the Chinese their numbers fell, with 12,000 still living in Victoria in 1881 (Lovejoy 2011). Valerie Lovejoy has noted that the Joss House sits in an area rich in evidence of Chinese settlement: "Chinese market gardens with still visible fruit trees lie on the Bendigo Creek opposite the temple, and recently archaeologists excavated a brick-making kiln adjoining the garden, a rare example of a Chinese constructed kiln outside China" (Lovejoy 2011, 7). The *feng shui* of the site on which it stands matched principles in operation in China. Derham Groves notes that:

> to attract as much "*qi*" (the breath of nature) as possible, the joss house faces south, it is decorated with auspicious figures and symbols, and its plan is shaped like the Chinese character "*shan*" (mountain), which symbolizes a place of worship. On the other hand, to repel any "*sha qi*" (noxious vapour), there is a cross- wall a short distance inside the front doors of the temple, none of the side doors lined up with each other, and the north facade is blank (Groves 1994, 242).

Bendigo's temple is the sole survivor of six attested Chinese places of worship at Emu Point in 1868. It is unique as it remains *in situ* in a rural area and is an active place of religion; when it closed for several months in 2022 due to National Trust staff being subjected to abuse and anti-social behaviour by unnamed aggressors, members of the Chinese community in the nearby city of Bendigo were open in expressing their grief at the closure. Dennis O'Hoy, AM stated that "It represents the history of the Chinese people in Bendigo. It's desolate inside—it's lost its meaning, it's lost its spirituality" (Schubert 2022). The site re-opened shortly after O'Hoy, a prominent community leader, made this appeal via the Australian Broadcasting Commission, and is now receiving

tourists and congregation members regularly.



Figure 3. Bendigo Joss House Temple (exterior). Photograph by Author.

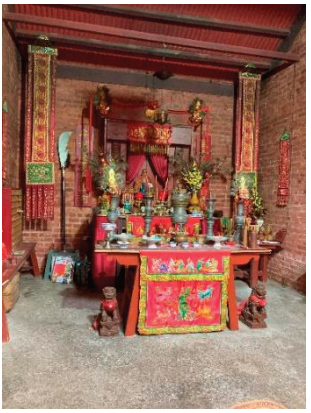


Figure 4. Bendigo Joss House Temple (main temple interior, altar to Kwan Gung [Guan Di]). Photograph by Author.

Across Australia, joss houses were lost to fire, became derelict, or were demolished in the name of progress. Chinese heritage in Australia in the first half of the twentieth century was unvalued, and the White Australia Policy reduced the size of ethnic communities that could care for sites, and made many Chinese Australians concerned to assimilate and not appear too different. This was a driver of conversion to Christianity for some individuals and families (O'Brien 2014), and for the use of less ostentatious home altars and shrines in business premises for others. The survival of the Bendigo Joss House Temple was due to certain influential people's protection. Paul Macgregor singles out:

> Sir John Jensen, Assistant Secretary for the Department of Supply, who ordered its preservation when the Emu Point area became an ordnance factory, Professor Brian Lewis and others of the National Trust of Victoria, who recognised the need to restore the joss house; Cr Alec Craig, Chairman of the newly formed local branch of the National Trust, who invited Dennis O'Hoy to undertake the

> planning and restoration works; the Bendigo Chinese Association who supported the joss house's renewal; John Ball and Ron Lee who sourced furnishings and temple artefacts from Hong Kong; and now The Bendigo Trust, the current stewards (Macgregor 2015, 119).

Many other Chinese temples of equal architectural and historical distinction were destroyed because they lacked such defenders; in Victoria the Castlemaine Joss House was demolished to make way for a new development as late as the 1960s, a decade when heritagisation was actively occurring elsewhere (Brine 1997). Historical archaeologists have identified many significant remains of the Chinese occupation of the countryside, but these are generally less impressive than the temples. For example, there are Chinese sections in many nineteenth century cemeteries; at the cemetery at Campbell's Creek (near Castlemaine) the graves were separated by the creek, which ritually functioned as the Yangtze River in China in the orientation of the burials (Hunter 2010). Memories of older Chinese Australians about the distant past that they learned about from their grandparents or great-grandparents have been collected by oral ethnographers and historians, and poignant practises have been uncovered. For example, Kate Bagnall interviewed Wilma Conroy of Indigo, north-eastern Victoria, a former gold town with a sizeable Chinese community that now shows no overt evidence of that history. Conroy told Bagnall of visits to her grandparents' grave in Chiltern cemetery: "Wilma Conroy maintains a tradition taught to her by her Anglo-Chinese grandmother – taking an offering to share with the spirits of her ancestors. Rather than the more usual meal of rice, pork, fruit and wine, Jessie Shing taught her granddaughter to take biscuits – sometimes fancy creams and sometimes just plain ones – to sprinkle on the headstones" (Bagnall 2013, 22).

The Sze Yup and Yui Ming Temples of Sydney

Sydney has two Cantonese Chinese joss houses that rival Melbourne's in charm and history, if not in grandeur or antiquity. Yui Ming Temple is first recorded in 1870, when the Yui Ming Hung Fook Tong (now the Yui Ming Society) tallied its members in Alexandria and in rural New South Wales. The market garden settlement of Alexandria was one of two distinct 'Chinatowns' in Sydney. Ann Stephen notes all members have "common origins, from one or other of two districts, Gaoyao/ Gouyiu and Gaoming/ Gouming, in the province of Guangdong (formerly known as Canton)" (Stephen 1997, 10). Retreat Street, "a nothing little lane of Alexandria," is redolent of the hiddenness of Chinese life in Sydney; Melita Rogowsky notes that the temple is a repository "of the memories, the secrets, and the legacy of early Chinese settlement in this area. This temple and the terraces which adjoin it, are the only remaining structural evidence of the history of the Chinese in a district that was arguably home to one of the largest concentrations of urban Chinese in Sydney (and Australia)" (Rogowsky 2004, 97). The

wooden first temple became dilapidated, and the Chinese rebuilt it in brick in 1904. Amanda Jean analyses the architecture of the Yui Ming Temple as two blocks, one higher, with a sunken courtyard between the wings. The joss house may have been exotic to a White Christian in 1900, but recent scholars note that Chinese builders drew upon early twentieth-century cottage architecture, so the "eaves of the 'roof lantern' are similar to the ventilated eaves of tropical Australian Federation buildings" (Jean 1997, 32).

