

JOURNAL OF

DAESOON  
THOUGHT  
&  
THE RELIGIONS OF  
EAST  
ASIA

THE DAESOON ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

DAEJIN UNIVERSITY

pISSN: 2799-3949

eISSN: 2799-4252

**Vol.2 Issue 1**, SEPTEMBER 2022

## Aims and Scope

*The Journal of Daeseon Thought and the Religions of East Asia (JD TRE A)* is the official English language journal of the Daeseon Academy of Sciences, and thus far, it is the only peer-reviewed, English language journal exclusively dedicated to research on Daeseon Thought and the contemporary relevance of East Asia Religions. Daeseon 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*), and the chief purveyor of Daeseon Thought is Daeseon Jinrihoe, a representative Korean religion the ideological origins of which can be traced back to Kang Jeungsan. Although there is a reasonable level of worldwide familiarity with the major religious traditions of East Asia, Daeseon Thought remains under-researched outside of Korea. As a remedy to this, the Daeseon Academy of Science (DAOS), aims to publish *JD TRE A* twice a year. The editorial board of *JD TRE A* consists of active scholars from over a dozen countries including Australia, Bulgaria, Canada, China, Australia, France, Japan, Korea, Lithuania, Netherlands, Poland, Russia, Spain, Taiwan, the UK, and the USA. *JD TRE A* is published to promote global studies on Daeseon Thought and East Asia religion by encouraging wide-ranging research on these topics. The scope of *JD TRE A* includes the following:

- Interpretation and analysis of Daeseon Jinrihoe's 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 Daeseon Thought and/or East Asian religions
- New interpretations of and approaches to Daeseon Thought

The types of publications featured in *JD TRE A* 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

*JD TRE A* debuted on September 30<sup>th</sup>, 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](http://www.jdre.org). No publishing costs will be incurred by authors who submit to the journal.

## Abstracting and Indexing Services

Portions of articles, metadata, or full texts of articles from the *Journal of Daeseon Thought and the Religions of East Asia* are available via CrossRef Metadata (2021-) and Google Scholar (2021-).

---

**Publisher:** BAE Kyuhan, The Daeseon Academy of Sciences, Korea

**Editor-in-Chief:** Carole M. CUSACK, The University of Sydney, Australia

The Daeseon Academy of Sciences

Daejin University Daejin Education Building 403,

1007, Hoguk-ro, Pocheon-si, Gyeonggi-do, 11159, South Korea Tel: +82-31-539-2523 Fax: +82-31-531-2541

E-mail: [idaos@daejin.ac.kr](mailto:idaos@daejin.ac.kr)

© The Daeseon Academy of Sciences ([www.daos.or.kr/en/](http://www.daos.or.kr/en/))

# Journal of Daesoon Thought & the Religions of East Asia

Volume 2 Issue 1, September 2022

---

## Publisher

**BAE Kyuhan**

Daejin University, Korea

## Editor-in-Chief

**Carole M. CUSACK**

The University of Sydney, Australia

## Review Editor

**Holly FOLK**

Western Washington University, USA

## Associate Editor

**LEE Gyungwon**

Daejin University, Korea

## Managing Editor

**Jason GREENBERGER**

Daejin University, Korea

## Copy Editor

**CHOI Wonhyuk**

Daejin University, Korea

## Office Staff

**NA Kwonsoo**

**PYEON Gyeongil**

**EOM Hyejin**

**LEE Suhyun**

Daejin University, Korea

## Honorary Editors (alphabetical order by nation)

**Don BAKER** University of British Columbia, Canada

**Massimo INTROVIGNE** The Center for Studies on New Religions, Italy

**Eileen BARKER** London School of Economics, UK

**J. Gordon MELTON** Baylor University, USA

## Editorial Board

**Christopher HARTNEY** The University of Sydney, Australia

**David W. KIM** The Australian National University, Australia

**Mario MARINOV** South-West University "Neofit Rilski", Bulgaria

**Susan PALMER** Concordia University, Canada

**LEE Hongjun** Yanbian University, China

**WANG Zhihe** Institute for Postmodern Development of China USA, China

**Bernadette RIGAL-CELLARD** Bordeaux Montaigne University, France

**KAWANISHI Eriko** Osaka Professional Institute University, Japan

**OBUSE Kieko** Kobe City University of Foreign Studies

**AHN Shin** Paichai University, Korea

**KO Namsik** Daejin University, Korea

**Milda ALISAUSKIENE** Vytautas Magnus University, Lithuania

**Boudewijn WALRAVEN** Leiden University, Netherlands

**Irena BOROWIK** Jagiellonian University, Poland

**Boris FALIKOV** Russian State University, Russia

**Javier MARTINEZ-TORRON** Complutense University, Spain

**CHERN Meeihwa** Taiwan Association for Religious Studies, Taiwan

**HUANG Pochi** Huaan Univetrity, Taiwan

**George CHRYSSIDES** York St John University, UK

**Catherine WESSINGER** Loyola University New Orleans, USA

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

**Patrick LAUDE** Georgetown University, USA

**Thien-Huong NINH** Cosumnes River College, USA

---

*Journal of Daesoon Thought & the Religions of East Asia* is a peer-reviewed, academic journal published in English by the Daesoon Academy of Sciences (DAOS). Article submissions, queries and editorial matters should be addressed to the editorial committee. For more information, please contact:

Tel: +82 (0)31 5392523, Fax: +82 (0)31 5312541, E-mail: [idaos@daejin.ac.kr](mailto:idaos@daejin.ac.kr)

DAOS maintains an executive office in the Daejin Edu. Building 403, Daejin University 1007

Hoguk-ro, Pocheon-si, Gyeonggi-do, 11159, Rep. of Korea



# **Journal of Daesoon Thought & the Religions of East Asia**

**Volume 2 Issue 1**

September 2022



The Daesoon Academy of Sciences



# C O N T E N T S

Journal of Daesoon Thought & the Religions of East Asia  
Volume 2 Issue 1, September 2022

## Editor’s Preface

Carole M. CUSACK (The University of Sydney, Australia)	9
--	---

## Research Articles

▪ <b>Introducing Daesoon Philosophy to the West</b> Don BAKER (University of British Columbia, Canada)	13
▪ <b>Haewon-sangsaeng, Chinese Harmonism and Ecological Civilization</b> Zhihe WANG (Institute for Postmodern Development of China, USA)	31
▪ <b>Activating Twenty-four: Time, Space, and Body</b> Livia Kohn (Boston University, USA)	57
▪ <b>Yiguandao in Korea: International Growth of a Chinese New Religion</b> Edward IRONS (The Hong Kong Institute for Culture, Commerce and Religion, USA) & LEE Gyungwon (Daejin University, Korea)	85
▪ <b>An Analysis of the Meaning Enshrined in the Architecture of the Tay Ninh Holy See of Cao Dai</b> NGUYEN Phuoc Tai (FPT University, Vietnam) et al.	111
▪ <b>Teaism in the Sinophone World and Beyond: Spiritual, Political and Material Explorations.</b> Kai SHMUSHKO (Leiden University, Netherlands)	133

# C O N T E N T S

Journal of Daesoon Thought & the Religions of East Asia  
Volume 2 Issue 1, September 2022

## Book Reviews

- Liora Sarfati, *Contemporary Korean Shamanism: From Ritual to Digital*  
Don BAKER (University of British Columbia, Canada) ----- 159
- Irene Eber and Kathryn Hellerstein, *Jews in China: Cultural Conversations, Changing Perceptions*  
Josh DANIELS (Institute for Curriculum Services, USA) ----- 163
- Ron Geaves, *Prem Rawat and Counterculture: Glastonbury and New Spiritualities*  
Donald A. WESTBROOK (San Jose State University, USA) ----- 167

---

# EDITOR'S PREFACE

**Carole M. CUSACK**

The University of Sydney, Australia





It is a pleasure for me to introduce the collection of articles and book reviews featured in this new issue of the *Journal of Daesoon Thought and the Religions of East Asia*. Several contributions were first presented at the JD TRE A Conference on the theme “New Frontiers in Daesoon Thought” which was held on Friday 1 July 2022 at Daijin University and online. The quality of the presentations was very high, and Don Baker, Zhihe Wang, and Livia Kohn have submitted their work for publication here, for which I am grateful.

The first contribution is by Don Baker (University of British Columbia, Canada), and is titled “Introducing Daesoon Philosophy to the West.” This article traces the complexities of cross-cultural communication, taking as its subject matter how Western people might be brought to an understanding of the “quintessentially Korean” content of Daesoon Jinrihoe. This article covers important content regarding the universality of some religions' messages, and the cultural adaptations that are the inevitable result of a religion crossing the boundaries of language, geography and culture.

The second article is Wang Zhihe's (Institute for Postmodern Development of China, USA) “Haewon-sangsaeng, Chinese Harmonism and Ecological Civilization.” This study extends the theological idea of Haewon-sangsaeng, generally taken to refer to human relationships, to the broader field of the ecological wholeness of the world. Wang poses the question of whether it is time for us to abandon anthropocentrism and consider the wholeness of creation as falling under the idea of Haewon-sangsaeng.

Next is Livia Kohn's (Boston University, USA) “Activating Twenty-four: Time, Space, and Body,” which is a witty and comprehensive study of the ways in which time is generally divided into auspicious and inauspicious times. After reading this exhaustive study it is impossible to disagree with Kohn's contention that “numbers structure reality and define the way people live.”

Edward Irons (Hong Kong Institute for Culture, Commerce and Religion, USA) and Lee Gyungwon (Daejin University, Korea) have authored a fascinating article, “Yiguandao in Korea: International Growth of a Chinese New Religion.” Yiguandao was originally a Chinese movement which entered Korea around 1947. The strength of this research is the detailed discussion of mission within the movement, and the chronicling of the lineages descending from the original movement.

The fifth contribution is Nguyen Phuoc Tai (FPT University, Can Tho Campus, Vietnam), Dinh Van Thuy (Ho Chi Minh National Political Academy, Vietnam), Nguyen Thuan Quy (Dong Thap University, Vietnam) and Tran Thi Kim Hoang (Kien Giang Teachers Training College, Vietnam) “An Analysis of the Meaning Enshrined in the Architecture of the Tay Ninh Holy See of Cao Dai.” This important contribution

considers the sacred architecture of the Tay Ninh Cao Dai temple, the most important sacred site of this Vietnamese new religion.

The final article is Kai Shmushko (Leiden University, Netherlands) “Teism in the Sinophone World and Beyond: Spiritual, Political and Material Explorations.” This is a charming and intelligent examination of cultural customs examined as if they were religions/ religious. The journal issue is completed by reviews supplied by the Review Editor, Professor Holly Folk (Western Washington University, USA). I am grateful to Bae Kyuhan, Lee Gyungwon, Jason Greenberger and Choi Wonhyuk, from Daejin University, and to all the scholars and referees who made this issue happen. 2022 has proved to be as challenging as 2021, and we are delighted to shine a positive light in the darkness.

**Carole M. Cusack**

Editor of *JDTREA*

The University of Sydney, Australia

---

## R E S E A R C H   A R T I C L E S

- **Introducing Daesoon Philosophy to the West**  
**Don BAKER** (University of British Columbia, Canada)
- **Haewon-sangsaeng, Chinese Harmonism and Ecological Civilization**  
**Zhihe WANG** (Institute for Postmodern Development of China, USA)
- **Activating Twenty-four: Time, Space, and Body**  
**Livia KOHN** (Boston University, USA)
- **Yiguandao in Korea: International Growth of a Chinese New Religion**  
**Edward IRONS** (The Hong Kong Institute for Culture, Commerce and Religion, USA) & **LEE Gyungwon** (Daejin University, Korea)
- **An Analysis of the Meaning Enshrined in the Architecture of the Tay Ninh Holy See of Cao Dai**  
**NGUYEN Phuoc Tai** (FPT University, Vietnam) **et al**
- **Teatism in the Sinophone World and Beyond: Spiritual, Political and Material Explorations.**  
**Kai SHMUSHKO** (Leiden University, Netherlands)



# Introducing Daesoon Philosophy to the West

## Don BAKER

Don Baker has been professor of Korean Civilization in the Department of Asian Studies at the University of British Columbia since 1987. He is a cultural historian who has published widely on Confucianism and Korea's traditional sciences as well as on Korea's religious culture. He also has a special interest in the translation into English of Korean-authored texts in Classical Chinese and recently completed a translation of two commentaries on the *Zhongyong* by Dasan Jeong Yagyong.



JDTREA 2022,2(1): 13-29

### Original Articles

Correspondence to

**Don BAKER**

University of British Columbia, Canada

**ubcdebaker@gmail.com**

ORCID

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1908-7041>



*Journal of Daesoon Thought and the Religions of East Asia* Vol. 2. Issue 1 (September 2022): 13–29

© 2022 by the Daesoon Academy of Sciences, Daejin University, Korea

<https://doi.org/10.25050/JDTREA.2022.2.1.13>

**Day of submission:** 2022. 06. 24.

**Completion of review:** 2022. 08. 15.

**Final decision for acceptance:** 2022. 08. 31

P-ISSN: 2799-3949

E-ISSN: 2799-4252

## Abstract

Daesoon philosophy has been described as a quintessential Korean philosophy. Given the great difference between traditional Western and East Asian ways of thinking, how can such a quintessential Korean philosophy be explained to people who have no background in traditional East Asian thought? After all, the Daesoon Jinrihoe way of approaching such core problems as how to make this world a better place is not only very different from the way the West has traditionally approached such problems, Daesoon Jinrihoe uses terminology which most Westerners are not very familiar with. Translation into Western languages such as English helps, but a conceptual gap remains because of the differences in the way key Daesoon Jinrihoe terms are understood in the West.

As a first step toward overcoming that gap, I discuss three key teachings of Daesoon philosophy and how their translations into English need to be amplified so that people in the West who are not well versed in East Asian philosophy can gain a more accurate understanding of what those terms and phrases mean in their original language. The three items discussed here are the tenet “virtuous concordance of yin and yang,” the Essential Attitude of sincerity, and the precept “do not deceive yourself.”

**Keywords:** yin; yang; concordance; virtue; tenet; Five Phases;  
sincerity; self-deception

## Introduction

A few years ago, I contributed a chapter to a book on the teachings of Daesoon Jinrihoe in which I argued that Daesoon philosophy is a quintessential Korean philosophy (Baker 2016). Though I have learned a lot more about Daesoon thought since I wrote that chapter, I have not seen anything to make me change that evaluation. However, I now realize that my chapter was incomplete. I did not address how such a quintessential Korean philosophy can be explained to people in the West who have no background in traditional East Asian thought.

After all, the Daesoon Jinrihoe way of approaching such core problems as how to make this world a better place is not only very different from the way the West has traditionally approached such problems, Daesoon Jinrihoe uses terminology which most Westerners are not very familiar with. Translation into Western languages such as English helps, but there still remains a conceptual gap because of the differences in the way key Daesoon Jinrihoe terms are usually understood in the West.

Daesoon Jinrihoe members do not, of course, face such a large conceptual gap in disseminating its teachings to fellow Koreans, who, so far, have been their primary concern. Though Koreans may not immediately grasp the full weight of Daesoon Jinrihoe terms when they are first exposed to how they are used in Daesoon Jinrihoe publications, most of that terminology will nevertheless look familiar. The majority of those terms has been part of East Asian religious and philosophical culture for millennia. That makes it somewhat easier for members of Daesoon Jinrihoe to explain its teachings to their fellow Koreans, and for those fellow Koreans to understand them. That may be one reason why, unlike some other religions which dispatch missionaries to foreign countries in an effort to convert people from different cultures to their way of thinking, Daesoon Jinrihoe members have tended to focus on their relatives, friends and neighbors. Rather than proselytizing strangers, Daesoon Jinrihoe members rely more on word-of-mouth transmission of their beliefs and values to relatives and friends, as well as the example of their own behavior and the activities of Daesoon Jinrihoe as an organization, to convince others to join them in the Daesoon Jinrihoe project to build a better world. (Chryssides 2022)

Even though Daesoon Jinrihoe does not send believers overseas to recruit new members, it nevertheless sees its message as a message for all humanity, not just for Koreans. It therefore wants to make that message available to peoples around the world, including people in the West, who do not know Korean. To do that, however, requires translation of Daesoon philosophy from Korean into English and other languages in wide-spread use outside of the Korean peninsula.

Translation is always a difficult task. But that task is made more difficult when the language being translated represents a very different culture from the culture



of the language, such as English, it is being translated into. Relying on a Korean-English dictionary to come up with a word-for-word literal translation will often lead readers of that translation astray. First of all, many Korean vocabulary items, especially philosophical and religious terminology, do not have an exact equivalent in English. Though there will be overlap between the way a term is used in a Korean linguistic and cultural concept and the way its closest equivalent is used in an English linguistic and cultural concept, the remaining differences, differences around the edges in the totality of what those different terms refer to, can lead to misunderstandings.

More important, languages do not exist apart from culture. Value-laden terms in particular are expressions of cultural assumptions which may not be shared across cultures. I do not mean only differences in how cultures evaluate behavior as ethical or unethical. Value-laden language is also found in how human beings, the natural world, and even the universe in its entirety are understood. Different cultures have different assumptions about how human beings are best defined, how human beings should understand and interact with the natural world, and even how the truly real and not fully real should be distinguished. Those assumptions, especially when they are not clearly articulated, can lead to people from different cultures understanding the same sentence in different ways.

This is a problem translators have faced for centuries. A few centuries ago, in China, one man facing the problem of explaining his Christian faith to those steeped in Confucianism threw up his hands in despair at the difficult of doing so with words alone. Yang Tingyun (1557-1627) lamented, “As for subtle principles and abstract ideas, even though books on them abound, it is impossible to rely on gestures and words alone to explain them thoroughly” (Cheung 2017, 63). He was writing about transmitting Western ideas to China, but the same thing can be said about transmitting Daeseon philosophy to the West.

Unlike Yang, I am not quite ready to give up on words. Instead, I suggest more words, words which provide explanations of what difficult translated passages mean.

## **Virtuous Concordance of Yin and Yang**

Let me give an example of what I mean. Let's look at the first of the Four Tenets of Daeseon Jinrihoe. That tenet is translated in English as “Virtuous Concordance of Yin and Yang.” That is an accurate literal translation of the original four-syllable phrase *eumyang hapdeok* (陰陽合德, 음양합덕). However, I doubt that many native speakers of English who are not well acquainted with East Asian ways of things will understand what that phrase is actually saying. The problem is not yin and yang per se. Yin and yang are widely enough known in the West that they are usually not translated but instead are written in a rough approximation of the way they are read in Chinese. The problem is the assumptions underlying this four-syllable phrase.

Though I pronounced the phrase the Korean way, it is actually a Chinese character phrase, written according to the grammar of classical Chinese. If we were to translate it word by word, we would say “yin and yang unite/harmonize their virtues.” That is Chinese grammar. Korean grammar puts a verb like “work together/harmonize” at the end of a sentence, with an object like “virtues” preceding it. But this grammatical difference between Chinese and Korean in the placement of the verb is not the major conceptual barrier to a correct understanding of this tenet when it is translated into English as “virtuous concordance of yin and yang.” The problem is that this English translation lacks any verb at all.

Sino-Korean phrases, which this phrase is an example of, reflect the implications of their use in a Chinese context. Chinese is not only a member of a totally different language family from English, it is rooted in a totally different world view than the world view reflected in English grammar and vocabulary. Chinese is more process-based than substance-based, focused more on becoming than on being. To put it simply, if English can be said to be a language emphasizing nouns, Chinese is a language putting more stress on verbs. Therefore, to leave out the verb in translating a Sino-Korean phrase strips it of much of what gives it its rhetorical power.

The original Sino-Korean formulation makes yin and yang appear more active than they are in the standard English translation. That is the nature of the Sino-Korean language—action is more important than mere existence. The grammar tells us that. In the Sino-Korean formulation we have yin and yang as the active subject, followed by a verb “to work together, to harmonize,” followed by a noun which tells us what is acted upon. In English we have adjective modifying a noun, and then we have “of” followed by yin and yang as nouns. Not only are there no verbs in the English translation, yin and yang, though they are the subject of the Sino-Korean phrase, appear at the end of the English translation, robbing them of much of the active status they enjoy as the subject appearing at the beginning of the original phrase.

Moreover, to comprehend the full import of this tenet, it is necessary to understand that yin and yang are not things. Instead, they are aspects of things or, more accurately, of how things behave. To be properly understood, yin and yang must be perceived in contrast to other elements in their immediate environment. In fact, yin and yang are defined by their opposites: yang is yang because it is not yin, and yin is yin because it is not yang. This is very different from what was traditionally the dominant way of thinking in the West, which has focused on things as they are more in themselves than on what they do and how they interact with, and compare to, other things around them. There are exceptions in Western thought, of course. Hegel, for example, argued that a slave was not a slave unless he had an owner, and a slave owner could not be a slave owner unless he owned a slave. Moreover, a person cannot be a husband unless he has a spouse, and woman cannot be a wife unless she has a spouse. So even among Western philosophers there have been those who recognized that nothing exists in isolation but

can only be defined by contrasting it with what it is not. Nevertheless, this was a minor current in the ocean of Western thought, whereas it has been dominant in East Asian ways of thinking.

Yin and yang represent concepts so different from what we are accustomed to in the West that they cannot be translated. Instead, they are transliterated and then explained. Unfortunately, the usual explanations are misleading. We are told that yin and yang are dark and light, female and male, soft and hard, passive and active, respectively. However, that explanation fails to point out explicitly that actually, since yin and yang are terms implying comparison with the other, they should be explained as darker and lighter, more feminine and more masculine, softer and harder, more passive and more active, etc.

Another term we have to think more deeply about is “virtuous.” The sinograph translated here as “virtuous” (德) is a sinograph which, when read as a noun rather than as an adjective, can be translated not only as virtue but also as “power” and as “virtuosity.” This sinograph can be translated, depending on context, as either virtue or power because there has been a widespread assumption in traditional East Asian thought that if you interact appropriately (virtuously) with the world around you, then you will influence those people and things you interact with to in turn interact with you appropriately. Since you are influencing the way other peoples and things behave, you are exerting power !

The phrase *eumyang hapdeok* has ancient roots. It appears in the line 陰陽合德而剛柔有體 in the Chinese Classic known as the *Book of Changes*, which was written over two thousand years ago. There have been numerous translations of that text into Western languages. The best English translators of the *Book of Changes*, trying to render it as it was originally understood, have interpreted that line as a reference to the hexagrams, the fortune-telling combinations of six broken and unbroken lines which are the core of the *Book of Changes*, also known in Chinese as the *Yi Jing* (周易, in Korean it is called *Juyeok* 주역). For example, the nineteenth-century translation by James Legge of the line in which this phrase appears reads “These two unite according to their qualities, and there comes the embodiment of the result by the strong and weak (lines)” (Legge 1963, 395). A more recent translation by Richard Lynn translates that same line as “The hard and soft exist as hexagrams only after yin and yang have combined their virtues” (Lynn 1994, 86). Gyungwon Lee correctly goes beyond those narrow hexagram-centered readings of that line to tell us that over the centuries it came to be read as explaining the origin of all things in the universe in a constant process of ever-changing interactions (Lee 2013, 82-84) . I doubt that the average person in the West, unless he or she has studied East Asian philosophy, would realize that is how a Korean would understand this line.

Moreover, a Westerner encountering Daesoon thought might have trouble even understanding what “virtuous” means in “the virtuous concordance of yin and yang.”

English speakers normally understand virtue as a term applied to appropriate human behavior. We don't normally talk of things or even animals as being virtuous. However, Lee correctly explains that *eumyang hapdeok* applies to both the natural world and the human community (Lee 2013, 102). That being the case, we need elaboration on what “virtuous” in this short phrase implies.

In doing that, we have to take into account that calling this phrase one of Daesoon Jinrihoe's Four Tenets may also confuse people in the West. Tenet implies in English a belief in a specific fact. However, the four tenets of Daesoon thought refer to the belief that four changes are in the process of emerging in the world in which we live and have been doing so since Kang Jeungsan initiated *cheonji gongsa* (the work of reordering heaven and earth) in the early twentieth century. Moreover, Daesoon Jinrihoe tells us that those changes will not occur automatically but need human beings to continue to work toward making sure that happens. One of those changes is that yin and yang, which have been acting contrary to each other rather than cooperating as they should, should now begin to interact appropriately and complement each other. The way this tenet is understood in Daesoon philosophy is much more active than is implied in the English translation. It means that the work of reordering of heaven and earth is bringing yin and yang into harmonious interaction, which is what the English translation means by “virtuous concordance” (Lee 2013, 86). Tenet here, therefore, refers to a belief about what will emerge thanks to the efforts of Kang Jeungsan and his followers rather than a belief about what is a settled fact now.

Furthermore, this tenet can only be understood against the background of the assumption that yin and yang have been out of balance, causing all sorts of problems by creating disharmony in this world, and it is necessary to restore their proper harmonious cooperation to restore order to the universe. The Daesoon Jinrihoe term for the era in which that imbalance led to men treating women unfairly, and the rich and the powerful oppressing the poor and the weak, is *sanggeuk*, translated as “mutual contention.”

## From Yin and Yang to the Five Phases

*Sanggeuk* (相克, 상극), like *eumyang hapdeok* is an ancient term. It is often used in the context of the Five Phases (五行, 오행, also translated as the Five Processes or the Five Movements), which are believed to have evolved out of yin and yang and which, in turn, gave rise to the many different things, processes, and events we see in the world today. The Five Phases are described as wood, soil, water, fire, and metal. They are seen as sometimes caught up in a circular relationship of “mutual contention.” This is a circular destructive series of relationships and interactions in which wood, by growing out of the ground, breaks up the soil; soil blocks the flow of water; water puts out fire, fire melts metal, and metal cuts wood, and then it starts up again with wood breaking

up the soil. The Five Phases, by the way, are not actual wood, soil water, fire, and metal, but instead are terms applied to five different ways processes occur and influence each other in an endless cycle of interactive changes. They should be understood as meaning five types of processes which are wood-like, soil-like, water-like, fire-like, and metal-like, respectively. Wood is the beginning of growth or slowly picking up speed, soil is stability, water is decline or slowing down, fire is fast growth or rapidly speeding up, and metal is the beginning of decline or slowing down. The Five Phases are a reference all the processes of change which constitute the universe, not just to what those five material entities do.

The relationship of “mutual contention” is sometimes referred to as a relationship of mutual destruction. Fortunately, however, those Five Phases also have a more productive relationship, which is called *sangsaeng* (相生, 상생), translated by Daesoon Jinrihoe as “mutual beneficence.” This is another circular series of relationships and interactions. However, in the *sangsaeng* cycle, wood fuels fires, fires then produce soil (ash), metal then forms in that soil, water (dew) forms on that metal, that water then ensures that wood can grow, which then leads to fires (Graham 1986, 47-66).

*Sangsaeng* does not, of course, refer only to productive interactions among the Five Phases. It also refers to human beings working together in fruitful harmony in order to create better lives for everyone (Šorytè 2022, 104-05). In a *sangsaeng* world, human beings will stop harming each other by putting their own selfish interests ahead of the common good. Instead, they will act in such a way as to ensure that those around them benefit and, as a result, they will also create a better world for themselves. Nevertheless, the philosophical foundation for the distinction between *sangsaeng* and *sanggeuk* lies in the assumption that there are two fundamental impersonal forces operating in the world in which we live, and those forces can be broadly characterized as yin and yang.

Daesoon Jinrihoe teaches that, thanks to the reordering of heaven and earth, we are now entering an era of *sangsaeng* and leaving *sanggeuk* behind. When yin and yang begin working together harmoniously rather than acting at cross purposes, today's world, with its wars, its racial discrimination, its anti-feminine patriarchy, its economic inequality, and, of course, its different ideologies, will all become a thing of the past. Those *sanggeuk* conflicts and contradictions, which are caused by the failure of yin and yang, and their Five Phases, to work together harmoniously as they should, will be replaced by the *sangsaeng* of harmonious cooperation. This more productive set of interactions will also bring the material and the cultural realms together, so that humanity is not governed by machines and technology but instead will use advances in technology to create a better world for human beings. The end result, brought about by the work of reordering heaven and earth which will bring yin and yang into proper balance so that yang doesn't dominate yin as it has been doing, will be a paradise on this earth (Lee 2013, 102).

Here again Daesoon Jinrihoe is building on a legacy of the East Asian past. The ancient Chinese text *Daodejing* (道德經, 도덕경) has a line 萬物負陰而抱陽沖氣以為和 which promises that it is possible for yin and yang (which it calls the two *ki* 氣 C. *qi*, the primal vital energies of the cosmos) to join forces and makes our lives better. Richard Lynn translates that line as “the Myriad things, bearing yin and embracing yang, form a unified harmony through the fusing of these two vital forms” (Lynn 1999, 135). Another modern scholar of traditional East Asian thought, Roger Ames, provides a slightly different translation of that line: “Everything carries yin on its shoulders and yang in its arms and blends these two vital energies together (*qi*) to make them harmonious” (Ames 2011, 64).

The fact that two outstanding scholars of East Asian traditional thought translate those passages differently is evidence that translation is an art, not an exact science, and that no one translation can render totally transparent in the target language the deeper meaning of a passage as it is expressed in the original language. Each translator has to decide what to leave out of their translation as well as what to include. Ames, for example, give a more active spin on that line with his “make them harmonious: than Lynn does with his “form a unified harmony.”

As an early Qing China translator, Wei Xiangqian (魏象乾, dates unknown) pointed out,

The Dao of translation is most obvious, yet it manifests itself in the minutest details: it is simple and straightforward, but it involves a vast number of contexts. It changes constantly and has numerous permutations, and is mysterious beyond imagination. Precisely because it is capable of infinite changes, the translated work may differ from, or lose, the meaning of the original. Scholars should be very careful! To be ‘accurate’, one has to understand thoroughly the meaning of the original text, to have a grasp of its rhetoric and style, to catch its tone, to capture its nuances, not to add or omit anything, nor to invert or to translate only the idea (Cheung 2017, 139-40).

My suggestion that translating *eumyang hapdeok* as “virtuous concordance of yin and yang” is misleading should not be misunderstood as a criticism of the translator. The problem is not the translator but the language into which the tenets are being translated and the numerous mysterious permutations this entails.

We could add “will” when explaining this tenet and the other three tenets to Westerners, since those tenets are expressions of belief that we can, through hard work and devotion, bring those tenets to realization rather than simply describing what has been going on up to now. That would mean that we would translate *eumyang hapdeok* as “yin and yang will be brought into appropriate (virtuous) and powerful harmonious cooperation (concordance).” That would also more accurately represent the importance

of the verb in this phrase, signaling the dynamic nature of the process it is describing. However, such a formulation would destroy the distinctive succinctness of the original phrase which gives it its rhetorical power.

Moreover, not only is this slightly revised formulation not as concise as it is in Sino-Korean, it also fails to clarify the assumptions behind, and the implications of, this phrase. In order for people in the West who are not already familiar with East Asian philosophy to understand the full import of this short phrase, they will need an explanation of the unarticulated assumptions behind it. They need to understand that yin and yang are not things but processes; that yin and yang, and their manifestations as the Five Phases, can interact in both productive and destructive ways; and that when they interact appropriately (virtuously), they then will be powerful enough to bring everything else into harmonious cooperation. Only with such a clarification can Westerners then understand that this phrase is promising that the previously existing destructive types of interactions, evidence of which is right before our eyes today, are being replaced by constructive interactions of mutual beneficence rather than mutual contention. Translation of passages with such broad scope and multi-layered implications as “virtuous concordance of yin and yang” requires elucidation. Otherwise, the ideas the translation is meant to convey will fail to reach their intended audience with the depth and breadth they deserve.

## Sincerity

The same need for elucidations to accompany translations is true of some other key features of Daeseon thought, even when a lack of clarity isn't caused by grammatical differences between the Chinese/Korean source language and the English language it is being translated into. For example, one of the Three Essential Attitudes is translated as “sincerity.” That English translation is a noun, just as the original is. Moreover, sincerity is the standard translation into English of *seong* (誠). Nevertheless, I doubt most native speakers of English who are not already familiar with East Asian ways of thinking will understand exactly what “sincerity” as one of the Three Essential Attitudes means.

To a native speaker of English, sincerity has a limited meaning of honesty. You are sincere if you do what you say you are going to do, and you say what you really think. That is close to a literal reading of the two components of the sinograph *seong*: “to speak (言)” and “to accomplish (成).” However, “sincerity” has come to mean much more than that in an East Asian context, as is clear in the English-language explanation of sincerity in *Essentials of Daeseon Jinriboe*. There it is explained that “being sincere means having a mind that is endlessly attentive, weary of cracks or slack, and fearful of its own insufficiency.” (DIRC 2020, 30)



That explication helps readers understand that sincerity means much more in Daesoon Jinrihoe writings than it does in ordinary English. Nevertheless, it appears to me that readers unfamiliar with East Asian philosophies will, even after reading this explication, nevertheless still find it difficult to understand why sincerity is given such importance in Daesoon thought. To grasp the full import of this one word, it is necessary to go back far in time and examine how the word translated here as “sincerity” has been used over the centuries.