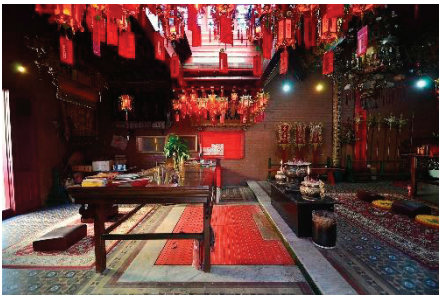


Figure 5. Yui Ming Temple, Alexandria (Sydney). Wikimedia Commons.

The temple has many Daoist features, but as Chinese religion was non-exclusive there are other religious elements, including Buddhist, Confucian, and folk iconography, which are common to most forms of Chinese religion:

> [a] plaque inside the temple reveals that the three main deities honoured here are Cai Shen, Hong Sheng, and Guan Di. As Hong Sheng/ Hung Sheng was the local deity, it is most probable that the better-known deities were added when the present temple was built. The choice of a particular god to worship is influenced by the worshipper's own needs and beliefs (Chee and Tse 1997, 52).

The most popular deity in all nineteenth century Australian Chinese temples is Guān Gōng (Lord Guan) or Guān Dì (Emperor Guan).[3] Cai Shen, another popular god, is a deity of wealth; and Hong Sheng is a rain deity (who is sometimes called the 'god of the southern seas'), a specific protector who was petitioned by Alexandria vegetable gardeners for sufficient rainfall to grow plentiful crops. Benjamin Penny has argued that Hong Sheng is a more important deity than generally realised, with records dating to the Sui Dynasty (581–618 CE) (Penny 2008, 61). There are texts that mention Buddha and Guan Yin (the goddess of mercy, a Chinese version of the Indian *bodhisattva* Avalokiteshvara) in the temple. Another deity who is not present at Alexandria is Tian Hou, the goddess of the seas; she appears in many other temples. It is clear that she would be popular in a community separated from its homeland by lengthy sea voyages. The Yui Ming Society also built ten terraced houses, as housing for new arrivals and the elderly (Stephen 1997, 13). This calls to mind the accommodation provided in the Num Pon Soon building in Little Bourke Street, Melbourne for new arrivals on their way to

mine gold.



Figure 6. Entrance to the Yui Ming Temple, Alexandria (Sydney). Wikimedia Commons.

The Sze Yup Temple serves the association of the Four Districts, as in Melbourne, and is located in the inner western suburb of Glebe. It was first built in 1898; Johnny May Sing and Kung Fen bought the land the previous year. The first structure was wooden and temporary. The current joss house, which also shows evidence of Australian local building styles (it resembles a row of Federation workers' cottages) dates to 1904 (Cusack and Prior 2010). The Chinese in Glebe interacted more with the broader White community of Sydney, and the temple opening featured in the *Sunday Mail* as "a good show" at which "roast pig galore" was served to large gathering (Fitzgerald 1997, 107). The temple is dedicated to Guān Gōng (Guan Di), the popular god of war and business, and also to Choy Bak Sing, "a god of good fortune wisdom and wealth"(Chan 1989, 7). The temple provided social support and religious services, as did the Victorian temples discussed above and the slightly older Yui Ming Temple in Alexandria. Kip Fong, one of the custodians of the Glebe temple, says that "only the men folk were here. They were coming here…to make a fortune hopefully, and the go back home…they had to help each other—so the temple was a…cultural meeting place and also a mutual assistance place"(Chan 1989, 6).



Figure 7. Entrance to the Sze Yup temple, Glebe (Sydney). Photograph by Author.

Federation made the lives of Chinese Australians extremely difficult. Those who had made fortunes and a majority of single men returned to China. Those who were

successful in bringing their wives to Australia, and those men who had married while in Australia, often remained with their families. In Sydney the Chinese were persistently accused of spreading bubonic plague (which was constant from 1900 to 1907) (Rogowsky, 2004: 104), and also leprosy (Markus 1979, 201–202). Under the White Australia Policy, Australia permitted only economic migrants to enter the country, and these could only remain temporarily (Inglis 1972, 269). The Chinese population was just under thirty thousand in 1901 but had fallen to less than ten thousand in 1947 (Chan 2005, 636). Those who stayed wore Western clothes and led secretive lives. The Yui Ming and Sze Yup Temples fell into decrepitude in the mid-twentieth century, as younger Chinese Australians assimilated more with the majority White culture and devoted less time to traditional Chinese culture. Charmaine Chan records that a fire in 1953 closed the Sze Yup temple, and the re-opening ceremony on 27 March 1955 was attended by approximately 700 people. It included a dramatic firework display and Lion Dance, an unfamiliar phenomenon at the time. The lion was loaned to the Sze Yup congregation by the Yui Ming Temple association in a gesture of goodwill (Chan 1989, 7).

In 1979 a restoration of the Glebe joss house began – there had been damage from vandalism and a leaking roof, and some members wished to sell the Sze Yup Temple, but a fundraising drive from 1977 changed the mood to a more positive attitude for the future of the building – and New South Wales Heritage Council placed a heritage preservation order on it in 1985 (Chan 1989). The Yui Ming Temple was also fully restored in the late twentieth century, and both temples are now "open to the public" functioning as "important historical landmark[s] for tourists and schoolchildren" (Shum 1988, 210). The White Australia Policy was dismantled in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and immigration from the mid-1970s, spurred by conflicts in Vietnam and Cambodia, changed Sydney's ethnic and religious mix. Yet the Chinese in Sydney still have enemies; in January 2008 the Sze Yup Temple was set on fire by an arsonist, and while police were "unwilling to say if it might have been an ethnically-motivated attack just ahead of the Chinese New Year" (Welch 2008), this is the most likely interpretation, as racism and pro-White sentiment have been on the rise in Australia since the early 2000s (Hage 2002).[4]



Figure 8. Central shrine of the Sze Yup temple, Glebe (Sydney). Wikimedia Commons.

The Joss Houses of Queensland: Breakfast Creek (Brisbane) and Atherton

Two remarkable nineteenth century Chinese joss houses survive in Queensland; the Holy Triad Temple (Temple of the Three Sacred Officials) at Breakfast Creek (modern Albion, a suburb of Brisbane) and the Hou Wang Miau (Temple of Hou Wang) in rural Atherton, far north Queensland. In the 1880s, Brisbane experienced a construction boom and Chinese labourers flocked there to work. A 'Chinatown' was established at Frog's Hollow, in what is now the Brisbane central business district, but tensions ran high among men from five clans with histories of hostile relations (Ealing-Godbold 2024). In this small city, two organisations serving the Three Districts and the Four Districts was not feasible. As has been seen in Melbourne and Sydney, a wealthy Chinese businessman in good standing with the White community, Sum Chick Tong (1849–1902), was a motivating force in getting the temple approved and built. Four other businessmen, Way Hop, George Shue, Wam Yo, and Tong Wah, completed the representation of each of the five clans (Chinese Museum of Queensland 2024). Mark Singer notes the auspiciousness of the site:

> [t]he Brisbane temple with its auspicious water views of the Brisbane River, and its sheltered location beneath surrounding hills, had promised a very favourable future until surrounding factories were built earlier [in the twentieth] century. The decline of the temple thereafter was directly attributable to the loss of good *Feng Shui* (Fisher 1988, 99).