The *locus classicus* for the term “sincerity” is the short Confucian classic usually called *The Doctrine of the Mean* (中庸, *Chungyong*/ C. *Zhongyong*). In that text from well over 2,000 years ago, we can find, in chapter 25, the line 誠者自成也 誠者物之終始, 不誠無物. One translation of that line, by Andrew Plaks, translates *seong*, the first sinograph, as “integral wholeness” rather than “sincerity.” The rest of the line says of *seong*, “The term ‘integral wholeness’ refers to a process of becoming complete through one’s own agency... Integral wholeness represents the beginning and end of all things, for without this wholeness nothing in this world would truly exist.” (Plaks 2003, 45) Roger Ames and David Hall, two more well-respected contemporary translators of ancient Confucian texts, prefer to translate *seong* as “creativity,” since they believe that text is telling is that it is by being “sincere” that we are able to change the world around us for the better. They translate that same passage from chapter 25 of the *Doctrine of the Mean* as “Creativity is self-consummating... Creativity is a process taken from its beginning to its end, and without this creativity there are no events” (Ames and Hall 2001, 106). Others prefer to translate *seong* as integrity (Zhang 2002, 140; Nylan 2014, 130). On the other hand, James Legge, who, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, was the first to translate the *Doctrine of the Mean* into English, at first used “sincerity” as the translation for *seong* but later changed his translation of *seong* to “perfection of nature” (Wang 2008, 153-54).

These multiple ways of translating the single sinograph *seong* shows us again that translation is an art more than it is a science. A translator has to decide which of the many meanings a term might imply in English needs to be stressed in the translation. “Sincerity” is not an incorrect translation of *seong*. However, like all the other terms used to translate it, it fails to convey the full import of what that term means in either a Confucian or a Daesoon Jinrihoe context. In my own work, I often simply transliterate that term, or I use a translation that is so long it should be considered more an explanation than a translation. In my forthcoming translation of commentaries on the *Zhongyong* by Korean Confucian philosopher Jeong Yagyong (1762-1836), when I do not transliterate, I gloss *seong* as “thinking and acting in an unselfishly cooperative and appropriately responsive manner” (Baker 2023).

*Seong*, as it applies to human beings, is more than just an internal attitude. It also has to be manifest in interactions with others. Gyungwon Lee points out that the



famous Korean Neo-Confucian philosopher Toegye Yi Hwang (1501-1570) explained that *seong* is a characteristic of a heart-mind manifesting through real principles only. Only a person whose heart-mind is filled with real principles (實理, *silli*) and therefore acts only in accordance with those principles can be deemed “sincere.” What does “real principles” mean in this context? It means the patterns defining and directing appropriate interactive behavior. A person who is *seong* is not only honest but also acts appropriately in whatever situation he or she finds himself or herself in. *Seong*, with the same meaning of acting appropriately, refers to the external physical realm as well. As Toegye notes, *seong*, in the physical realm, refers to real principles without any deviations from those principles (Lee 2013, 269). Regular movements by the sun, and moon, and the stars through the sky is just as much *seong* as virtuous human behavior is.

Yulgok Yi I (1536-84), another important Korean Neo-Confucian philosopher, said something similar. He wrote, “Heaven accomplishes the transforming and nurturing that produces all things in the universe by means of real *li*, the concrete all-encompassing patterns of appropriate interactions. Human beings are able to respond to as well as influence things around them by means of a real heart-and-mind. Both real *li* and a real heart-and-mind are nothing more than sincerity itself.” Yulgok adds, reinforcing the connection between cosmic *seong* and human *seong*, “A sage is someone whose thoughts and actions are aligned with the principles of Heaven and who therefore doesn’t have the slightest taint of selfishness. Such a person is completely sincere” (Yi 2022, *Seubyu* VI: 15a; Ro 2010). Yulgok is articulating the mainstream Confucian view that “sincerity” is much more than simple honesty. It means doing what you are supposed to do, whether you are a sentient human being or an insentient physical object, without any concern for personal benefit. That is very different from the usual Western understanding of sincerity as limited to being synonymous with honesty. Inanimate objects cannot be honest, since they are incapable of lying. They can, however, be “sincere” in the Confucian sense of moving through space as they should move through space.

Confucian thinkers reinforced the notion that *seong* means much more than simple honesty by contrasting *seong* with truthfulness. A thirteen-century Chinese work explains that *seong* refers to real principles operating unhindered and spontaneously. It therefore corresponds to the Dao of Heaven. Truthfulness, on the other hand, belongs to the Dao of human beings, since only human beings can be truthful and, to do so, requires effort (Chen 1986, 100).

That does not mean, of course, that human beings should not strive to be “sincere.” It is important to think and act in a *seong* manner because only by doing so can you realize your full potential. Human beings in traditional East Asian philosophy are social beings, defined as human beings by the fact that they interact with other human beings. Such a social definition of human beings implies that you only become the true human being you are meant to be if you interact appropriately, that is to say “sincerely,” with others.

When we act inappropriately, on the other hand, we not only risk harming others, we also hinder our own self-realization, keeping us from becoming the person we should become. That is why “sincerity” is so important in East Asian ethics, and in Daesoon philosophy.

Another way to understand *seong*, both in a Confucian and in a Daesoon philosophy context, is to see it as referring to aligning yourself with the way things really are, and to do so in full earnestness. That means you should be devoted to what you are supposed to do for the sake of the common good, without any reservations, since that is where “real principles” lie. You should be dedicated completely to whatever task lies before you.

## Do Not Deceive Yourself

Among those tasks is being true to your true self. In traditional East Asian philosophy, the true self means your moral self, the self that tells you to cooperate harmoniously and selflessly with everyone and everything around you. That is why *seong* is related to the Daesoon Jinrihoe precept which tells you, “Do not deceive yourself.”

To someone not accustomed to traditional East Asian ways of thinking, it is hard to understand what it means to deceive yourself. That is because, in the Western tradition, each person is a unified self, though that self has both moral and immoral tendencies. Selfishness is seen as just as much a part of our true nature, if not more so, than selflessness and devotion to the common good.

That is quite different from the traditional East Asian understanding of human nature, which underlies Daesoon philosophy. According to that traditional assumption, our true human nature is aligned with heaven (the Dao of Heaven) and is therefore virtuous. However, we often mistake our selfish impulses for our true human nature. When we do that, we are deceiving ourselves and will, therefore, end up betraying our true nature. That is the reason we need to guard against such self-deception. If we succeed in avoiding self-deception, we will be sincere, in that we will act in accord with our true nature and therefore will interact with everyone and everything around us appropriately, without our thoughts and actions being distorted by any concern for selfish benefit (Lee 2013, 284-86).

As the *Essentials of Daesoon Jinrihoe* explains, “Do not deceive yourself” means to “Abandon the selfish mind and commit yourself to recovering your conscientious mind” (DIRC 2020, 37). This exhortation is based on the traditional East Asian assumption that “is” and “ought” are intertwined. What we really are, our true existence, is what we ought to be. If we instead pay attention to our selfish self, our false self (that which is contrary to what we should be), then we are deceiving ourselves. Another way to translation this exhortation is, “Guard against betraying your higher self, your true self.” Only if we do that can be “sincere.”

Daesoon thought includes all of these implications of the term “sincerity.” However, it adds to them a theistic component. “Sincerity” in Daesoon thought also means “sincere devotion” to Sangje. By including “sincerity” among the Three Essential Attitudes, Daesoon Jinrihoe is enjoining us to cultivate a strong, unceasing and selfless devotion to Sangje, the Supreme God of the Ninth Heaven (Lee 2013, 276-90). This theistic addition to the traditional understanding of *seong* is one of the features of Daesoon thought which makes it distinctive, and makes *seong* much more than the simple English translation of “sincerity” implies.

We need, therefore, to explain *seong* in a way that brings out the full import of that concept. Simply calling it “sincerity” without amplifying its many connotations will give Western readers an incomplete and even misleading understanding of what that key term means. For example, sincerity does not normally have theistic connotations in English. It can be combined with “devotion” in a reference to sincere devotion to God, but even there the implication is limited to an internal state of mind in which we are not pretending to believe something we really do not believe. “Sincerity” in English does not imply that we are being faithful to our true inner nature, nor does it imply that our sincerity is somehow connected to the orderly movement of celestial bodies.

## Conclusion

Translation, as noted earlier, is always a difficult task. Translators need to be faithful not just to the literal meaning of the text they are translating but also to the text’s rhetorical structure which gives it its persuasive power. That means that short phrases should not be translated into much longer explanatory sentences or paragraphs. However, translations of religious and philosophical texts also require explication when the assumptions between the ideas in the text being translated are very different from the assumptions underlying the language into which the text is being translated. Translations such as “virtuous concordance of yin and yang,” “sincerity,” and “do not deceive yourself” do not need to be changed. However, they do need to be explained, if Daesoon philosophy is to reach a receptive audience in the Western world.

## Conflict of Interest

Don Baker has been on the Editorial Board of *JDTEA* 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.

## References

- Ames, Roger  
2011 *Confucian Role Ethics: A Vocabulary*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Ames, Roger  
and David L. Hall  
trans  
2001 *Focusing the Familiar: A Translation and Philosophical Interpretation of the Zhongyong*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Baker, Don  
2023 *A Korean Confucian's Advice on How to be Moral: Tasan Chǒng Yagyong's Reading of the Zhongyong*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- 2016 "Daesoon Sasang: A Quintessential Korean Philosophy." In *Daesoon Jinrihoe: A New Religion Emerging from Traditional East Asian Philosophy*, edited by The Daesoon Academy of Sciences, 199–216. Yeosu: Daesoon Jinrihoe Press.
- Cheung, Marth P. Y. ed  
2017 *An Anthology of Chinese Discourse on Translation Vol. II: From the Late Twelfth Century to the Eighteenth Century*. New York: Routledge.
- Chen, Chun  
1986 *Neo-Confucian Terms Explained*. New York: Columbia University Press. Wing-tsit Chan, trans.
- Chryssides, George D.  
2022 "Disseminating Daesoon Thought: A Comparative Analysis." *Journal of Daesoon Thought and the Religions of East Asia* 1 (2): 13-39. <https://doi.org/10.25050/JDTREA.2022.1.2.13>.
- Daesoon Institute for  
Religion and Culture  
(DIRC) 2020 *Essentials of Daesoon Jinrihoe*, Yeosu: Daesoon Jinrihoe Press. <http://dirc.kr/dictionary/app/dt/scripture/dic.php?idx=3#e>.
- Graham, A. C.  
1986 *Yin-Yang and the Nature of Correlative Thinking*. Singapore: Institute of East Asian Philosophies, National University of Singapore.

- Lee, Gyungwon  
2013 *Daesoon Jinrihoe Gyoriron* [A discussion of the doctrines of Daesoon Jinrihoe]. Seoul: Mun-Sa-Chul Press. [Korean Language Text] 이경원, 『대순진리회 교리론』, 서울: 문사철, 2013.
- Legge, James, trans.  
1963 *The I Ching: The Book of Changes* New York: Dover Publications.
- Lynn, Richard John, trans.  
1999 *The Classic of the Way and Virtue: A New Translation of the Tao-te-ching of Laos as interpreted by Wang Bi*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- 1994 *The Classic of Changes: A New Translation of the I Ching as Interpreted by Wang Bi*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Nylan, Michael  
2014 “Translating Texts in Chinese History and Philosophy,” In Ming Dong Gu with Rainer Schulte, ed. *Translating China for Western Readers: Reflective, Critical, and Practical Essays*. Albany: SUNY Press. 119-148.
- Plaks, Andrew  
2003 *Ta Hsiieh and Chung Yung (The Highest Order of Cultivation and On the Practice of the Mean)*. New York: Penguin.
- Ro, Young-chan  
2010 “Yulgok on Sincerity” Personal Communication.
- Šorytè, Rosita  
2022 “Daesoon Thought as the Source of Daesoon Jinrihoe’s Social Work.” *Journal of Daesoon Thought and the Religions of East Asia* 1 (2): 89-114. <https://doi.org/10.25050/JDTREA.2022.1.2.89>.
- Wang, Hui  
2008 *Translating Chinese Classics in a Colonial Context: James Legge and His Two Versions of the Zhongyong*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.
- Yi, I.  
2022(1682) *Yulgok Seonsaeng Jeonseo* [Complete Works of Yulgok] Accessed 25 July 2022. [https://db.itkc.or.kr/dir/item?itemId=BT#dir/node?grpId=&itemId=BT&gubun=book&depth=2&cate1=Z&cate2=&dataGubun=%EC%84%9C%EC%A7%80&dataId=ITKC\\_BT\\_0201B](https://db.itkc.or.kr/dir/item?itemId=BT#dir/node?grpId=&itemId=BT&gubun=book&depth=2&cate1=Z&cate2=&dataGubun=%EC%84%9C%EC%A7%80&dataId=ITKC_BT_0201B)

Zhang, Dainan      *Key Concepts in Chinese Philosophy*. Edmund Ryden,  
2002                trans. New Haven: Yale University Press.



# Haewon-sangsaeng, Chinese Harmonism and Ecological Civilization



JDTREA 2022,2(1): 31-56

## Original Articles

### Zhihe WANG

Zhihe Wang, Ph.D, a former researcher of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, is director of the Institute for Postmodern Development of China, Co-director of China Project, Center for Process Studies. He is also an executive member of Ecological Development Union International as well as an expert advisor of China Biodiversity Conservation and Green Development Foundation. From 2018-2019, he was a visiting scholar at Scripps College, Claremont. He is a leading figure in constructive postmodern movement and ecological movement in China. Wang holds his Ph.D. in Philosophy of Religion from Claremont Graduate University and holds both an MA and BA in Philosophy from Peking University.

Correspondence to

### Zhihe WANG

Institute for Postmodern Development of China, USA

[claremontwang@yahoo.com](mailto:claremontwang@yahoo.com)

ORCID

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8638-5110>



*Journal of Daesoon Thought and the Religions of East Asia* Vol. 2, Issue1 (September 2022): 31–56

© 2022 by the Daesoon Academy of Sciences, Daejin University, Korea

<https://doi.org/10.25050/JDTREA.2022.2.1.31>

**Day of submission:** 2022. 08. 05.

**Completion of review:** 2022. 08. 15.

**Final decision for acceptance:** 2022. 08. 31.

P-ISSN: 2799-3949

E-ISSN: 2799-4252



## Abstract

Haewon-sangsaeng is a key idea of Daesoon Jinrihoe, which, as Professor Bae Kyu-han points out, "... has broad applications." Haewon-sangsaeng is not only congenial to Chinese Harmonism, but it also enriches this concept. However, many scholars understand Haewon-sangsaeng in a relatively narrow scope. For them, Haewon-sangsaeng is confined to pertaining only to human relationships. For example, Don Baker, the author of *Korean Spirituality*, states that "Haewon means relieving the resentment human beings past and present have felt because they were treated unfairly". Sangsaeng refers to "a spirit of mutual aid and cooperation" rather than "the spirit of competition and conflict that has dominated the human community up to the present day". This article argues that Haewon-sangsaeng not only has religio-ethical implications, but ecological implications as well. Specifically, it has relevance for the goal of creating an ecological civilization that aims at the harmony of humans and nature. In other words, Haewon-sangsaeng can be both "expanded for the global peace and the harmony of all humanity" and can be expanded for healing the relationship between humans and nature, including human beings and viruses. In order not to risk being "the first Earth species knowingly to choose self-extinction", an Ecological Civilization is urgently needed before it's too late. Alone with Chinese Harmonism, Haewon-sangsaeng can make great contributions to the cause of ecological civilization by transcending anthropocentrism, individualism, and the worship of competition as root causes of the predicaments faced by modern civilization.

**Keywords:** Haewon-sangsaeng; Daesoon Jinrihoe;  
Chinese Harmonism; Ecological Civilization

## I. How should we understand Haewon-sangsaeng?

Haewon-sangsaeng has been conceived of as a key idea of Daesoon Jinrihoe, an indigenously new Korean religion. According to *The Canonical Scripture*, Haewon-sangsaeng refers to “Resolution of Grievances for Mutual Beneficence (解冤相生)” (*Progress of order* 2, 32), or “resolve our grievances (haewon) and reciprocate love (sangsaeng) to one another” as Professor Jay McDaniel put it (McDaniel 2022), whose aim is to promote the Betterment of Others and to Achieve Eternal Harmony with One Another.

Haewon-sangsaeng can be understood “... as representative thought regarding peace in Korean new religions” (Bae 2018). As a matter of fact, in some sense, many ideas of Daesoon Jinrihoe, such as the messianic vision, the concept of chosenness, the earthly paradise, and its eschatological beliefs are closely related to the doctrine of Haewon-sangsaeng (Jin 2007). Also, Haewon-sangsaeng thought “... penetrated through the whole life of Kang Jeungsan” (Park 2016), who established the tradition leading to present-day Daesoon Jinrihoe.