Sum Chick Tong's building firm, Kwong Nam Tai and Company, imported materials for the construction of the roof, and he reputedly played a significant role at the opening ceremony in 1886. However, there were anti-Chinese riots in Brisbane in 1888, after which Sum Chick Tong lost his business and was reduced to working as a grocer. The hostile White community and the legal impact of Federation caused the Chinese community in Brisbane to shrink. Christina Ealing-Godbold notes that by the 1930s the Holy Triad Temple was viewed as a "quaint" relic from an earlier age, and in 1948 there was not a single worshipper remaining (Ealing Godbold 2024).



Figure 9. Holy Triad Temple in 1886, Breakfast Creek (Brisbane). Wikimedia Commons

Government processes of heritage conservation were mobilised to save the Breakfast Creek Temple in 1964; it had been derelict for sixteen years and a community organization, the Chinese Club, was invited to consider the building's future. A specific Chinese Temple Society was founded immediately to raise funds, and the restoration began in 1965, with the restored temple (complete with some original furnishings that had been identified and reacquired) opening in 1966. A caretaker's residence was erected and the first caretaker, Mrs Dorothy Chick Tong, and Englishwoman, was Sum Chick Tong's daughter-in-law, the second wife of his son George Chick Tong (1886–1968) (Ealing-Godbold 2024). She was caretaker for twenty years from 1968 when her husband died to 1988, when the Bicentenary of White settlement in Australia was celebrated and Brisbane was the host city of World Expo 88. In the 1970s, a new Buddhist shrine was built to extend the temple's physical dimensions and popularity with recent Chinese migrants, mostly from Vietnam.



Figure 10. Holy Triad Temple, Albion (Brisbane). Wikimedia Commons.

The Chinese arrived in Charters Towers, far north Queensland, in 1867 and began panning for gold on the Cape River. Cape River was part of the Palmer River goldfield, which was the largest alluvial goldfield in Australia. Chinese miners made a significant contribution economically and socially to the region: Heather Burke and Gordon Grimwade note that in 1883, "that half or more of the populations of the Cairns, Port Douglas, Innisfail and Atherton regions were of Chinese descent" (Burke and Grimwade 2013, 121). These towns were not large; the north of Queensland remains a thinly populated area. The prominence of the Chinese workmen in the late nineteenth century meant that there were many joss houses in far north Queensland. Yet the only surviving nineteenth century Chinese structure is the Hou Wang Miau in Atherton. As with other states, the majority of the miners originated in Guangdong, and were from either the Three Districts (Sam Yup) or the Four Districts (Sze Yup). Burke and Grimwade cite Hum Lee's research indicating that 390 Chinese residents were a critical mass required for a community and temple in Australian mining towns. They calculate north Queensland

had nine such towns:

> Cooktown (where two or three temples were built in the late nineteenth century), the Palmer (one temple, c. 1878), Etheridge/ Georgetown (which had at least two temples, one constructed in 1891 and another in 1905), Port Douglas (c. 1880s), Cairns (two separate temples, one erected in 1886 and the other c. 1898), Croydon (one temple built in 1897 and its replacement in 1903), Thornborough (1898), Innisfail (one temple in the late 1800s and its replacement c. 1940)[5] and Atherton (1903) … Only Hou Wang Miau in Atherton (1903), and Lit Sing Gung, the second temple built in Innisfail (c. 1940), survive today (Burke and Grimwade 2013, 124).

Grimwade argues that ancestor veneration and familial connections were crucial functions of the goldfield temples. He approvingly cites Evelyn Lip's research, that all traditional Chinese temples have five key elements: "1) the platform; 2) the beam frame structure; 3) brackets (*duo gong*); 4) roof form; and 5) decorative motifs" (Grimwade 2003, 51). Arguably, the *feng shui* of the landscape is as important as these structural qualities. Derham Groves has observed that all the surviving Australian joss houses face water: "Atherton faces Piebald Creek, Breakfast Creek faces the Brisbane River, Alexandria faces Sheas Creek, Glebe faces Rozelle Bay, North Bendigo faces Bendigo Creek, and South Melbourne faces Albert Park Lake (South Park Lagoon)" (Groves 2011, 66). He argues topography, orientation, and architectural form were basic requirements of the Chinese seeking to build an effective shrine for their gods, and that many sites lost their positive *feng shui* in the twentieth century when other buildings were erected that blocked views of water (Groves 2011).

The Atherton Hou Wang Miau is an outstanding building, and its survival is remarkable (though Gordon Grimwade likens it to a farm shed). He argues that it dates from 1903, but it is generally accepted to be one of the surviving nineteenth century joss houses (usually numbered at nine). At this point, I have discussed the Num Pon Soon and See Yup buildings in Melbourne, the Bendigo Joss House Temple, the Yui Ming and Sze Yup temples in Sydney, the Albion Temple of the Three Triads in Brisbane, and the Atherton Hou Wang Miau. The two not yet broached are the joss house in Darwin (which is a special case), and the Weldborough temple in Tasmania, now in the Queen Victoria Museum, Launceston (Pybus 2012). Unlike the temples discussed so far, which began as wooden structures and were replaced by more durable brick, the Atherton joss house is built of corrugated iron. Its congregation diminished by the 1930s, and in 1979 it was derelict, when the National Trust "acquired both the temple and the adjacent, abandoned, Chinatown site by donation from the owners, the Fong On family" (Grimwade and Carter 2000, 37). Hou Wang (a bodyguard of the last Sung Emperor) is an unusual dedicatee and of four known temples, Atherton is the only one outside China. There have also been conflicts between state heritage organisations and the local community in management of the site (Grimwade and Carter 2000).



Figure 11. Hou Wang Miau, Atherton. Wikimedia Commons.