Although the concept of Haewon-sangsaeng is important in Daesoon Jinrihoe and “... has broad applications...” (Bae 2018) as Professor Bae Kyu-han points out, many scholars understand Haewon-sangsaeng in a relatively narrow scope. To them, Haewon-sangsaeng is confined only to pertaining to human relationships. For example, Don Baker, the author of *Korean Spirituality*, states that “Haewon means relieving the resentment human beings past and present have felt because they were treated unfairly.” Sangsaeng refers to “a spirit of mutual aid and cooperation” rather than “the spirit of competition and conflict that has dominated the human community up to the present day” (Baker 2008, 88).

There is little doubt that Haewon-sangsaeng can be applied to engendering “... the global peace and the harmony of all humanity” (Bae 2018), it can play an instrumental role in creating harmony among human beings. However, it is unwise to limit the applications of Haewon-sangsaeng strictly to the context of human relationships since it is a versatile idea that can be expanded to affect the relationship between humans and nature. In other words, it is not only for the common good of human life, it is for the common good of all life, “... the Resolution of Grievances for the Mutual Beneficence of all life” (Lee 2010), including the well-being of entire ecologies. In Maria Park’s words, “Sangsaeng happens not only between people, but also between humans and nature, between nature and nature” (Park 2016). This means that Haewon-sangsaeng not only “... has religio-ethical implications” (Huang 2021), but has ecological implications as well.

In addition, the author tends to argue that “Sangsaeng” has another important meaning. Namely, “Sangsaeng” indicates not only “mutual beneficence”, but also mutual engendering, mutual becoming, mutual growth, and mutual fulfillment, or helping each

other succeed or making others prosperous. Because in the Chinese language, “生” (saeng / sheng) is a hieroglyph. In Oracle and Jinwen, the character resembles a plant growing on the ground.

According to *Shuowen Jiezi*, an ancient Chinese dictionary by Xu Shen from the Han dynasty, the character “生” is composed of two parts: the lower part and the upper part, with the lower part representing “soil”, and the upper part representing the plant breaking through the soil, with the entire character ultimately meaning “to grow” or “to produce”.

It is worth mentioning that “生” is a verb in the Chinese language. As a matter of fact, “In Chinese there is no sharp distinction between nouns and verbs” (Wang 2012, 178). Regarding “生” as a verb empowers the concept of Haewon-sangsaeng and attributes a dynamic dimension to it.

## II. The Convergence between Haewon-sangsaeng and Chinese Harmonism

It is abundantly apparent that Haewon-sangsaeng is congenial to Chinese Harmonism because Haewon-sangsaeng is likewise oriented towards harmony, and emphasizes the primacy of harmony.

What is Chinese Harmonism? Chinese Harmonism is a uniquely harmony-oriented Chinese approach to the relationships between different cultures, religions, and people. The key features of Chinese harmonism are the primacy of its namesake of harmony, peaceful co-existence, mutual transformation, openness to change, and the affirmation of life. All of these concepts are closely related to each other and together they constitute the basic theoretical contents of Chinese harmonism. Among them, without a doubt, the concept of harmony is a key constituent underlying this way of thinking.

Although different Chinese religions have their own respective emphases, all of them recognize the primacy of harmony. Harmony, in Chinese tradition, pervades the cosmos and is a central goal of all personal, social, political, and religious relationships. Even today, the Chinese government also regards building a “Harmonious Society” as one of its national goals (Center for Strategic and International Studies 2005).

To a large extent, harmony can be regarded as a “deeper faith” in Whitehead’s sense, which means “the trust that the ultimate natures of things lie together in a harmony which excludes mere arbitrariness” (Whitehead 1967, 18).<sup>1</sup> In China, the sages are always open to harmonious engagement and thus exhibit this faith. For Confucius, “achieving harmony (和) is the most valuable function of observing ritual propriety (li)” (Confucius 1998, 74). Therefore, “at the core of the classical Chinese worldview is the cultivation of harmony” (Ames 1993, 62). According to Chinese harmonism, harmony is a verb, it is productive. Everything is conceived as being derived from the state of harmony. In the words of Shi Bo (史伯, 551-475 BCE), “It is harmony which generates

things” (國語, *Guoyu* 1980, 8). It is crucial to note that harmony is different from sameness. Sameness is destructive; “harmony is constructive” (Wang 2012, 189).

Harmony has been highly cherished even in Chinese folk culture. That is why Confucius’ saying “Harmony is most precious (和为贵)” is among the most important principles in Chinese society. This explains why, for example, the phrase “It is better for foes to be reconciled than to contend with each other (冤家宜解不宜结)” is a popular proverb in Chinese folk culture. There is a deep convergence between the leitmotif embodied in the above-mentioned sayings and Daesoon’s Haewon-sangsaeng. How are we to resolve grievances? The answer offered by Mozi (墨子, c. 470 BC – c. 391 BC), a Chinese philosopher who founded the school of Mohism during the Hundred Schools of Thought period (early portion of the Warring States period of c.475–221 BC), was “Regarding others’ countries as your own countries; Regarding others’ homes as your homes; Regarding others’ bodies as your bodies” (Mozi 2014, 60).

If one wishes to survive and succeed, it is imperative to resolve any outstanding grievances with others, one must preserve a harmonious relationship with other people and beings, including nature. “In Chinese harmonism, this emphasis on an appropriate harmony includes harmony among people and between people and nature” (Wang 2012, 190). The famed Chinese idea of “Harmony with nature (天人合一)” fully represents such an idea.

It is this characteristic emphasis on harmony that explains why Alfred North Whitehead’s process philosophy has been well received in China (Todd 2008). Like traditional Chinese philosophy, Whitehead’s process philosophy also holds harmony to be a priority.

Whitehead’s philosophy has been studied in China since the 1920s and 1930s (Wang 2014), and “many scholars inside and outside of China believe that his thought resembles Chinese ways of thinking more than Western ways in many regards” (McDaniel, 2022). Indeed, Whitehead himself believed that, in certain respects, his philosophy shared more in common with Chinese philosophy in its tone and substance. In his magnum opus *Process and Reality*, Whitehead claimed that his philosophy of organism seemed to “approximate more to some strains of Indian, or Chinese, thought, than to Western Asiatic or European thought” (Whitehead 1978, 7).

For Whiteheadian process philosopher Jay MacDaniel, one can find the ethos of harmony in both Chinese Daoism and Chinese Buddhism. “Philosophical Daoism speaks of the universe as a flowing process of which humans are an integral part and encourages them to dwell in harmony with the larger whole” (McDaniel 2008). At the same time, “Chinese Buddhism in the Hua Yen tradition gives us the image of a universe in which every entity is present in every other entity in a network of inter-existence or inter-being” (McDaniel 2008).

Today China has an urgent need for harmony as it faces many serious elements of discord that have emerged in the decades since China opened its doors and experienced

modernization and Westernization over the past 40 years. Professor Lang Ye, former chair of the philosophy department at Peking University summarizes these discords as the following three imbalances: “One is the imbalance between humans’ material life and spiritual life, one is the imbalance of humans’ inner life, and one is the imbalance of humans’ relationship with nature.” (Ye 1995)

Whiteheadian Process philosophy can help China revalue its traditions, especially, its harmonist tradition, in order to ameliorate these discords. That explains why process thought is so welcome in China today. The fact that the establishment of more than 30 process studies centers in China, the publication of hundreds of articles on process thought, and the translation and publication of almost all of Whitehead’s books and many other books on process philosophy in China prove “the deep and extensive influence” of Whitehead in China (Yang 2010). In a survey conducted by the People Forum Poll Research Center about “The Most Valuable Theoretical Point of View in 2012”, the following point of view of Professor Yijie Tang of Peking University, a top philosopher in the field of Chinese philosophy, was selected as the top one:

In the end of the last century, Constructive Postmodernism based on process philosophy proposed integrating the achievements of the first Enlightenment and Postmodernism, and called for the Second Enlightenment. The two broadly influential movements in China today: 1) “The zeal for traditional culture”; and 2) “Constructive Postmodernism.” If these two trends can be combined organically under the guidance of Marxism, not only take root in China, but further develop so that with comparative ease, China can complete its “First Enlightenment” in realizing its modernization, and also very quickly enter into the “Second Enlightenment” and become the standard-bearer of a postmodern society (Tang 2011a).

The second constituent part of Chinese harmonism is open-mindedness. In order to realize harmony, an open-minded attitude is necessary. This refers to an attitude of respect for others and a willingness to learn from others, which is intended to inspire both parties of a dialogue on how to learn the most important things of the opposite party without abandoning their own core concerns. Traditional Chinese culture provides an excellent sample of ideas in this regard. In the view of the renowned process philosopher John B. Cobb Jr, a pioneer in the contemporary West of promoting religious dialogue, the fact that traditional Chinese Confucianism and Taoism existed together peacefully is a concrete historical example of the inclusiveness and openness of Chinese harmonism. As stated by Cobb, “Buddhism, Confucians, Taoists, and others have lived side by side” (Cobb 2006, 19). Peaceful coexistence is indeed immensely important. One of the ultimate aims of Chinese religions is peaceful coexistence. “At the

heart of Chinese Harmonism is this practice of peaceful coexistence among people of different religions, even if they have problems with those other traditions” (Wang 2012, 172). Additionally, the concept of creative transformation is also particularly important. “Cobb showed how deep commitment to one’s own tradition, when understood as requiring dialogical openness to other traditions, can lead to a surprising transformation of everyone involved” (Cobb 1999, 2).

The third important component of Chinese harmonism is its emphasis on life affirmation. Why do Chinese place harmony in such high priority? Why has harmony played such a critical role in Chinese culture? Because everything is ultimately derived from the state of harmony and harmony can create life. According to *Zhou Yi* (also called *Yi Jing* or *Book of Changes*), the oldest of the classical Chinese texts, “The Great Virtue of Heaven and Earth is creating life (天地之大德曰生)” (Liu 2019, 453). It is again worth mentioning that “生 (sheng)” is both a noun and a verb in Chinese language. As a noun it means “life”, and as a verb, it means “to create.” “Sheng sheng” thus means “to create life” (Cheng 2022).

Harmony is inextricably tied to life. It is harmony that is itself capable of creating life, giving life, helping life, and nourishing life. It is harmony that can sustain and contribute to life. It increases, but does not decrease, life. It is harmony that makes others’ lives become exuberant, and be more fully alive. It helps, nurses, and fortifies the vitality of life. In this sense, Chinese harmonism is life-oriented and it is a life-affirmative harmonism. In the words of Hungarian scholar Attila Grandpierre, “We may regard Chinese Harmonism as organic or life centered harmonism” (Attila 2021).

As clearly seen from the discussion above on both Haewon-sangsaeng and Chinese harmonism, it is not difficult to find that Haewon-sangsaeng is interrelated with Chinese harmonism. As David Kim pointed out, “The view of the Haewon-sangsaeng is supposed to be related to the In-pi-cheon-ha (仁被天下, benevolence spreading throughout the world) that if one wants to achieve a goal one should also cooperate with another to achieve the friend’s goal” (Kim 2020, 201). As a result of this interrelatedness, there are deep doctrinal convergences between Haewon-sangsaeng and Chinese harmonism.

First of all, both emphasize the primacy of harmony. One of the main purposes of Haewon is to achieve harmony. This is why Myung Woo identifies “Haewon-sangsaeng” with harmony itself. For Woo, “Haewon-sangsaeng” is equivalent to “Living in Harmony” (Woo 2012). It is impossible to reach a state of harmony if there are grievances serving as obstacles in the way of developing a harmonious relationship. In order to achieve harmony, these grievances must be resolved. Therefore, harmony as both a drive and purpose play a paramount role in the doctrine of Haewon-sangsaeng.

Secondly, both Chinese harmonism and Haewon-sangsaeng are life-affirmative. Like Chinese harmonism, the doctrine of Haewon-sangsaeng is also an effort to alleviate suffering, a way of coordinating life to life and “enabling each individual life to flourish”

(Lubarsky 2019). It is directed toward increasing and intensifying value and life. In fact, some scholars of the Korean have recognized the life-affirmative nature of Haewon-sangsaeng. For example, Park Sam-kyung argues that “sangsaeng” means “life-sharing” (Park 2012). To Maria Park, “sangsaeng” can “contribute values and respect to life” (Park 2016). It can enable those who have been treated unfairly to freely and fully engage with life.

### **III. The Meaning of Haewon-sangsaeng and Chinese Harmonism for creating an Ecological Civilization**

Considering the deep doctrinal convergences between Chinese harmonism and Haewon-sangsaeng, when taken together they can make enormous contributions to laying the philosophical foundations for an ecological civilization. The wisdom in both Haewon-sangsaeng and Chinese harmonism provides very valuable insights that an ecological civilization needs. As Kyu-han Bae stated in his noted article, “Haewon-sangsaeng Thought for the Future of Humanity and World”, “Haewon-sangsaeng has values and meanings in terms of principles, laws, ethics, and ideology all of which are commonly connected to Injon (Human Nobility), Sangsaeng, peace, harmony, the Later world, and paradise. This indicates that its value for the future of humanity and world is deeper and wider than its mere etymological meaning” (Bae 2018). For Professor Bae, “the principle of Haewon-sangsaeng has a motivative power, through the Reordering Works of the Universe, which can transform the future of humanity and the world” (Bae 2018). Ecological civilization is exactly the type of civilization which undertakes the noble work of transforming the future of humanity and the world.

What is Ecological Civilization? Why do we need it? Ecological Civilization is the transcendence of industrial civilization, which aims not only at effecting harmony among human beings, but also focuses on the dynamic harmony between human beings and nature. The idea of Ecological Civilization is not just icing on a cake, it is necessary for the survival of humanity at large. Because as a matter of fact, “current civilization is running at 40% above its sustainable capacity. We’re rapidly depleting the earth’s forests, animals, insects, fish, freshwater, even the topsoil we require to grow our crops” (Lent 2018). The world is unmistakably headed toward catastrophe. In the words of David Korten, the founder and president of the Living Economies Forum, and a full member of the Club of Rome, “We have arrived at a defining moment in the human experience. Either we find our common path to an Ecological Civilization that meets the essential material needs of Earth’s human population in a balanced relationship with Earth’s natural systems, or we risk being the first Earth species knowingly to choose self-extinction” (Korten 2020).

Since what we are facing is an unprecedented crisis, tinkering with the dogmas of past civilizations will not solve the problem. A fundamental awakening is needed. As John Cobb pointed out, “Many who now talk about moving toward an ecological civilization retain



features of modernity that in fact prevent them from moving very far. Too often, affirming an ecological civilization means little more than being ecologically sensitive. In fact, ecological civilization calls for profound changes and significant sacrifices” (Cobb 2015). In this sense, Ecological Civilization is “a great and all-round transformation” (Fan 2020). It is not only necessary to transform our current economic system, namely, restructure the fundamentals of our global cultural/economic system to “cultivate an ecological civilization: one that prioritizes the health of living systems over short-term wealth production” (Lent 2018), but also to transform our models of economic development, our way of living, our way of consumption, our way of production, our dietary habits, our education system, and, more importantly, transform the modern way of thinking and our modernist worldviews. These modernist paradigms become obstacles to the development of ecological civilization. In order to realize ecological civilization, these obstacles must be removed, as Professor Xiangzhan Cheng of Shandong University argued, “The prerequisite for establishing eco-civilization is a forceful critique of the numerous and varied malpractices of modern civilization and its philosophical presuppositions” (Cheng 2022). The philosophical presuppositions that must be overcome include, but are not limited to anthropocentrism, worship of struggle, dualism, and individualism. These are also among the root causes of the crisis facing modern civilization. Overcoming them is imperative if humankind wishes to survive. In concrete terms, what kind of role can Haewon-sangsaeng and Chinese harmonism play in the fight to create an ecological civilization?

Firstly, Haewon-sangsaeng and Chinese harmonism can help transcend anthropocentrism. Anthropocentrism is a worldview which believes that human beings are the central or most important entity in the universe. “Just as God was once absolute existence, now humankind is, on earth, the absolute form of existence. It is a hierarchy, an anthropocentrism, which places human life at the center and all other life on the periphery” (Kisho 1994, 188). The term “anthropocentrism”, can be used interchangeably with human-centrism, according to which, “Human desires and satisfactions were the only ones that had to be considered in deciding the way to treat nature” (Griffin 1988, 146). This not only implies an exploitative ethic: There is no sentience and intrinsic value in nature that are worth being considered, but also expresses “a modern conceit that the world’s worth is a matter of human judgment” (Lubarsky 2012). It is such a thinking that “turns nonhuman life into objects for our enjoyment—and for our use and abuse” (Lubarsky 2012). Also, it is such a mode of thinking that has resulted in the severe ecological crisis we are facing today and eventually led us to the edge of “the environmental cliff” (Tang 2016).