Darwin and Tasmania: The Fringes of Australian Settlement and the Fate of Joss Houses

The township of Darwin was founded only in 1869, over eighty years after the first European settlement on Sydney Harbour (Giese 1995). The Chung Wah temple on Wood Street, Darwin was first erected in 1887, a date attested by the bell that was cast for the Chinese community upon the opening of the site. This temple was built using elements from other Chinese communities. For example, the stone temple guardian lions were originally part of the Brocks Creek Temple, near Pine Creek, Northern Territory (Northern Territory Government 2024). Brocks Creek was a sizeable Chinatown; when Australian soldiers attacked and damaged the temple, the lions were moved to Darwin (Chung Wah Society 2024). This temple is an outlier in the list of surviving nineteenth century temples, because it was destroyed in 1974 when Cyclone Tracy struck Darwin on Christmas Day 1974. Eighty per cent of Darwin's buildings were flattened, and the Chinese community were amazed when spokesman Ernie Chin found the temple's "old gods upright and barely scathed" (Roussos and Purtili 2014). He was inspired to call on fellow Chinese to help: "I said to everybody, 'We have to go in there and pick up all those gods'…They looked at me like I was crazy. I said, 'We've got to do this because we've lost our properties but we're still alive. So we've got to do this'. The survivors set the gods under the shelter of an awning" (Roussos and Purtili 2014). The Darwin temple currently dates from 1977, but the rebuild was based closely on the nineteenth century temple and the continuity is acknowledged as valid, given the drastic circumstances of Cyclone Tracy.



Figure 12. Wood Street Temple (Chung Wah Society), Darwin. Wikimedia Commons.



Figure 13. Lit Sing Gung Temple of All Religions (1940), Innisfail. Wikimedia Commons.

The final nineteenth century Chinese joss house surviving in Australia is that which was formerly located at Weldborough in Tasmania. This is where the question of the disappearance of the faith community becomes acute, given that the Weldborough temple dedicated to Guan Di is now located in the Victoria Museum in Launceston, Tasmania. In a museum it has ceased to be an effective place of worship and has become part of heritage, the historical record that is presented to Australians and international visitors as relics of an exotic, and increasingly distant, past (Brine 1997). In northern Tasmania tin mining attracted Chinese labourers from Guangdong and the mining boom from approximately 1880 to 1890 saw the township of Weldborough being home to 700 Chinese men, some of whom had non-Chinese wives. Cassandra Pybus describes a majority of the men as "lonely bachelors" and their working life as managed by:

> [the] clan leader in Weldborough, Maa Mon Chinn…one of the first miners to come to the Blue Tier, arriving in Tasmania with his father and brother in the 1860s when he was just a youth. Twenty years later he had prospered and held several mining leases in the region, as well as running a gambling den and all-purpose store in Weldborough. He dealt directly with Tom Sing in Launceston, who handled all the buying and selling of ore, the interpreting and negotiations with officialdom, in addition to the importation of goods from Hong Kong. Tom Sing was also the middleman who made it possible for miners to remit much of their earnings to the families left behind in China (Pybus 2012).

She notes that Weldborough's Chinese community decreased due to the social and political conditions I have detailed above, and by 1930 only one Chinese man, Hee Jarm, remained to take care of the temple. As the years went by, he became concerned about the future of the joss house and arranged for it to be transferred to the Victoria Museum through the agency of the prominent Chinese citizen, James Chung-Gon, in 1934.

Initially, being in the museum did not prevent the Weldborough temple from being used as a place of worship as well as a museum exhibit. Pybus and her fellow Tasmanian writer Carmel Bird (née Janice Maureen Power, b. 1940) both recollect the joy of encountering this exotic cultural artifact on visits to the Victoria Museum with their

families as children:

> Tucked away in the dusty, darkened inner sanctum of this place of curiosities, the 'joss house' became an enduring source of fascination and joy for generations of Tasmanians, who vividly remember approaching in darkness and then, as the display illuminated, entering into an inexplicably exotic world. The gilded red lacquerwork of the temple was hung with embroidered scrolls inscribed with the teachings of Confucius and decorated with…fierce red dragons, white cranes, crimson peonies, yellow chrysanthemums, and multi-coloured fish. Mounted on eight long cedar poles were eight flat boxes covered with the brilliant blue feathers of the kingfisher, while on a central altar were fourteen figurines in elaborate makeup and vivid embroidered silken robes, arranged around the central figure of Guan Di, who was seated on a throne, looking terribly fierce in his glossy green robes. Entering this gorgeous, but slightly shabby, shrine was an awesome pleasure that many Tasmanians never forgot (Pybus 2012).

Pybus's amusing essay about the Chinese in the Tasmanian imaginary drifts off into Hollywood celebrities and local gossip, but exhibits affection for and interest in, the long-gone Tasmanian Cantonese mining community. The Queen Victoria Museum website indicates that the temple is still a working place of worship and offers various interesting pieces of information about its history and fittings (Addison 2024). More political and incisive are the findings of Freya Su, David Beynon, and Van Krisadawat, who argue that the fate of the Weldborough temple, which "has been removed from its original location (and largely from its original purpose) indicat[ing] that the relationship between migration and settlement is a threshold between movement and fixity, ephemerality and permanence, residence and citizenship in the fullest sense" (Su, Beynon and Krisadawat 2023, 537) has greater significance for White Australia's unwelcoming attitude to all non-Whites, including Indigenous Australians.



Figure 14. Weldborough Joss House, Victoria Museum Launceston (Tasmania). Wikimedia Commons.

The status of the ninth and final continuing nineteenth century joss house in Australia as a permanent museum exhibit raises the fact that majoritarian White Australia still is

disinclined to give credit to non-White settlers, sojourners, and even citizens as contributing to the complex, multicultural Australia of the twenty-first century (Cusack and Prior 2010). This article has examined the survival, against the odds of historical abandonment, dilapidation, and prevalent racist attitudes of Chinese joss houses in Australia, noting the White preference for a "heritage" presentation, such as is found in the goldfields theme park Sovereign Hill near Ballarat, Victoria (where the temple is a reproduction), rather than actual knowledge of the history, archaeology, and lived religion of historic Chinese settlers (Evans 1991).



Figure 15. Joss House, Sovereign Hill Theme Park (Ballarat). Wikimedia Commons.

Tajao Fujikawa notes that the Chinese were the only non-European ethnic group of significance prior to Federation and constituted the second-largest ethnic group in Australia at that time; they are still the second largest ethnic group after White Europeans in the twenty-first century, and they are also the largest tourist group to visit the country (Fujikawa 2018). Fujikawa studied the five museums in Australia dedicated to Chinese history:

> [the] five Chinese museums which we deal with here are the following: the Hou Wang Chinese Temple and Museum in Atherton, Queensland; the Museum and the Temple of the Chung Wah Society in Darwin, the Northern Territory; the Chinese Museum in Melbourne, Victoria: the Golden Dragon Museum in Bendigo, Victoria; [and] the Gum San Chinese Heritage Centre in Ararat, Victoria. All the museums exist within a Chinatown or were closely connected with a former Chinatown which dates back to the 19th century (Fujikawara 2018, 45).