In the words of Professor Sandra Lubarsky, “we imply that all life on earth is for the purpose of serving human life. The result is a relationship with the world that is destroying the world” (Lubarsky 2012). For the sake of the survival of both the earth and humankind itself, the anthropocentric attitude must be abandoned. The most



instrumental tool to overcome this self-destructive pathology of modern civilization is ecological consciousness, which regards humans as part of nature, as parcel of a larger web of life that has beauty and intrinsic worth. Nature is viewed “as a living organism or as supportive of numerous living organisms” (Cobb 2010, 145) which have their own value. Nature is not something outside of us. Nature is us, and we are all nature. Therefore, we should care about and respect nature, because nature not only nourishes our body, but our feeling and our soul. It not only sustains our physical life, but our spiritual one as well. Accordingly, “Our ideal should be not to conquer nature, not to hunt our fellow animals, but to live as part of nature, in accordance with its rules” (Kisho 1994, 172). Humankind should not be regarded as the center of all of creation, instead, “Humankind and Nature should be conceived of a life community with shared destiny” (Tang 2011b, 4).

It is ecological consciousness that makes us truly realize that no one is an island, all things are interrelated. Interdependence is the true picture of reality. In Marjorie Suchocki’s words, “Interdependence is the very stuff of life” (Suchocki 1999, 69). We are not accidentally interdependent, but necessarily so. In the beautiful expression of Dr Vandana Shiva, a world-renowned environmental thinker and activist, and the recipient of the 2022 “John Cobb Common Good Award”, “All beings are our relatives. There are no strangers, no enemies, no hierarchies, no superiority and inferiority. Oneness is the path to sustainability and justice, to non-violence, peace and harmony” (Shiva 2022).

The term “interdependence” can to some extent be used interchangeably with “symbiosis”, referring to the conviction that “all existence — human beings, plants, animals, and minerals — is not only living but, at the same time, being given life by the rest of existence. Inorganic matter such as minerals are crucial for human life, and if even one vital mineral is lacking, we cannot survive. Human beings live and are kept alive through their coexistence with animals, plants and minerals” (Kisho 1994, 260-261). The philosophy of symbiosis teaches us that “We are kept alive by other forms of life” (Kisho 1994, 188).

There is a great deal of rich resources present in both Daesoon Jinrihoe and Chinese harmonism with which to deconstruct anthropocentrism in terms of ecological consciousness, interdependence, and symbiosis. In the Daesoon tradition, the Supreme Sangje used to say to Kim Hyeong-Ryeol: “In the Former World, as all creations were ruled by mutual contention (相剋, sanggeuk), grievances and grudges have been accumulating, condensing, and filing up the Three Realms. Heaven and Earth, losing the constant Dao, are overwhelmed with all kinds of disasters and calamities, and the world has fallen into wretchedness. To save all the people in the world, I will resolve the grievances and grudges accumulated from time immemorial by recalibrating the Degree Number of Heaven and Earth, harmonizing divine beings, and establishing the Later World’s paradisiacal land of immortals which will be based on the principle of mutual

beneficence (相生, sangsaeng). The grievances must be resolved by the Dao of gods in every small and large matter” (*Reordering Works* 1: 3). The core of the scripture is “what we do is to promote the betterment of others” (Kim 2020, 203).

Here the others should include other forms of life on the earth. This means that when Daesoon stresses the importance of the harmonious relationship, it also includes the harmonious relationship between human beings and nature. Bringing peace and harmony between the human and the natural worlds should be the inner pursuit of Daesoon (Kim 2020, 201). This explains Jeungsan’s affection shown for nature and its creatures in his Chinese poems: 驱情万里山河友, 供德千门日月妻 (Park 2016).

According to Whitehead, a founder of constructive Postmodernism, or process philosophy, the true religion – the religion of shared humanity – shares a commitment to the well-being of life itself. Religion at its best is “World-Loyalty”, in which the human spirit has merged its individual claim with that of the objective universe (Whitehead 1960, 59).

In Chinese tradition, 天人合一 (“Harmony with nature” or “Oneness of Nature and Humans”) has been the Chinese people’s ultimate pursuit. Achieving such harmony has been a leitmotif throughout the whole of Chinese culture. This also partly explains why the Chinese government pays an ever-increasing amount of attention to ecological issues and has even written “ecological civilization” into not only the Party’s constitution, but into China’s national constitution as well (Hanson 2019).

The famous saying by Zhuangzi (c. 369 BC – c. 286 BC), the pivotal figure in Classical Philosophical Daoism, “天地与我并生, 而万物与我为一 (The nature lives with me in symbiosis, and all things are one with me)” (Guo 2012, 85) can be conceived as one of the earliest expressions of the Chinese idea of “天人合一”. It not only represented an anti-humancentrist stance, but also “an equity consciousness of humans and nature” (Fan 1997, 75).

In Zhuangzi, like human beings, ten thousand things are also ecological subjects. Both human beings and ten thousand things are equal in value. That explains why so many animals, plants and other lifeforms appeared in his book, *Zhuangzi* and became the protagonist he valued and appreciated. A study shows that “There are 22 species of flying birds, 15 species of aquatic creatures, 32 species of terrestrial creatures, 18 species of birds, 37 species of plants, and 32 species of inanimate species appeared in the book *Zhuangzi*” (Liu 1996). In some sense, Zhuangzi can be regarded as a pioneer of deep ecology. Now we understand why David Hall, a celebrated American comparative philosopher, claimed that “classical Chinese thought, particularly some specific Taoist and Confucian ideas, is ‘postmodern’ in the real sense” (Hall 1996, 698-710).

The idea of “民胞物与” exemplified in his most celebrated work, the *Ximing* (*Western Inscription*) of Zhang Zai (张载, 1020–1077), a leading Figure in Neo-Confucianism, beautifully also reflects the Chinese idea of “天人合一”.

Heaven is my father and earth is my mother, and I, a small child, find myself placed intimately between them.

What fills the universe

I regard as my body; what directs the universe I regard as my nature.

All people are my brothers and sisters;

All things are my companions. (Wang 1982, 353-354)

To Wang Yangming (1472–1529), widely acknowledged as the most influential Confucian philosopher of the Ming dynasty of China, “仁者以天地万物为一体 (The humane take the myriad things between heaven and earth as one)” (Wang 1982, 112). Accordingly, the whole world is regarded as a family. If we harm others, that means we harm ourselves. Likewise, “If we humanity do not fail nature, nature will not fail us” (Xinhua 2021). As a consequence of this consciousness of oneness, it is everyone’s responsibility to take care of our mother earth.

In addition, reestablishing the relationship between humans and nature by transcending anthropocentrism also includes rethinking of the nature of viruses. Both Haewon-sangsaeng and Chinese harmonism can help us resolve the grievances between humans and viruses. That requires us to “respect viruses, treat viruses nicely, and co-exist with viruses”, rather than “to kill viruses at all costs” (Tang 2022). The word “respect” in this context means knowing that the existence of other beings is as precious as much as our lives are. New research in biology tells us to treat viruses “as intimate partners” (Roossinck 2017) instead of treating them as enemies. From this viewpoint, “coronavirus is a courier rather an enemy” (Fan 2020). As a courier, its mission is to persuade humans to slow down. “It reminds us that nature is crucial to humans’ lives and livelihoods” (Fan 2020).

Secondly, in close relation to the above, Haewon-sangsaeng and Chinese harmonism can help us overcome the impediments brought about by modern individualism. Individualism is a philosophical outlook that adheres to the idea of the independence of individuals, emphasizes the interests of the individual, and claims that individual freedom ought to be paramount. Society as a whole is viewed by individualists “as an aggregate of such individuals” (Daly and Cobb 1994, 159).

Although no one denies that there is considerable value in individualism and individuals, such as the affirmation of individual freedom, dignity, and creativity, there are fatal defects in the individualist ideology. According to the analysis of Alexis de Tocqueville, the author of the notable treatise *Democracy in America*, individualism, characteristic of modern democracy, is an erroneous theoretical doctrine. At first, it “only saps the virtues of public life; but in the long run it attacks and destroys all others and is at length absorbed in downright selfishness” (Tocqueville 2000, 483). Therefore, individualism can hardly absolve itself from contributing to the severe social, moral, and ecological crises of modern civilization. In Korean philosopher Tae-Chang Kim’s

opinion, “Individualism has become the root cause of various problems of modern society” (Kim 1996). It is not only the culprit in the crime of “the destruction of small, intimate, organic communities and institutions” (Griffin 1988, 8), but is also responsible for the ecological crisis facing us today.

From a constructive postmodern perspective, treating the individual as a completely independent, self-contained substance is a gross distortion of reality. Because there is no such individual in the real world. Human beings are fundamentally social. “Each human being is constituted by relationships to others” (Daly and Cobb 1994, 164). The field of contemporary biology also supports this point of view. According to Lynn Margulis, a world-renowned evolutionary biologist who is the primary modern proponent of the significance of symbiosis in evolution, “There have never been individuals”. Furthermore, “it is significant. For animals, as well as plants, there have never been individuals. This new paradigm for biology asks new questions and seeks new relationships among the different living entities on Earth. We are all lichens” (Gilbert, 2012). Consequently, the picture provided by the ideology of individualism regarding the relationship between individuals and their communities is doomed to be a misrepresentation. More importantly, the characteristic individualist emphasis on the primacy of the individual is necessarily based on belittling or devaluing the importance of community. This means “Won” [(冤): grudge, grievance, resentment, hatred] was planted here in the context of Daesoon. Therefore, the resolution of Grievances (Haewon) becomes an absolute must in order to realize a harmonious society, which itself is a prerequisite for an ecological civilization. It is impossible for a society in which people form grudges against others to create an ecological civilization since “the Resolution of Grievances (Haewon) and the Mutual Beneficence of All Life (Sangsaeng) are inter-related to one another in the sense that without Haewon there is no Sangsaeng, or vice versa” (Lee 2010).

There is a multitude of highly-applicable resources in the Daesoon Tradition with which to riposte against radical individualism. Daesoon Thought posits that “humans cannot live or survive without relations to the following: personally, family members, socially, friends, colleagues, superiors, and subordinates, racially, blacks, whites, and browns, ecologically, nature and environment, religiously, gods and fellow men and women. Without exception people are not happy unless and until all those needs will be met” (Lee 2010). According to Professor Gyungwon Lee, a long serving professor of Daejin University, this is the way one becomes good and attains happiness. “I am always fundamentally connected to others, and as such, I should recognize that promoting the betterment of others is a path that also promotes my own betterment” (Lee 2010). This explains why Daesoon encourages people to actively help other people and work towards their betterment because everyone is connected to all phenomena and events in the human realm and to all human interactions as well. “The Daesoon Truth intends to resolve all relational problems in terms of the concept of Haewon-sangsaeng

that stands for the value of inter-relations in making peace, harmony, cooperation, and coexistence among all beings” (Lee 2010). It is clear that there is no room for individualism in Daesoon philosophy.

Chinese harmonism can also make a great contribution in countering individualism. In Chinese culture, individuals are always relational beings since, at its root, Chinese thinking is a “correlative thinking” (Ames 2011, 41). The character for core idea of Confucianism “仁 (Ren)” is constituted by “亻” (also Ren) meaning “person”, and “二 (Er)” which represents the number two. According to Professor Roger Ames, a world-renowned comparative philosopher, we must acknowledge the primacy of vital relationality in Chinese culture in order to understand “the twoness”: it is the vital relationality that “makes all things including human persons uniquely one and focally many at the same time. No one does anything by themselves” (Ames 2021, 73). This initially attributes a relational implication to *Ren* (仁). Being a human virtuosity, *Ren*(仁) only “can be achieved in our roles and relations through the emulation of moral exemplars”(Ames 2020), as Ames interpreted. Ames believes that the Chinese self is always relational, he calls it “organismic self”. According to his researches, early Confucian texts, notably the Analects, present a relational view of self, together with relational virtues, ethics, etc. (Thompson 2017). Roger Ames argues that in an age beset by the ideology of individualism, “the Confucian conception of a relationally constituted, interdependent human ‘becoming’ as an alternative to the pervasive conception of the liberal, free, autonomous, rational person is perhaps its most important contribution to a changing world cultural order” (Ames 2020).

The Chinese emphasis on the primacy of vital relationality is also reflected in language if we believe that one’s worldview is inseparably connected with the language they speak. As mentioned before, almost every term in the Chinese language can be a verb. All of the core ideas in Chinese culture, like 仁, 义, 礼, 智, and 信 can play the role of a verb, all of them are relational or “transactional and collaborative” in the words of Roger Ames:

The vocabulary is transactional and collaborative: ‘divinity and humanity’ (tianren 天人), ‘the heavens and the earth’ (tiandi 天地), ‘forming and functioning’ (tiyong 體用), ‘flux and persistence’ (biantong 變通), ‘the furthest reaches and beyond’ (taiji/wuji 太極無極), the yin and the yang 陰陽, ‘this particular focus and its field’ (daode 道德), ‘configuring and vital energy’ (liqi 理氣), ‘determinacy and indeterminacy’ (wuyou 無有), and so on. No term can stand alone as an independent, determinative principle. There can be no superordinate and independent ‘one’ in this ecological cosmology (Ames 2011,72).

Therefore, it is abundantly clear that there is no room for a Westernized independent, self-contained, autonomous individual in Chinese culture. For Chinese people, the meaning of life can be manifested only through peacefully co-existing with others, through helping others, giving life to others, and accomplishing things with others.

Both Daesoon and Chinese harmonism are reminiscent of Whitehead's definition of true religion: the true religion must "direct people to the end of stretching individual interest beyond its self-defeating particularity" (Whitehead 1978, 15). True religion as well as true philosophy encourage people to broaden their sympathies, thereby enlarging their interest, eventually merging their "individual claim with that of the objective universe" (Whitehead 1960, 59). This can be regarded as another expression of the realm of oneness of humans and nature. Ecological civilization is in dire need of such a spirituality.

Thirdly, Haewon-sangsaeng and Chinese harmonism can help deconstruct the modern worship of competition. According to Daesoon, all phenomena and events in the universe, including humans, harbor their own "Won". These "Won" have all arisen from antagonistic relationships characterized by mutual contention. Many factors have contributed to the existence of these Won, and the excessive worship of competition prevalent in the modern world is among them. The fixation on competition is partly responsible for these Won since it causes and strengthens the antagonistic relationships by poisoning the harmonious ones.

Competition has existed in human society since ancient times, but worshipping competition is very much a unique phenomenon that has only arisen in modern civilization. According to Whitehead, "The watchwords of the nineteenth century have been, struggle for existence, competition, class warfare, commercial antagonism between nations, military warfare. The struggle for existence has been construed into a gospel of hate" (Whitehead 1925, 265). The worship of competition has reached its limit in America. The well-known adage of the professional football coach Vince Lombardi, "Winning isn't everything, it's the only thing" (Kohn 1992, 3), very pointedly expresses some Americans' obsession with competition. For Paul Wachtel, the author of *The Poverty of Affluence: A psychological portrait of the American way of life*, the concept of competition is so widespread in American society that competition can be regarded as America's "official state religion" (Wachtel 1983, 284).

In the analysis of Alfie Kohn, a renowned critic of the worship of competition, competition is not only the basis of the American economic system, but also pervades into the American education system, leisure time, and even family life. "We treat others as obstacles to our success. We judge ourselves in relation to others. We feel good when our competitors fail" (Kohn 1992, 2). Such a culture is destined to poison the relationship among its people and would become an immense obstacle to ecological civilization. In order to create an ecological civilization, the devotion to competition



must be replaced with a spirit of cooperation. Both Haewon-sangsaeng and Chinese harmonism contain invaluable wisdom to deconstruct this worship of competition.

As Pochi Huang points out, “Haewon-sangsaeng, as a religio-ethical ideal, brings out an amicable and harmonious relationship among myriad beings in the cosmos” (Huang 2021). It teaches people to “live *sangsaeng* lives—lives characterized by a spirit of mutual aid and cooperation rather than by the spirit of competition and conflict that has dominated the human community up to the present day..... Together haewon and *sangsaeng* tell us to stop trying to gain personal benefit at the expense of others and instead to put others’ interests before our own. By doing so, we will not only avoid creating new resentments; we will create new relationships of love and trust that will erase the old feelings of resentment and anger” (Baker 2008, 88).

The Chinese harmonist emphasis on the primacy of harmony preconceives the rejection of competition and instead the embrace of cooperation. When Chinese speak of “和实生物 (It is harmony which generates things)”, the concept of harmony (和) already denotes cooperation. This is apparent due to the same pronunciation (He) which they share. On the contrary, the state of strife and discord does not possess the creative power of harmony. It is the road that leads to destruction. In the words of Xunzi (310–218 BCE), one of the three great Confucian thinkers of the Chinese classical period along with Confucius and Mencius, “Division leads to rivalry, which leads to chaos, which leads to a dead end” (Xun 1997, 40). Harmony is regarded by Chinese people as a genuine, creative state among the myriad things between heaven and earth. The world remains full of vigor, variety and beauty in virtue of harmony.