Fujikawa argues that Chinese Museums cater often to a largely Chinese public and are ignored or categorised as alien and difficult to understand by contemporary Whites (Fujikawa 2018). Michael Evans' work on the goldfields theme park of Sovereign Hill which opened in 1970, fits neatly with Fujikawa's research, in that historic Ballarat had a 'Chinatown' and the inclusion of a joss house at the attraction made sense. Yet Evans' research reveals that the temple, far from being an authentic Australian Chinese place of worship, was "based on an illustration on a postcard from Macau" (Evans 1991, 143). Considering that the surviving, and very fine, Bendigo Joss House Temple was a mere

hundred kilometres away, this neglect of historical evidence is disturbing. The important thing, it seems, in presenting the history of the Chinese in Australia to non-Chinese Australians is not to adhere to historical realities, but rather to employ a range of exotic but attractive cliches, which demand less of the audience than the presentation of often complex and contested facts (Evans 2018).

The museums in towns where there once were temples are interesting because they reveal a history of movement and change; Janis Wilton's work on the demolished temples of Emmaville and Tingha in the New England religion of New South Wales reinforces Kate Bagnall's work on the maintenance of Chinese traditions among the descendants of the early Chinese settlers. Wilton's interviews with Ernest Sue Fong and his sister Bessie Chiu bring to life the long-gone temple in Tingha, which Bessie insisted was "the most beautiful joss house" (Wilton 2019, 27). Moreover, these poignant memories are reinforced by the collections of fittings from the Emmaville and Tingha temples that are now housed in local museums like the McCrossin's Mill Museum in nearby Uralla, New South Wales, a testament to the connections of these remote temples with Guangdong, given that many fittings and objects were manufactured in China.

Conclusion

From 1851 to 1871, the population of Australia grew from around 430,000 people to 1.7 million as migrants flocked to prospect for gold. The largest non-European ethnic group were Chinese, who often migrated as bonded labourers, and were discriminated against by the government, White Australians, and other miners on the goldfields. In the nineteenth century non-Christian places of worship were unpopular and missionaries sought to convert the "heathen Chinese" (O'Brien 2014). In the twenty-first century the surviving handful of temples built by Cantonese miners are tourist attractions. However, at sites where there is an absence of material remains, the painstaking work of oral historians and folklorists receives less attention (Bagnall 2013), despite the fact that it arguably reveals more about the actual lives of historical Chinese Australians than a visit to a temple (which is intentionally geared toward creating an impression of exoticism and colourful, alien rites). In the twenty-first century, these limited and scattered relics of an important migrant people merit serious reconsideration, and greater integration into Australian multicultural and multi-faith history.

Conflict of Interest

Carole M. Cusack has been on the Editor of *JDTREA* since July 2021, but has no role in the decision to publish this article. No potential conflict of interest relevant to this article was reported.

Notes

[1] The Chinese transliterations of words in this article will appear as they are most commonly known by English speaking Australians and as such will shift between Mandarin and other dialects.

[2] The term 'joss house' is used as an alternative to 'temple' in this article because a majority of existing Cantonese speaking Chinese who use these temples have adopted that term (for example, the Emu Point structure is formally called the Bendigo Joss House Temple).

[3] His name is also given as Kwan Ti and Kwan Gung, which is merely a different form of orthography.

[4] The Sze Yup Temple is approximately twenty minutes' walk from the Studies in Religion department at the University of Sydney, and for decades my colleague Christopher Hartney and I (and in recent years, Ray Radford, too) have taken students to visit the quiet gardens where temple cats laze in the sun. Students respectfully tour the premises and burn hell money in the oven or light incense at the shrine if they wish to.

[5] The Lit Sing Gung Temple of All Religions in Innisfail is not generally counted as a nineteenth century temple as the current structure dates from 1940, and the earlier joss house had been destroyed by a cyclone in 1918. The twenty-two years before the rebuild are deemed to have broken the continuity for scholars. Innisfail local residents nevertheless love and esteem their well-maintained and religiously active temple.

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BOOK REVIEW

In the Midst of Healing: Three Studies on the Cultural Impact of COVID-19

Edward IRONS (The Hong Kong Institute for Culture, Commerce and Religion, USA)

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In the Midst of Healing: Three Studies on the Cultural Impact of COVID-19

Yamamoto, Nobuto, ed. *The COVID-19 PANDEMIC and Risks in East Asia: Media Social Reactions, and Theories*. London and New York: Routledge, 2023, 240 pp. ISBN: 978-1032194714, $160.00 (pbk)

Lim, Tai-Wei, ed. *Crafting an Asian Future in the Post-COVID-19 Asia*. New Jersey: World Scientific, 2023, 264 pp. ISBN: 978-9811253720, $88.00 (pbk)

Erni, John Nguyet, and Theodore G. Striphas, eds. *The Cultural Politics of COVID-19*. London and New York: Routledge, 2023, 480 pp. ISBN: 978-1032155265, $48.71 (ebk)

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This review covers three recently published academic works on COVID-19 (hereafter COVID) and its impact on culture. Each of the three is a collection of articles from a variety of fields, including political science and media studies. Two of the collections focus on Asia, while the third comes from a Cultural Studies perspective. COVID and its impact is still a current topic. The earliest among the three were published in 2023, and the most recent in 2024. So from our perspective in late 2024 we can say that all the studies suffer from a shortened horizon.

Beyond this structural issue the editors adopted different strategies, with varying results. *The COVID-19 Pandemic and Risks in East Asia* uses the concept of risk as the unifying theme. Unfortunately few of the articles engaged with the concept, choosing instead to describe events and reactions. In contrast to these two examples that focus on Asia, *The Cultural Politics of COVID-19* takes a disciplinary approach. All its articles were published in Cultural Studies during the early phase of COVID. So the collection overall reflects the view of that particular discipline.