Following the same train of thought, “生生” [shengsheng (create life)] as “the *Great Virtue* of Heaven and Earth (天地之大德)” also preconceive the necessity of harmony and cooperation because it is impossible to create life without cooperation. According to *Liji*, (礼记, “Record of Rites”), one of the Five Classics (五经) of Chinese Confucian literature, “It is harmony that creates the myriad things” (*Liji* 1987, 208).

It is for this same reason, contemporary Chinese scholar Dr. Meijun Fan proposed a new phrase, “Survival of the Harmonious” to replace the prevailing one, “Survival of the fittest”, through which she wishes to emphasize that “Only in harmonious relationship can life survive and thrive” (Fan and Wang 2012). In the exquisite expression of late Dr. Ho Mae-Wan, a Chinese geneticist, “All beings are mutually entangled and mutually constitutive. Thus, harming others effectively harms ourselves, and the best way to benefit oneself may be to benefit others” (Hunt 2013).

Constructive Postmodern philosophy also shows that “... cooperation is more basic in the nature of things than competition” (Griffin 1988, 146). In *Science and the Modern World*, Whitehead offers an excellent example to prove this point:

A single tree by itself is dependent upon all the adverse chances of shifting circumstances. The wind stunts it: the variations in temperature check its

foliage: the rains denude its soil: its leaves are blown away and are lost for the purpose of fertilization. You may obtain individual specimens of line trees either in exceptional circumstances, or where human cultivation had intervened. But in nature the normal way in which trees flourish is by their association in a forest. Each tree may lose something of its individual perfection of growth, but they mutually assist each other in preserving the conditions of survival. The soil is preserved and shaded; and the microbes necessary for its fertility are neither scorched, nor frozen, nor washed away. A forest is the triumph of the organization of mutually dependent species (Whitehead 1967, 289).

For Constructive Postmodern philosophers, competition does exist, but it is derivative and secondary. “To have a postmodern consciousness is to see and feel the primacy of cooperation, mutual assistance, and noncoercive relations” (Griffin 1988, 146). In facing the severe ecological crisis of the twenty first century, Dr. Cobb stresses that “Societies in which people love each other and the other creatures with which they live may survive” (Cobb 2021, xi).

#### IV. Concluding Remarks

As a path forward that may be “the only true hope for our descendants to thrive on Earth into the distant future” (Lent 2018), “Ecological civilization represents the development trend of human civilization” (Xinhua 2021). However, as an unprecedented great project, the arduousness of creating an Ecological civilization is also unprecedented. It not only requires all excellent traditions to work together to contribute their forms of wisdom to “resolve the grievances” (Haewon) of both people and nature in order to create this new civilization, but it also requires people all over the world to work together to put this idea into practice. Fortunately, more and more people and nations in the world have realized how urgent and how important it is to put an end to modern industrial civilization and create a wholly new civilization, an ecological civilization.

In China, President Xi Jinping has declared ecological civilization to be a central part of his long-term vision for the country (Lent 2018). Accordingly, ecological civilization is written in both the Party’s constitution and China’s national constitution. “In Bolivia and Ecuador, the related values of *buenvivir* and *sumakkausay* (‘good living’) are written into their respective national constitutions, and in Africa the concept of *ubuntu* (‘I am because we are’) is a widely-discussed principle of human relations. In Europe, hundreds of scientists, politicians, and policy-makers recently co-authored a call for the EU to plan for a sustainable future in which human and ecological wellbeing is prioritized over GDP” (Lent 2018).



In the United States, the annual Claremont International Forum on Ecological Civilization which the Institute for the Postmodern Development of China and our partners Chinese and non-Chinese co-sponsored has been held 15 times. Thus far, thousands of environmentalists, scholars, and government officials have participated in this forum and the forum has reached out to more than 12 million people. Also, I am very excited to witness that more and more Korean people have participated in this great movement of creating an ecological civilization. Under the leadership of Dr. Gunna Jung, Professor of Economics at Hanshin University, Dr. Yunjeong Han, Director of Ecological Civilization in Korea Project, and Ms. Kumsil Kang, head of the People for Earth Forum and former Minister of Justice of South Korea, the following conferences on ecological civilization were held: The “1<sup>st</sup> International Conference on Green Transition toward Ecological Civilization: A Korea-US Dialogue”(2017), “Ecological Transformation on the Korean Peninsula and East Asia conference” (Paju, 2018), “International Forum on Ecological Urban Regeneration in Northeast Seoul” (2018), and the “Ecological Civilization in Korea Conference: Ecological Transition, from Philosophy to Policy” (2019). At Paju Forum, a Declaration named “Paju Declaration” was issued. The Declaration consisted of a preamble and 10 agendas:

1. The Worldview of Ecological Civilization
2. Responsibility as Global Citizens
3. Establishing an Ecological Economy and Systems of Collaboration
4. Resetting the Ecological Path of Science and Technology
5. The Value of Earth Jurisprudence and the Need for Global Governance
6. Revolutionary Transformation of Educational Institutions
7. Ecological Transition on the Korean Peninsula and a Global-scale Campaign
8. The Constant Maturation Process of Self-reflection
9. Urging Future Generations to Participate
10. Creative Organizations and an Ecological Network. (Han 2018)

There was another important eco-forum held in 2019 in Korea, the “Yeoju Eco-Forum: Interfaith Dialogue for Ecological Civilization” sponsored by Daeseon Jinrihoe. This was the first conference in the world that dedicated interfaith dialogue to ecological civilization. Some 500 leaders and top scholars from various traditions and faiths, all committed to the goal of ecological civilization, participated in this historical event. That explained why Dr. John Cobb, a pioneer in promoting both interfaith dialogue and Green GDP in the West felt so excited about the forum. He regarded the Yeoju Eco-Forum as “... a breakthrough in creating an ecological civilization.” (Wang 2021) In 2021, the Jeju Forum on Ecological Civilization was successfully held in spite of the

global pandemic. We hope more and more people can participate in this great work. Chinese people like to say “人心齐，泰山移 (The people all working with one will can move Mount Tai)”. I am confident that when people all over the world act with one mind, we can make the impossible possible, by developing an ecological civilization.

### **Conflict of Interest**

Zhihe Wang 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**

- <sup>1</sup> This quote is inspired by Dr. George Derfer who has been exploring the concept of deeper faith by Whitehead.

## References

- Ames, Roger  
1993      *Sun-tzu, the Art of Warfare*. New York: Ballantine Books.
- 2011      *Confucian Role Ethics: A Vocabulary*. Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press.
- 2020      “Recovering a Confucian Conception of Human Nature: A Challenge to the Ideology of Individualism.” *Acta Koreana* 20(1): 9-27. <https://doi.org/10.18399/acta.2017.20.1.001>
- 2021      *Human Becomings: Theorizing Persons for Confucian Role Ethics*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Bae, Kyu-han  
2018      “Haewon-sangsaeng Thought for the Future of Humanity and World.” *The Journal of Daesoon Academy of Sciences* 30: 1-57. <https://doi.org/10.25050/jdaos.2018.30.0.1>
- Baker, Don  
2008      *Korean Spirituality*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Center for Strategic &  
International Studies  
Washington, D.C.  
2005      “Building a ‘Harmonious Society’ in China.” Accessed 26 September, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2005/09/26/building-a-harmonious-society-in-china/>.
- Chan, Wing-tsit  
1992      *Wang Yangming Chuanxiluxiangzhujiping*. Taiwan: Xueshengshuju.
- Cheng, Xiangzhan  
2022      “Eco-humanism and the Construction of Eco-aesthetics in China.” In *Utopia and Modernity in China: Contradictions in Transition*, edited by David Margolies and Qing Cao. Pluto Press, 132-150.
- Cobb, John B. Jr.  
1999      *Transforming Christianity and the World: A Way Beyond Absolutism and Relativism*. Maryknoll, N.Y Orbis Books.
- 2006      “Is Whitehead Relevant in China Today?” In *Whitehead and China*, edited by Wenyu Xie, Zhihe Wang, George E. Derfer. Frankfurt/Paris: Ontos Verlag.

- 2010     *Spiritual Bankruptcy: A Prophetic Call to Action*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press.
- 2015     “Deconstructing Modernity.” *Open Horizon*. <https://www.openhorizons.org/the-postmodern-john-cobb-deconstructive-and-constructive.html>, Accessed 28 July 2022.
- 2021     *Is It Too Late? A Theology of Ecology*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.
- Cobb, John B. Jr and  
Herman E. Daly  
1994     *For the Common Good: Redirecting the Economy toward Community, the Environment, and a Sustainable Future*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Confucius  
1998     *The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation*, by Roger T. Ames and Henry Rosemont, Jr. New York: Ballantine Books.
- Daesoon Institute for  
Religion and Culture  
(DIRC) 2020     *The Canonical Scripture*. Yeosu: Daesoon Jinrihoe Press. <http://dirc.kr/dictionary/app/dt/scripture/dic.php?idx=2#e>
- Fan, Meijun.  
1997     *A Contemporary Interpretation of Traditional Chinese Aesthetics*. Beijing: China Social Sciences Press.
- 2012     “Survival of the Harmonious: Toward an Constrictive Postmodern Harmonious Civilization.” *Marxism and Reality* 6.
- 2020     “The transition to the ecological civilisation is a great and all-round transformation”. *International Social Science Journal (Chinese Edition)* 2: 70-79.
- Fan, Meijun and Zhihe  
Wang.  
2020     “Coronavirus Is Not an Enemy Rather a Courier.” *Month Review Online*, Apr 23, <https://mronline.org/2020/04/23/%E2%80%8Bcoronavirus-is-not-an-enemy-rather-a-courier/>
- Gilbert, Scott, Jan Sapp,  
and Alfred I. Tauber.  
2012     “A symbiotic view of life: we have never been individuals.” *The Quarterly Review of Biology* 87(4): 325-341. <https://doi.org/10.1086/668166>.

- Grandpierre, Attila  
2021 "Can Chinese Harmonism Help Reconcile the Clash of Civilizations? Reading Zhihe Wang's *Process and Pluralism: Chinese Thought on the Harmony of Diversity*." *Process Studies* 50(2): 270-275. <https://doi.org/10.5840/process202150215>
- Griffin, David Ray  
1988 "Peace and the Postmodern Paradigm." In *Spirituality and Society: Postmodern Vision*, 143-154, edited by David Griffin. Albany: SUNY Press.
- Guo, Qingfan  
2012 *Collocation and Interpretation of Zhuangzi*. Zhonghua Book Company
- Guoyu  
1980 In *Selected Works of Chinese Aesthetic History*. Edited by Philosophy Department, Peking University. Beijing: China Publishing House.
- Hall, David  
1996 "From Modern China and the Postmodern West: Resistances and Alternatives." In *From modernism to postmodernism: an anthology*, 698-710, edited by Lawrence Cahoone. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers.
- Han, Yunjeong.  
2018 "Three Ecological Transition Conferences in Korea." <https://ecociv.org/three-ecological-transition-conferences-in-korea/>. Accessed 27 July 2022.
- Hanson, Arthur.  
2019 "Ecological Civilization in the People's Republic of China: Values, Action, and Future Needs." *Asian Development Bank*. <https://think-asia.org/handle/11540/11482>. Accessed 26 July 2022.
- Huang, Pochi  
2021 "Haewon-sangsaeng as a Religio-Ethical Metaphor." *Journal of Daesoon Thought and the Religions of East Asia* 1(1):103-125. <https://doi.org/10.25050/JDTREA.2021.1.1.103>
- Jin, Xun.  
2007 "A Preliminary Discussion on the Ideological Characteristic of the Doctrine of the New Religion of Korean Republic", *Studies in World Religions* 2: 97-105. <https://doi.org/10.3969/j.issn.1000-4289.2007.02.011>

- Hunt, Tam.  
2013 "The rainbow and the worm: Establishing a new physics of life." In *Communicative and Integrative Biology* 6(2), <https://doi.org/10.4161/cib.23149>
- Kim, David  
2020 *Daesoon Jinriboe in Modern Korea Society: Emergence, Transformation and Transmission of a New Religious Movement*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing
- Kim, Tea-Chang  
1996 "The Theological and Philosophical Shift Related to Political Philosophy in the Great Century Transition Age." *Social Sciences Abroad* 5: 61-65.
- Kisho, Kurokawa.  
1994 *The Philosophy of Symbiosis*. Academy Editions.
- Kohn, Alfie.  
1992 *No Contest: The Case Against Competition*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Korten, David.  
2018 "Ecological Civilization and a Theory of the Community," Paper for the 12th International Forum on Ecological Civilization and Symbiotic Development, April 27-28, 2018, Claremont, CA, USA.
- Lee, Gyungwon  
2010 "A New Paradigm of the Daesoon Thought with Special References to Characteristics of the Ideas of Haewon-Sangsaeng - Resolution of Grievances for the Mutual Beneficence of All Life." *Journal of the Korean Academy of New Religions. Special Edition*:107-122. <https://doi.org/10.22245/jkanr.2010...107>
- Lent, Jeremy.  
2018 "We Need an Ecological Civilization Before It's Too Late." MAHB (stanford.edu), Accessed 28 July 2022, <https://mahb.stanford.edu/blog/need-ecological-civilization-late/>.
- Liji*  
1987 Annotated by Chen Hao.Shanghai: Shanghai Guji.
- Liu, Bin  
2019 *Yijing with Collation and Explanation*. Jinan: Shandong People's Press.

- Liu, Chengji. 1996 "The Natural Image System of Zhuangzi's Aesthetics." *Academic Journal of Zhongzhou* 6: 88-92.
- Lubarsky, Sandra. 2012 "Life Affirming Beauty." In *The Energy Reader: Overdevelopment and the Delusion of Endless Growth*, Tom Butler, Daniel Lerch, and George Wuerthner, eds. Healdsburg, CA: Watershed Media, 1-2.

2019 "The Kinship of Beauty and Life." *The Ecological Citizen* 3(Suppl A): 97-100.
- Mozi. 2014 *Mozi*. Shanghai: Shanghai Ancient Books Publishing House.
- McDaniel, Jay. 2008 "Mei's Invitation: A Gentle Asceticism for Chinese and Americans." *Cross Currents* 57(4): 526-544.

2022 "Imagining a Daesoon Process Theology." <https://www.openhorizons.org/imagining-a-daesoon-process-theology.html>. Accessed 30 July 2022.
- Park, Maria. 2016 "On 'Haewon-sangsaeng' Thought in Jeungsan's Chinese Poems in The Canonical Scripture from Lyricism." *Chinese Literature and Philosophy Research Newsletter* 26(2):99-122.
- Park, Sam-kyung. 2012 "The Notion of Reconciliation in Sangsaeng Theology for Korean Reunification." *Madang* 18: 95-114. <https://doi.org/10.26590/madang..18.201212.95>
- Roossinck, Marilyn and Edelio R Bazán 2017 "Symbiosis: Viruses as Intimate Partners." *Annual Review of Virology* 4(1):123-139. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-virology-110615-042323>
- Shiva, Vandana 2022 "Earth Democracy, Earth Community and the Common Good –Acceptance Speech -John Cobb Common Good Award." *Cultural Communication* June 30, 2022.
- Suchocki, Marjorie. 1999 *The Fall to Violence*. New York: The Continuum Publishing Company.

- Tang, Daixing.  
2016 "Defining and Interpreting the Concept of Environmental Cliff." *Modality and Civilization* 2.

2022 "An Ethical Ecological Reflection on Pandemic Catastrophes." *Gansu Social Sciences* 3(2022): 63-72.
- Tang, Yijie  
2011a "The Enlightenment and its Difficult Journey in China." *Wen Hui Bao*. November 14, 2011.

2011b "Preface to The Second Enlightenment." In Zhihe Wang, Meijun Fan, *The Second Enlightenment*. Beijing: Peking University Press.
- Thompson, Kirill O.  
2017 "Relational self in classical Confucianism: lessons from Confucius' Analects." *Philosophy East and West* 67(3): 887-907
- Tocqueville, Alexis de  
2000 *Democracy in America*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop. University of Chicago Press
- Todd, Douglas.  
2008 "China embraces Alfred North Whitehead." *Vancouver Sun*. December 10, 2008.
- Wachtel, Paul.  
1983 *The Poverty of Affluence: A psychological portrait of the American way of life*. New York: Free Press.
- Wang, Fuzhi.  
1982 *Zhangzi Zhengmeng Zhu*. Changsha: Yuelu Press.
- Wang, Kun.  
2014 *The First Handshake of Whitehead and China*. Beijing: Peking University Press.
- Wang, Zhihe.  
2012 *Process, Process and Pluralism: Chinese Thought on the Harmony of Diversity*. Frankfurt/Paris: Ontos Verlag.