Crafting an Asian Future and *The COVID-19 PANDEMIC and Risks in East Asia* had problems with English clarity. Several of the articles in these volumes had only one or two problems, which is perhaps understandable. But others had five or more blatant punctuation or incorrect pluralization issues that a good editor would have caught. Beyond these problems there are issues with language usage, where the words may be syntactically correct, but the expression is off-kilter. Several articles excelled/were exemplary in their use of English. Satoshi Abe's article on COVID-19 in Iran was exceptionally clear. Yoshihisa Godo's two articles on the agricultural sector in Japan

were similarly lucid and concise. Many of the others suffered from inadequate checking of English usage and readability, issues that are ultimately the responsibility of the publishers. The *Cultural Politics* collection was the exception—all the articles showed a degree of care for editorial standards and clear writing.

The reader will in some way be expecting a certain type of arguments in our discussions of COVID. While much early media coverage focused on disruptions and government measures, academic discussions of the social impact of the pandemic will inevitably ask to what extent society changed due to COVID. Another way to pose the question is to ask to what extent the much-discussed "new normal" has become widespread. Is the prospect of a life "after COVID" growing fainter by the minute, as expressed by John Erni (22), or was COVID simply one of the many pandemics that appear in human history, disrupting life for a time, then disappearing into the background?

This essay briefly describes each volume before focusing on the primary narrative threads, which taken together form a unique profile of the academic perspective on this seismic social event.

1. *The COVID-19 PANDEMIC and Risks in East Asia: Media, Social Reactions, and Theories* (2023)

This volume grew out of a conference titled "Risk Society and Media in an Uncertain Age," organized by Keio University in February, 2021. Generalizations for the entire region of East Asia, difficult at the best of times, are impossible. Defining East Asia is a perennial challenge in many fields. The majority of the studies here focused on Taiwan (the focus of four articles), Japan (4), Korea (2), with one each mentioning the Philippines and Vietnam. China, Hong Kong, and North Korea are notably absent, an obvious gap. Several of the articles adopted a comparative approach, which at least helps the reader to build up their own mental models.

The important findings deal with handling of the pandemic. The different states followed WHO pandemic guidelines without objection. This meant they adopted the now-familiar package of border checks, quarantines, contact tracing, masks, lockdowns, vaccinations, social distancing, and online classes. But implementation, even among this small sample of countries, varied widely. Vietnam implemented harsh lockdowns, while South Korea and Japan were relatively loose. In slum neighborhoods in Manila volunteer guards checked everyone who entered and left the community (216). Differences in national situations—population densities, preparedness, affluence, immigrant flows—led inevitably to different outcomes. These in turn created wide divergence in reactions among the population. So despite adopting a similar package of measures, outcomes varied widely, given the wide diversity of cultures in East Asia.

The COVID-19 PANDEMIC and Risks in East Asia is most useful when it describes

not government policies, but popular reactions to the pandemic. However the concept of a risk society, floated briefly as a unifying theme, was not taken up directly by many of the writers, and so did not unify the various articles.

2. *Crafting an Asian Future in the Post-COVID-19 Asia* (2023)

This volume attempts to describe COVID's impact on Asia in terms of three broad socio-economic forces: globalization, the rise of new (Asian) geopolitical powers, and inequality. Most of the articles focus on either a single polity, such as Singapore or Iran, or a sector within a larger one, such as agriculture in Japan. The articles did not focus on broad comparisons between countries. Some passing statements note that the countries of East Asia have handled the COVID crisis comparatively better than other areas. These underline the fact that the articles were written in early 2021, at an early stage in the crisis, and scholars simply lacked the data to draw such wide-ranging conclusions. In that sense the polity- or sector-specific approach adopted here is a practical choice.

Many of the articles allowed the reader a glimpse into specific corners of the East Asia economy. Yoshihisa Godo's two articles on the agricultural sector in Japan are outstanding, both well-argued, concise, and analytical. Godo argues that the Nokyo, the agricultural cooperatives, were central organizations in Japan's civil society. They linked the ruling LDP party with grass-roots rural sectors (11). The Nokyo was a funding and influence-peddling organization as well, offering loans and insurance. Naturally conservative, Nokyo lobbied against rice imports which began in 1993 (23). Its position in Japanese society has generally weakened, requiring bailouts from the BOJ in 1996 (25). In his second article Yoshihisa clarifies the impact of COVID on rural Japan. Overall the rural sector was already losing social influence under the Abe government. There was a brief period after the financial crisis of 2008 in which agriculture was promoted as a "growth industry." Always more image than reality, this effort came to an end with the new Shiga premiership in 2020. COVID simply confirmed the increasing irrelevance of agriculture for national policy. In fact the connection between COVID and agriculture were tenuous in general. COVID and the government's policies around it simply underlined the sector's increasing irrelevance.

And so we find a similar debatable link in other articles that attempt to connect COVID to existing trends. Robotics, discussed in Tai Wei Lim's article on technology, continued to make strides in many areas of society; COVID simply accelerated the trend. Tracking devices, telemedicine, wearable technology, and Big Data collection were pre-existing trends (124–5). In Iran COVID brought tensions between religion-based and science-based views on health to the fore (114). These tensions pre-dated the pandemic, and no doubt continue.

Otherwise COVID is seen to have had only minor impacts on other sectors. Tenancy law and regulations regarding employment were adjusted in Hong Kong in light of

COVID events (139). Virtual funerals became more common in Iran than they had been (110). These changes are hardly major. One area in which COVID did have an immense impact was religious activities. In some countries traditional religious practices and gatherings were often allowed to continue despite COVID restrictions. Unfortunately, few articles focus on this aspect.

COVID's impact on business is worth discussing. World GDP did fall 3.4% in 2020, but it sprang back to 5.8% in 2021.[1] From the perspective of 2024 it appears that the economic impact of COVID was fleeting. Foreign trade, while impacted temporarily by severe supply chain shocks in some areas, overall continued its relentless churning. Oil exports did not slacken. Consumer goods, though delayed to some extent, quickly returned to pre-COVID levels. Sales in some categories such as home improvements increased substantially during COVID.[2] Bottlenecks were real—shipping prices added an estimated 1.5% to worldwide inflation in 2021 (165). Certainly many workers in export-dependent industries lost their jobs. Yet such disruptions are not unknown in global trade. Businesses eventually adjusted, shipping rates returned to previous levels, and many workers were re-hired.

The biggest impact of COVID on East Asia may be summed up by Wong Lok Hung's article on globalization. Globalization, often described in these volumes as a core element of the neoliberal agenda, has characterized the post-WWII economy. And we may indeed be moving into a de-globalized world.[3] Yet COVID hardly caused any of this. As Wong notes the pandemic *may* have exacerbated the trend toward deglobalization, although this is also debatable (176). We should not be surprised to learn that in times of crisis national interests and geopolitical considerations rise in prominence, and the benefits of globalization may fade into the background.