2021 "An Unforgettable Yeosu Eco-Forum." DAESoon JINRIHOE, 2021-06-29, <http://eng.daesoon.org/app/en/communion/story#11>. Accessed 22 July 2022.
- Wang Zhihe, Meijun Fan,  
and John Cobb.  
2020 "Chinese Environmental Ethics and Whitehead's Philosophy." *Environmental Ethics* 42(1): 73-91. <https://doi.org/10.5840/enviroethics20204217>



- Whitehead, Alfred North. 1960. *Religion in the Making*. Cleveland: World.
1967. *Science and the Modern World*. Simon and Schuster.
1978. *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*, ed. D.R. Griffin and D.W. Sherburne. New York: Free Press.
- Woo, Myun. 2012. *Where You Become True Is The Place Of Truth*. Sunnyvale: Cham books.
- Xinhua. 2021. “Xi Focus: Eco-civilization illuminates path to sustainable future.” Xinhua | 2021-10-14, [http://www.news.cn/english/2021-10/15/c\\_1310245413.htm](http://www.news.cn/english/2021-10/15/c_1310245413.htm) (Accessed 27 July 2022).
- Xun, Kuang. 1997. *Xunzi*. Liaoning Education Press.
- Yang, Fubin. 2010. “The Influence of Whitehead's Thought on the Chinese Academy.” *Process Studies* 39 (2): 342-349. <https://doi.org/10.5840/process201039229>
- Ye, Lang. 1995. “The Contemporary Inspirations of Confucian Aesthetics.” *Journal of Peking University* 1.
- Zhuangzi. 2012. *Zhuangzi Jizhu*. Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company.

# Activating Twenty-four: Time, Space, and Body

**Livia KOHN**

Livia Kohn, Ph.D., is Professor Emerita of Religion and East Asian Studies at Boston University, where she began teaching in 1988 after spending ten years in Kyoto, Japan. She has written thirty-four sole-authored books and over a hundred articles, translated five works from the German, French, Chinese, and Japanese, and edited eleven multi-authored volumes as well as fourteen issues of the *Journal of Daoist Studies*. After retiring from university teaching in 2006, she now serves as the executive editor of Three Pines Press, gives Zoom lectures (DaoExplore), and runs Daoist workshops. For details, please see [www.threepinespress.com](http://www.threepinespress.com).



JDTREA 2022,2(1): 57-83

## Original Articles

Correspondence to

**Livia KOHN**

Boston University, USA

[liviakohn@gmail.com](mailto:liviakohn@gmail.com)



*Journal of Daesoon Thought and the Religions of East Asia* Vol. 2. Issue1 (September 2022): 57–83

© 2022 by the Daesoon Academy of Sciences, Daejin University, Korea

<https://doi.org/10.25050/JDTREA.2022.2.1.57>

**Day of submission:** 2022. 07. 28.

**Completion of review:** 2022. 08. 15.

**Final decision for acceptance:** 2022. 08. 31.

P-ISSN: 2799-3949

E-ISSN: 2799-4252

## Abstract

Numbers structure reality and define the way people live. Both in Daoism and in Daesoon Jinrihoe they signify key concepts, notably the cardinal numbers from one through nine that classify different dimensions of the cosmos. Beyond these, the number twenty-four plays an important role. In a temporal mode, it marks the divisions or seasonal periods of the year. Consisting of fifteen days each, these periods signal (and are named after) changes in dominant weather patterns and the position of the sun. Generally activated in the body through particular seasonal activities and dietary prescriptions, in Daoism they are also the root of a series of healing exercises and certain refinement practices of internal alchemy. In Daesoon Jinrihoe, moreover, they are activated by chanting a specific incantation that invokes the twenty-four divine rulers of the divisions, originally a group of Tang Dynasty officials that in nature and function resemble the spirit generals of the early Celestial Masters. Beyond this, the number twenty-four also applies to space. Not unlike the twenty-eight lunar stations or mansions, traditional cosmology acknowledges twenty-four directions, made up of six constellations each in the four cardinal directions, complete with starry deities and divine generals. Their powers are activated with the help of written characters rather than vocal incantations, using techniques common both in Daoism and Daesoon Jinrihoe.

**Keywords:** Numbers, Daoism, Twenty-Four, Time, Space, Daesoon Jinrihoe

## Introduction

Numbers in many ways organize and structure reality, determining the way people conceive of and manage their world. Thus, in our daily lives today, we get up and work at certain hours as defined by a count of numbers, we find locations by the number of the highway or subway line and their various exits equally marked by numbers, we gather information from books and newspapers numbered in chapters or sections and pages, we measure wealth by assigning numbers to money or assets, we judge the value of something according to its numbered worth or price, we eat foods determined according to a certain number of calories, we classify our health status based on numbers such as heart rate, blood pressure, platelet count, and so on. It is not just that reality is classified and arranged in numerical structures, but we also live in the shadow of these structures, so that any adjustment made to them has a major impact on the way we conduct and conceive of ourselves.

In the light of the pervasive importance of numbers and closely inheriting the traditional Chinese and Daoist preoccupation with the numerically definable rhythms of the celestial bodies (Hsieh 2020, 271), it is no accident that Kang Jeungsan (姜甌山, 1871–1909), commonly known as Sangje, the incarnated Supreme God of the Universe, placed great importance on setting or recalibrating the Degree Numbers (度數, *dosu*) of various cosmic and social entities (*Acts* 3: 53)<sup>1</sup> as part of his Great Reordering works, focusing most importantly on that of the Former World to open the destined pathway to limitless divine immortality in the Later World and establish a paradise (*Reordering Works* 1: 2; Hsieh 2020, 269). Based on traditional Chinese cosmology as expressed in the *Yijing* (易經, Book of Changes), recorded variously in dynastic histories, and activated in medieval Daoist visions of cosmic revolutions (DIRC 2020, 272-73), this involves improving the way reality functions, but in some cases, it also means predicting calamities or other future events on the basis of numbers (*Acts* 3: 54). As he said himself, “Whatever I do, even if it’s just a small joke, all of it is related to Degree Numbers and spreads to heaven and earth” (*Acts* 4: 15).

## Numbers in Daoism

Daoists, too, have placed great importance on numbers in their history. According to them, the universe proceeds in an orderly fashion, definable through numbers and measurable by count (Bodde 1991, 136). The various beings and entities of the world are classified into distinct categories with the help of numbers—which, as Nathan Sivin notes, are not used “as measures but as a means of ranking phenomena into a qualitative order” (1976, 521). Expressing particular qualities of things, they allow an overall patterning of existence and, through changes in assigned meanings, present possible

models of dynamic unfolding (Robinet 2011, 46-47). “The arithmetic manipulation of numbers was intended to account for the structure of situations and their changes, and thus to make the world understandable” (2011, 48).

The basic understanding in this cosmic context is that one represents primordial unity, the chaos at the brink of creation, underlying all existence, while two signifies yin and yang, the sun and the moon, gold and jade—the core pair of creative energies in the world that brings forth the myriad beings in all their permutations (2011, 48; 1989, 313).

Next, all odd numbers are yang in quality, while even numbers are yin. Thus, closely echoing the *Xici* (繫辭, Appended Judgments; trl. Wilhelm 1950; Sung 1971), an *Yijing* supplement in two parts that makes up the fifth and sixth of the Ten Wings (1.9). The twelfth century manual of internal alchemy known as the *Zhong-Lü chuandao ji* (鍾呂傳道集, Transmission of the Dao from Zhongli to Lü; DZ 263, chs. 14-16)<sup>2</sup>, says, “Heaven is one, earth is two, heaven is three, earth is four, heaven is five, earth is six, heaven is seven, earth is eight, heaven is nine, earth is ten” (ch. 13; Kohn 2020a, 41).

From two, as already pointed out in the ancient classic *Daode jing* (道德經, Book of Dao and Its Virtue, ch. 41), the universe evolves into three. Three marks the three central powers heaven, earth, and humanity, represented in the human body as the three elixir fields, in turn inhabited by central deities of the universe, the so-called Three Ones (Andersen 1980). The number four connects to space, setting the four directions (四方, *sifang*), while the number five links to time, signaling the five phases or movements (五行, *wuxing*) of yin and yang as they continue to rise and fall in close interaction. From here, six relates to the pitch pipes, sound markers that define and classify the flow of cosmic and vital energy (氣, *qi*), while seven is the number of the planets and also of the stars of the Northern Dipper, the central constellation of the Daoist universe in charge of destiny and cosmic evolution (Robinet 2011).

Eight is the most important number in the *Yijing*, according to which the two forces yin and yang, symbolized by twofold and single lines, evolve into the so-called four images or emblems (四象, *sixiang*), which in turn produce the eight trigrams (八卦, *bagua*) by combining the lines into sets of three (Wilhelm 1950, 319; Sung 1971, 299). They in turn symbolize various features of the world and appear in two major schemes, one showing the world in its pre-creation state, the other in post-creation (Hsieh 2020, 275).

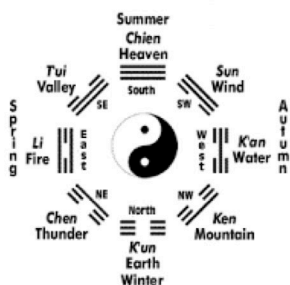


Figure 1. The Pre-creation Trigrams

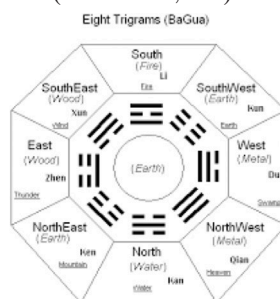


Figure 2. The Post-creation Trigrams

The trigrams, then, stand for the core powers of heaven and earth, water and fire, mountain and lake, thunder and wind, together representing key features of reality. Daoists use them variously to designate directions, alchemical substances, and internal energies as well as to symbolize major aspects of life, and apply them in philosophical speculation, divination, fengshui, and internal alchemy. In addition, the eight trigrams are combined into sixty-four hexagrams, representing major events and states of life and thus forming the backbone of the ancient system of divination.

Nine, finally, is three squared and thus represents a high potency of yang. It first appears in the understanding of the world as consisting of a square earth covered by the round dome of heaven, which gives it the overall shape of a turtle. The earth, moreover, was seen to consist of nine concentric squares, with China in the center (Middle Kingdom), friends and allies in the cardinal directions, and the so-called barbarians on the periphery. The country itself was further divided into nine provinces, the capital city was laid out to have nine major wards, and the palace contained a ritual space to show the world in miniature (see Allan 1991; Wheatley 1971). When Yu the Great, the mythical founder of the Xia dynasty—today tentatively associated with a chalcolithic site at Erlitou in Henan (1900-1600 BCE)—tamed the flood, he moved back and forth through the nine provinces, establishing order and claiming power over the country.

Daoists activate it in numerous different ways in ritual and cosmology. For example, the Daoist's staff, a sign of sacrality and authority, is made from bamboo and has nine knots, named after planets, lunar stations, and starry constellations. In the otherworld, Daoists occupy nine celestial ranks, and many dignitaries wear robes of nine colors. Scriptures, rules, heavens, and more all come in multiples of nine, the numbers thirty-six and eighty-one appearing most often (Kohn 2020b, 34).

Within this overall context, the number twenty-four plays an important role as a structuring factor of time, space, and the human body, activated in cultivation and ritual. It marks a cross-road of many other important numbers, being divisible by two, three, four, six, eight, and twelve, and linked intimately to the three powers that mark the vertical structure of the universe and the eight trigrams that signify the key factors of the world.

## The Twenty-four Seasonal Divisions

The twenty-four seasonal divisions (節, *jie*, KR: *jeol*) form part of the traditional Chinese calendar. Like the Jewish, Persian, and Indian, it goes back to the Babylonian (Schafer 1977, 10) and is a combination of lunar and solar—unlike the Islamic (entirely lunar) and the Julian or Gregorian (purely solar). Determined by court astronomers, it marked the division and measurement of time at the core of smooth social functioning (Loewe 1995, 308), its main function being ritual rather than economical or agricultural. As Paul Wheatley says,

The Shang year count bears the impress of officialdom. It was not concerned with the needs of the farmer—who continued to regulate his activities by the onset of floods, the coming of the rains, the heliacal rising of a star, or some similar phenomenon—but rather was one of a set of accounting devices fashioned to facilitate the ritualistic and managerial functions of sacrally oriented elites. (1971, 385-86; Schafer 1977, 15)

This calendar, still actively used and available every year in the *Farmer's Almanac* (農曆, Nongli), is based on twelve lunar months of thirty days each in a solar year of 360 days, thus requiring the insertion of an intercalary month every few years (Loewe 1995, 318). It divided the year into four seasons, peaking at the solstices and equinoxes—in contrast to the Western system, where the latter mark the seasons' beginning—and added the eight trigrams by dividing each season. In addition, the annual structure was also applied to the months and days, as shown in table 1.:

Each season, moreover, spans three months or ninety days on the lunar level and comprises six seasonal divisions, also known as “nodes” or “*qi*-periods” of fifteen days each on the solar plane, marking the advance of the sun by fifteen degrees over the length of the elliptic course of the planet. Each division is further subdivided into three groups of five days, called a base-week (候, *bou*), counted by the names of the ten-day week first established in the Shang dynasty and today known as the heavenly stems (天干, *tiangan*).

Table 1. The Trigrams in Time

Year	Month	Day	Trigram
winter solstice	new moon	12 midnight	Kan/Water
spring beginning		3 / am	Gen/Mountain
spring equinox	first quarter	6 / am	Zhen/Thunder
summer beginning		9 / am	Xun/Wind
summer solstice	full moon	12 noon	Li/Fire
fall beginning		3 / pm	Kun/Earth
fall equinox	last quarter	6 / pm	Dui/Lake
winter beginning		9 / pm	Qian/Heaven

In total, the seasonal divisions come to twenty-four. As the Song Dynasty manual of internal alchemy *Lingbao bifa* (靈寶畢法, Conclusive Methods of Numinous Treasure, DZ 1191) says,

Each year begins at the division of the winter solstice. At this time, yang ascends from earth, and in the course of one seasonal *qi*-period or fifteen days, it reaches 7,000 miles. Three *qi*-periods make one segment or forty-five days, during which yang ascends 21,000 miles. Two segments make one season or ninety days, during which yang ascends 42,000 miles. Reaching the midpoint between heaven and earth, it touches the domain of yin. At this time, yang is halfway in the midst of yin. The weather [*qi*] changes to being warm: the time of the spring equinox has come. (Kohn 2020a, 193)

Defined by the continuous elliptic course of the sun, the seasonal divisions are marked by climatic conditions typical for each period (Loewe 1995, 312) and serve to chart the agricultural year. They are as shown in table 2.

Based on the changing weather patterns as relevant for the agricultural year, the twenty-four seasonal divisions provide structure for overall patterns and a framework that opens guidelines of behavior. Human beings not only match their work in the fields to these divisions but also arrange their daily lives in accordance, wearing appropriate clothes, eating the right kinds of food, and engaging in proper activities.

Table 2. The Twenty-four Seasonal Divisions

No.	Seasonal Division		No.	Seasonal Division	
1	Spring Beginn	立春	2	Rain Fall	雨水
3	Insects Rousing	驚蟄	4	Spring Equinox	春分
5	Clear and Bright	清明	6	Nurturing Rain	穀雨
7	Summer Beginning	立夏	8	Minor Ripening	小滿
9	Seeds Sprouting	芒種	10	Summer Solstice	夏至
11	Minor Heat	小暑	12	Great Heat	大暑
13	Fall Beginning	立秋	14	Limit of Heat	處暑
15	White Dew	白露	16	Fall Equinox	秋分
17	Cold Dew	寒露	18	Frost Descending	霜降
19	Winter Beginning	立冬	20	Minor Snow	小雪
21	Great Snow	大雪	22	Winter Solstice	冬至
23	Minor Cold	小寒	24	Great Cold	大寒



## Embodied Practice

Daoists consistently emphasize the need for moderation and adjustment. They follow instructions first documented in the ancient manuscript *Yinsbu* (引書, Pulling Book), discovered at Zhangjiashan and dated to 186 BCE (Kohn 2008; Lo 2014). It says,

Spring days. After rising in the morning, pass water, wash and rinse, clean and click the teeth. Loosen the hair, stroll to the lower end of the hall to meet the purest of dew and receive the essence of Heaven, and drink one cup of water. These are the means to increase long life. Enter the chamber [for sex] between evening and late midnight [1 am]. More would harm the *qi*.

Summer days. Wash the hair frequently, but bathe rarely. Do not rise late and eat many greens. After rising in the morning and passing water, wash and rinse the mouth, then clean the teeth. Loosen the hair, walk to the lower end of the hall and after a while drink a cup of water. Enter the chamber between evening and midnight. More would harm the *qi*.

Fall days. Bathe and wash the hair frequently. As regards food and drink, let hunger or satiation be whatever the body desires. Enter the chamber however often the body finds it beneficial and comfortable—this is the way to greatest benefit.