Tai Wei Lim concludes this collection by noting that many East Asian societies showed resilience in the face of COVID, the implication being that other states, such as Europe and the US, did not. Again later developments cast doubt on such conclusions. The COVID pandemic also took place alongside other significant events that need to be mentioned. In the article on Hong Kong, it is remarkable that author discussed the resiliency of civil society (65) while never mentioning the National Security Law implemented at the height of the pandemic in 2020.[4] This law has led to the subsequent arrest of many pro-democracy individuals. Both COVID and the National Security Law were significant challenges to resiliency and need to be evaluated together before we can generalize about resiliency. COVID's greatest impact may in fact have been that it served as convenient cover for the implementation of other measures by the state, a theme not mentioned in any of these volumes.

3. *The Cultural Politics of COVID-19* (2023)

This volume, released in mid-2023, reprints COVID-related articles from a single 2021 issue of the journal *Cultural Studies.* As such it is a handy snapshot of the state

of the field of cultural studies in that period. Cultural Studies has been known for its pre-occupation with authorial reflexivity and the status of the field itself. The insights found in this volume reveal much about the cultural studies approach, but unfortunately little about the COVID event.

Cultural Studies recognizes that relationships between phenomena are constructed. Practitioners thus tend to seek out specific articulations, that is, the way relations between two things are linked and expressed.[5] COVID-19 would seem to be an ideal topic of research in Cultural Studies. Yet the contributors in this volume seem to struggle with drawing out clear linkages between COVID and other social phenomena. Instead they reach the same non-controversial conclusion found in the other two volumes: the COVID experience served as a means of bringing out existing social and ideological relations.

Where the *Cultural Politics* authors excelled was in discovering moods and tendencies—"structures of feeling"—that emerged with COVID. The pandemic brought about a deep sense of having lost something that had been longed for (Silva, 31, 37); the discovery of a deeply entrenched individualism (Bratich, 51); the prominence of a life-denying spirit of defeatist disillusionment, "necropopulism" (Bratich, 55); a sense of intensified racial oppression (Calvente, 63); a rising tide of "pathological whiteness' (Smicker, 86); in India, a clarification of such social imaginaries as "home," "village, and "people" (Shome, 115), in Australia, a perception of increased housing discrimination against Asian immigrants (Khorana, 101); the rise of "self-management porn" such as the practice of displaying and watching bread baking competitions during lockdown (Mohabeer, 199); parodies and repurposed melodies (Stratton 220); a widespread sense of uncertainty and alarm (Bennett, 143; Adelman 261); and in general a sense that the current, neoliberal order is tottering, and in falling will take down such cherished assumptions as the myth of constant improvement and limitless progress (Adelman, 262). Chris Ingraham's article illustrates the difficulty of capturing these issues of quality of life under COVID by focusing on gestures that served to rebuild community (Ingraham, 134–5). Such gestures as displaying teddy bears in living room windows and painted rocks served as ritual communications that maintained social cohesion.

This last point is shared by many of the *Cultural Politics* contributors. Many fell into the trap that the diverse reactions to COVID add up to an attack on the neoliberal order. But in contrast to many breathless predictions made at the time, as well as from our perspective in late 2024, and despite the continued presence of different forms of the COVID-19 virus, it appears that much of life has in fact returned to pre-COVID "normal."[6] The exporting powerhouses of east Asia continue to ship product.[7] Air travel has returned to pre-COVID levels. Schools have reopened. In the U.S., unemployment is at record lows (in many economies), and inflation is gradually returning to the pre-COVID level.[8] There are certainly international tensions, and the American population remains ideologically divided. But few would attribute any of

these conditions to our experience with COVID.

That is not to say COVID did not have an impact. Unfortunately, few if any of the *Cultural Politics* articles brought up these issues we in 2024 can see were crucial. Foremost is the impact of school closures on children, which it appears has created a generational impact on school-age children in those places that closed schools. Second is the eruption of Black Lives Matter riots, violent events often dismissed as having been "mostly peaceful."[9] Third was the overall conclusion that the COVID crisis exposed the brittleness of certain institutions and practices, including supply chain risk, the overall state of health, and the precariousness of middle-class lifestyles.[10] These issues remain contentious and political, so consensus has not emerged yet, but consensus will build.

A World Economic Forum panel of futurists in 2022 highlighted the many social changes brought about by the pandemic.[11] First was the realization of the fragility of supply chains. The panel saw an increase in regionalism as well as automation in manufacturing. Politically they concluded that governments were only too happy to continue to exercise dictatorial powers flexed during the pandemic, leading to a world-wide "democracy deficit." The experts also expect a continued trend to move day-to-day activities such as shopping online. Educators will continue to try online learning, with challenges expected.

Few of the authors in this volume do more than bring up problematic issues, such as racism, blaming them ultimately on the neoliberal order and associated institutions. There are few details, for instance statistics, and almost never any action calls beyond sharpening Cultural Studies pencils for more critiques. Almost no articles deal with governmental actions except in general terms. The consensus seems to be that the US (Trump) government performed poorly, while selected states—Korea, New Zealand, Singapore—performed well (Smicker, 91).

All of the articles here are light on statistics, and so did not fully use epidemiological data. They also shy away from overt criticism of governments. Instead they focus on the individual and social practices. At the same time civil society is curiously absent. This concept, rediscovered from the 1980s and 1990s to interpret authoritarian regimes and neoliberalism, can be a revealing lens through which to investigate the impact historical events and traumas on individual lives. The articles in *Cultural Politics* focus instead on the position of individuals and ideologies, as if civil society actors—churches, businesses, associations, NGOs—lacked agency.

One exception to this was Madhavi Mallapragada's discussion of increased racial attacks on Asian-Americans during Covid (Mallapragada, 72). Mallapragada brings up what statistics have been published by the STOP AAPI HATE movement and other NGOs. Yet she doesn't interrogate the received nebulous categories of Asian-American or the perpetrators of racism in a holistic way. Racism has certainly been present in America and racist incidents may have increased during COVID. Why? We would expect at least an attempt to understand the connection with COVID. Instead we are

left with the suspicion that anti-immigration and "contagion metaphors" alone do not explain racist and violent action, that COVID alone is not a sufficient explanation. And so it went with many phenomena that were ostensibly linked to COVID, such as pathological whiteness (Smicker 91) and urban population density (Khorana 106).

While several of the articles in *Cultural Politics* are typical of the Cultural Studies approach, the final article, by Ien Ang, illustrates many elements best. Ang sees COVID as bringing underlying tensions in the neoliberal regime to the fore. Issues include racial inequities, which erupted in the Black Lives Matter movement and discrimination against Chinese, as well as the new cold war between China and the U.S.; a simmering sense of rage and anger felt everywhere; and the climate crisis, which remained largely in the background during COVID, although it remains ranked as the most dire of all crises. Governments find themselves in conditions of cultural paralysis (396), moving from crisis to crisis without a gameplan (396). Ang borrows Gramsci's concept of organic crisis as a process of unravelling that arises from intrinsic tensions (398).

Ang calls for a critical cosmopolitanism that can work against the organic crisis in which we find ourselves engulfed (396). But if she sees the current turmoil as moving us toward a "new world order, a new civilization," she does not spell out what that post capitalist future would look like. Nor does she say more about how it would come about, except to assume that we require a "collective mobilization in the name of shared humanity and mutual solidarity" (401). In political terms this vagueness leaves space for actors with different agendas to grab power, as seen in many periods of transition, not least of all the transition from colonialism to modernity. For a discipline that calls for radical restructuring cultural studies is often politically naive.

Naivety is easily treated by strong doses of political history and engineering. Issues such as the reevaluation of the US-China ties, and decoupling, as well as practical approaches to climate change are beyond the range of the Cultural Studies framework, it seems. There are many options available to deal with issues facing humanity, including pandemics, that do not require an idealistic "cosmopolitan sense of pan-human solidarity" or even the collective action she calls for (405).

Overall, the Cultural Politics volume is a significant and well-edited collection of admittedly early thinking on COVID's import. The articles by Charles Acland and Rebecca Adelman are particularly rich.

Conclusion

These collections as a whole illustrate several themes in research on COVID-19. First, the importance of timeliness. While many of the pieces were written in 2021 or 2022 and published in 2023—fast by academic standards—quite a number of their findings have been rendered irrelevant by later events. The relative success of East Asian states in dealing with COVID has been overshadowed by succeeding surges in

Hong Kong, Taiwan, and especially China. China's abrupt volte-face in COVID policies is the most extreme example, but many of the countries encountering persistent COVID outbreaks had to adjust their approaches even if previously seen as successful.[12]

Secondly, any discussion of East Asia clearly needs to include China, for a variety of reasons but none more relevant than its complete social and economic entanglement with surroundings states. Noburo Yamamoto, one of the volumes' editors, acknowledged that the absence of any treatment of China was a glaring problem. Yet incorporating China has been difficult. The Chinese government has not always shared data; a situation confirmed by WHO official Maria D. Van Kerkhove in April of 2023.[13]

A third issue is the need to evaluate economic impact as well as social factors. Any discussion of "successful" dealing with COVID that does not include issues of economic growth and disruption will be incomplete, since the economy is central to well-being. Indeed many measures adopted by states to deal with COVID showed varying degrees of concern for economy. At one extreme were the extreme lockdown policies requiring automatic quarantines for all flights, as well as strict lockdowns if a single person on a flight or in a factory was found to be positive, measures adopted in China, Vietnam, and Hong Kong.[14] At the other extreme was a business-as-usual approach that privileged keeping business open, an approach taken in a number of U.S. states (not all).[15]

Fourthly, in many countries COVID resulted in a loss of trust in governance and institutions, such as public health, as well as government pronouncements overall. It is too easy to blame the ease of communication and online forums for this "infodemic." It is also possible that officials did give incorrect information or, more commonly, were unwilling to revise previous statements in light of evidence. There are certainly deeper problems involved here that COVID did help to uncover, but they were not all the fault of misinformation or misguided "resistors," as many media depictions imply. COVID brought to light the degree to which ostensibly scientific pronouncements are accepted without debate. Many pandemic measures, such as mask wearing or maintaining a 2 meter/6 feet distancing, were instead based on what was promoted as "best practices" and an implied moral code, instead of on the results of controlled experiments (Bennett 146). Such recommendations were often revised several times, leading to a suspicion that they were not authoritative or necessary.[16] Greatest suspicion rose around the topic of vaccination efficacy, an issue that remains sensitive today.

Overall these articles suffer from closeness to the events. There is certainly a rush to publish that characterizes some academic efforts to capitalize on events. In the case of COVID-19 the event dragged on for years; it can be argued we still live in the age of COVID. Thus any collection published in early 2021, a mere 12 months after the spread of the pandemic, is bound to be dated as soon as it is issued. From our perspective we

know that the virus had different histories in different locations. Some countries—Brazil, Italy, the U.S., India—were hit hard in the first waves but recovered fairly quickly. Others, including those that held lockdowns the longest, had near-spotless records until they didn't, when they allowed the spread of the virus into the population. Taiwan's 295-days without a COVID case can be seen in this light. Yes, the government there sprang into action quickly, instituting border closures and energetic tracing policies. But eventually COVID did enter. Cases began to climb in May of 2021.[17] The new measures resulted in shortages of instant noodles and toilet paper. In May of 2022 Taiwan abandoned its zero-COVID strategy in favor of home care and active tracing.[18] By March of 2023 individuals were no longer required to report mild symptoms.[19] In the end Taiwan did not escape the impact of COVID-19, it simply delayed its arrival. This is generally true of all the East Asian societies that instituted strict border controls in the first year—they eventually had to allow the spread of the disease. In other words, pandemics spread throughout populations over time, regardless of government policy.

Most of these articles did not to focus on government measures to combat COVID. This was wise. Assuming COVID management to be a source of "national glory," seen in one example (Liu 171), is generally premature, and many of the positive comparisons in the foreign press will no doubt prove to have been fleeting. The success or failure of government policies can only be evaluated in the fullness of time. So none of these studies should be faulted for being too early. The urge to publish on a relevant topic is very real. And COVID had such a wide-ranging effect on every polity in the region that scholars have a responsibility to address its impact and attempt to understand the phenomenon. The key question raised by these studies is how best to address such a wide-ranging event. May it not be wiser to focus on questions in the initial stages, and to delay definitive analysis until later, once the phenomenon has cooled down? For complex events our understandings are often premature. In politics the advent of a Xi Jinping or a Donald Trump is unknowable in the early days, and observers are often surprised by outcomes. In business new business models and trends appear murky without breathing space. And in religious issues the full import of a new leader or idea is impossible to define or fully understand without the perspective of time. At the same time, we live in a world in which news and media calls for immediate comment, and scholars can be sucked in to the "immediate soundbite" mindset just as easily as politicians. We must resist this. In these cases we are best advised to outline a field of inquiry as it forms before our eyes, and to refrain from simple conclusions.

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