Winter days. Bathe and wash the hair frequently. The hands should be cold and the feet warm; the face cold and the body warm. Rise from sleep late; while lying down, stretch out straight. Enter the chamber between evening and early midnight [11 pm]. More would harm the *qi*. (Harper 1998, 110-11)

The Tang physician and Daoist Sun Simiao (孫思邈, 581-682), moreover, specifies certain kinds of food to be eaten in accordance with the seasons. As outlined in his *Shayang lun* (攝養論, On Preserving and Nourishing [Life], DZ 841), during the two seasonal divisions of the first month one should be aware that the kidneys (associated with winter) may be prone to ailing and that the function of the lungs (the organ dominant in the fall) is still reduced. To help with these conditions, limit the intake of salty and sour foods and increase pungent flavors in the diet but still avoid fresh scallions which reduce body fluids and blood as well as fresh ginseng which creates fatigue. Also, do not eat the flesh of hibernating animals which will lessen your life energy or the meat of predators, such as foxes, which will agitate your spirit. Generally taking care to balance the diet will support the kidneys and tonify the lungs, calm and

balance the spleen and stomach.

Similarly, in midsummer, the liver and heart *qi* are lessening and the lungs are rising as the dominant organ. One should keep calm and at peace in all emotions, increase salty and reduce pungent flavors, thus nourishing the spleen and stomach—which are supported by the changing emphasis in diet in all seasons and not allotted a specific period, such as the Indian summer, to themselves. As in winter, one should balance one's temperature, avoiding heavy sweats without strongly resisting the heat and engaging in extreme cooling measures. One should not eat pork and avoid thinking evil thoughts. Again, certain days are best for personal hygiene, such as taking baths and cutting hair; others are ideal for devotions and fasting; yet others should not be used for travels or new adventures (Kohn 2008, 135; 2012, 124-25).

The most detailed Daoist instructions for the twenty-four seasonal divisions appear in a set of healing exercises associated with the early Song immortal Chen Tuan (陳搏, d. 989), a figure of some renown (Kohn 2001). They are recorded in the *Ersbisi zuogong daoyin zhibing tu'an* (二十四坐功導引治病圖案, Twenty-four Illustrated Seated Exercise Practices to Heal Diseases), contained in the *Neiwai gong tushuo jiyao* (內外功圖說輯要, Collected Essentials and Illustrated Descriptions of Inner and Outer Practices, *Daozang jinghua* 2.10: 133-81).<sup>3</sup>



Figure 3. The Seasonal Exercise for the Summer Solstice

The diseases they propose to heal tend to be associated with *qi*-blockages, including joint pains, digestive issues, and muscular weakness, but as they work on all the different parts of the body in the course of the year they provide well-rounded care. Their timing is in the early morning hours, around midnight or 1 am in the winter months (11<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup>,

1<sup>st</sup>) and after sunrise or 5 am in the height of summer (4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>). During the remainder of the year, it is best to perform them at the crack of dawn around 3 am. In each case, after the physical stretch or movement, adepts are to click their teeth and swallow the saliva, guiding it to the area activated. Each exercise is repeated five or seven times. The instructions in each case mention that one should alternate the practices to the right and left (R/L) and practice them on each side for the given number of repetitions (e.g., 15x). The practices are gentle and, with two exceptions, undertaken while sitting down. They should not take more than ten minutes or so to complete, helping people to keep their joints moving and their energies harmonious as the seasons march through their preset path (Kohn 2008, 69-70). They are as shown in table 3.

In addition to the seasonal exercises, texts of the late Ming also present simple moves and stretches for specific medical conditions. Associated with famous immortals of various ages and provenance, they specify briefly which symptoms they are good for, give a concise description of the practice, and illustrate it in a pertinent ink drawing. They also provide an herbal remedy, usually consisting of five to eight different ingredients (often including ginseng, angelica, China root fungus, and various animal and mineral substances) to supplement the regimen, and outline a more metaphorical and symbolic version of the practice—often replete with alchemical imagery—in a practice poem of four lines of seven characters each.

Table 3. Seated Healing Exercises for the Twenty-four Seasonal Divisions

No.	Division	Practice
1	Spring Beginning	Sit cross-legged, press both hands on R/L knee, turn neck R/L, 15x
2	Rain Fall	Press both hands on R/L thigh, turn neck and torso R/L, 15x
3	Insects Rousing	Make tight fists, lift arms to elbow level, turn neck R/L, 30x
4	Spring Equinox	Stretch arms forward, turn neck R/L, look over shoulders, 42x
5	Pure Brightness	Pull arms into shooting bow position R/L, 56x
6	Nurturing Rain	Lift arm up, palm out, place other arm across torso, turn shoulders, 35x
7	Summer Beginning	Sit cross-legged, interlace fingers, hug knee into chest R/L, 35x
8	Minor Ripening	Lift one arm up, palm out, press other arm on legs, press R/L, 35x
9	Seeds Sprouting	Stand up, lift both arms to ceiling, slight back bend, 35x
10	Summer Solstice	Sit with legs out, lift one leg, hold with both hands, stretch R/L, 35x
11	Minor Heat	Kneel on one leg, stretch other leg away, lean back, R/L, 15x
12	Great Heat	Sit cross-legged, lean forward over legs, push floor, turn neck R/L, 15x
13	Fall Beginning	Sit cross-legged, press both hands on floor, push body up, 56x
14	Limit of Heat	Lifting the chest, turn the head R/L, drum fists on back, 35x
15	White Dew	Press hands on respective knees, turn neck R/L, 15x
16	Fall Equinox	Interlace hands behind head, lean sideways R/L, 15x
17	Cold Dew	Lift arms overhead in V position, pressing upward, 35x
18	Frost Descending	Sit with legs out, hold both feet, stretch and lift, 35x
19	Winter Beginning	Sit cross-legged, stretch both arms to one side, turn head to the other, 15x
20	Minor Snow	Press one hand on knee, hold at elbow with other hand, R/L, 15x
21	Great Snow	Stand up, cross legs at knees, open arms to the side, press, 35x
22	Winter Equinox	Sit with legs straight, press arms on knees with vigor, R/L, 15x
23	Minor Cold	Sit cross-legged, push one arm up, looking at it, other arm on floor, 15x
24	Great Cold	Kneel on one leg, lean back, bend and straighten the other leg, R/L, 15x

## Internal Alchemy

In a yet different mode, working with a reversal of, rather than an adaptation to, the natural cycles, Daoists use the twenty-four seasonal divisions as part of internal alchemy. Shown in the *Xiuzhen tu* (修真圖, Chart of the Cultivation of Perfection; Despeux 2019) as found on a stele of the late Qing (see Figure 4) along the vertebrae of the spine, they match its divisions (分, *fen*) and fill its three major sections, divided by passes or barriers (關, *guan*). As the *Lingbao bifa* says,

The bottom three vertebrae sit right opposite the kidneys. The top three are called the Heavenly Pillar, while the area above them [of the head] is known as the Jade Capital. Below the Heavenly Pillar and above the vertebrae opposite the kidneys, that is, above the Tail Gate, there are eighteen vertebrae. The central among them is called the Double Barrier: there are nine above and nine below it. (ch. 5; Kohn 2020a, 47)



Figure 4. The Xiuzhen tu

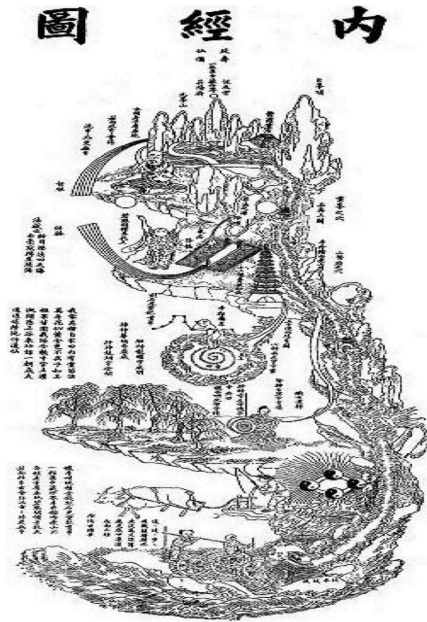


Figure 5. The Neijing tu

Thus, the spine, which is like a flowing river, contains not only three major barriers but also twenty-four nodes or knobs, matching the seasonal divisions of the year. The *Xiuzhen tu*, moreover, links this to the internal circulation of energy, as its inscription suggests, “Moving with the natural flow means ordinary life; going against it leads to sagehood.”

Textual sources supplement this with descriptions of the “small celestial circuit” or “microcosmic orbit” (小周天, xiao zhoutian), more comprehensively described as “yin and yang completing a full loop around the universe.” Practitioners inhale pure *qi* through the nose and guide it first into the abdomen to reach the lower elixir field, then sink it to the perineum and from there move it up along the spine and across the head to complete one circuit.

The *Neijing tu* (內經圖, Chart of Internal Passageways; Komjathy 2009), another major visual representation of internal alchemy (see Figure 5), shows a platform with radiantly blossoming trees beneath the heart where a lady is engaged in weaving. They symbolize perfect inner nature and primordial feeling that reside in the liver and the lungs.

The blossoming tree, a spring willow, indicates the new emergence of vegetation after a long winter, the new rise of yang energy, the fertility of clouds and rain, and the overall renewal of energy. At this time, the hexagrams Tun (屯, Difficulty at the Beginning) and Zhen (震, Arousing) come to the fore, signaling the new beginning of the annual and agricultural cycle. They lead up to the hexagram Wuwang (无妄, No Error), which matches the seasonal division Spring Beginning, when “yang is in harmony, insects arise, and all things are springing forth.” This is how things should be, when the energy of the annual cycle is in its proper mode—happy growth and new potency on the rise.

#### 心神、肝神和肺神与节气、易卦的关系图

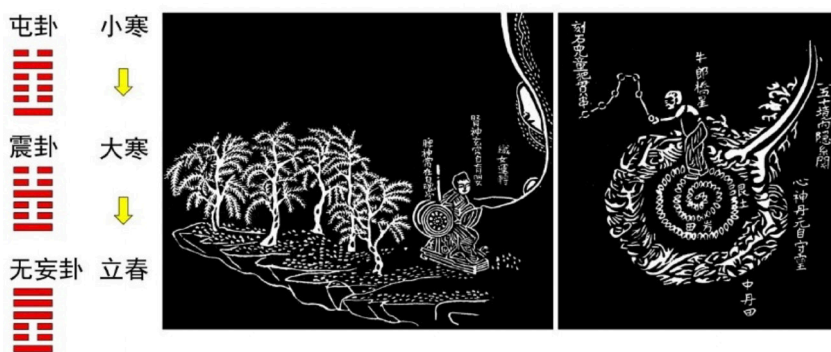


Figure 6. The representation of the liver and beginning of spring.

The lady engaged in weaving, on the other hand, symbolizes the core inner nature of an infant, its most primitive essence, activated during practice in extremely soft, long, and deep breathing, pure energy moving in and out of the body and rising through the body to the upper elixir field in the head, known as the Niwan Palace (泥丸宮). The weaving of the breath in the right manner and at the right time opens the infinite



sequence of time and space, and activates the meridians to prepare for the ultimate transformation of energy.

After Spring Beginning, the world sees an increasing balance of yin and yang, water and fire, as well as more agricultural activities, leading to the solar periods Rain Fall, Insects Rousing, and Spring Equinox. The *Neijing tu* depicts this with the images of an ox pulling a plow, two youngsters running a waterwheel for irrigation, and the reversal of the water flow (see Figure 7). These are not only images of spring planting activities, but they also match the hexagrams Jiji (既濟, After Completion), Feng (豐, Abundance), and Tongren (同人, Human Community).

In terms of internal cultivation, they indicate the reversal of essence, the transformation of kidney water toward heart fire, the increasing momentum of the microcosmic orbit. The ox plowing the land symbolizes the process of “emptying the heart and filling the belly” (*Dao de jing* Ch.3), of planting the seeds of new wealth, which involves specific abdominal breathing methods. The two youngsters running the waterwheel indicate the reversal of essence and its impending transformation into energy as well as the coordination of various forms of internal fire, marking the beginning of the process that continues along the same lines as the chart proceeds (Li 2020, 198-99).

内经图下丹田重要图像与节气、易卦的关系图



Figure 7. The various spring planting and irrigation activities in the *Neijing tu*.

## Sangje's Application

In close conjunction with the Daoist application of the twenty-four seasonal division, Sangje notes that they are crucial for farming and determine food, clothing, and activities throughout the year. He refers variously to their nature and qualities. For example, at one time, on the second of the three Dog Days (中伏, *zhongfu*, KR: jungbok), a time of extreme summer heat in the 6<sup>th</sup> month, he said, “If no thunder roars today, insects will damage crops.” When there was no sign of a thunderstorm, moreover, He accused heaven of damaging people's lives and took corrective measures.

He had a disciple bring a piece of dried straw. And He cut the straw to be as long as His ring finger, put it upright in a furnace, and burned it away. Suddenly, lightning flashed, only in the north. Again, Sangje shouted as if to scold Heaven: “Is it right if only people in the north should survive while those in other places die?” Then, in all directions, lightning and thunder started. (*Authority and Foreknowledge* 2: 17)

More generally, in accordance with the project of recalibrating the Degree Numbers, Sangje reordered twenty-four divisions in a new fashion. Matching the more advanced Daoist modality, he replaced their usual starting point at Spring Beginning with the Winter Solstice, the high point of yin and first rise of yang (DIRC 2020, 575). He also insists that it is essential for practitioners to know and follow the seasonal divisions closely: “Someone with good sense knows them. Not knowing them, acting in disregard of seasonal cycles is *cheol buji*” (*Reordering Works* 3: 34).

Rather than working with physical exercises or internal energy circulation, He brings the seasonal divisions into the human body with two different methods. One is the Seventy-twofold Art of Transformation, a detailed way of adapting to the seasonal changes in five-day increments that goes back to ancient fortune-teller Jiang Taigong (姜太公) and illuminates the transformations that occur in heaven and earth in the course of each year. Sangje applied it to set up the Fire Art of Transformation and establish appropriate Degree Numbers (*Prophetic Elucidations* 20). On one occasion, He made two chests

The larger one, which He named the “Creation Chest,” was placed in the Copper Valley (Donggok) Clinic. The smaller one, which He named the “Transformation Chest,” was left in Shin Gyeong-Su's house after He used it as the chest of the Seventy-twofold Art of Transformation. (*Reordering Works* 3: 10)

The other way is through chanting an incantation that activates the seasonal divisions in the human body as it serves to adjust and maintain the yin-yang degrees of heaven and earth (*Reordering Works* 2: 16). It is recited along with many others commonly used that similarly reflect essential Daoist notions. They include the Incantations of Perfected Dharma, the Twenty-Eight Constellations (lunar stations), the Seven Stars (of the Northern Dipper), the Five Inner Organs, of Dispelling Demons, Unifying Essences, Grand Opening, Jade Pivot, and Great Ultimate, as well as the *Scripture of Yin and Yang* (*Progress of the Order* 2: 42). Their purpose in all cases is to enhance and maintain harmony in the universe, increase the smooth flow of life energy, and provide corrective impulses as and when needed.

In content, the Incantation of the Twenty-four Seasonal Divisions consists of the names of their divine leaders. In China recorded in Sima Guang's (司馬光, 1918-1086) *Zizhi tongjian* (資治通鑑, Comprehensive Mirror to Aid in Government; ch. 196; Hsieh 2020, 280, 289), it ends with the classical formula, "In accordance with the statutes and ordinances (急急如律令, *jiji ru liling*)", which has formed an essential part of Daoist ritual since the inception of communal religion in the second century CE (*Progress of the Order* 2: 42). The twenty-four divine leaders, moreover, go back to the early Tang dynasty, first listed in the *Xin Tangshu* (新唐書, New History of the Tang). They all played important roles in the establishment of the dynasty after the conquest, notably under the rule of Taizong, Li Shimin (李世民, 599-649). Squashing wide-spread local rebellions and designing efficient forms of civil administrations, they served both as advisors and military officers.

The key figure among them was Wei Zheng (魏徵, 580-643), his most loyal retainer and frequent advisor. After his death, Li Shimin established an ancestral tablet for him in the Lingyan Pavilion (凌煙閣) on the palace grounds and there hung the portraits of all twenty-four founding contributors in commemoration of their accomplishments. The twenty-four were arranged in geographical directions and also came to symbolize temporal divisions. Wei Zheng in this system is the master of Spring Beginning, the core starting point of the traditional year. He supposedly ascended to the Jade Palace of Heaven at night to serve the Supreme God and attended to Emperor Taizong of the Tang during the day (*Dbharma* 3: 33). All twenty-four, moreover, are worshiped as divine generals in Daesoon Jinrihoe, their names making up the text of the Incantation.

The notion of divinities as military leaders of great martial prowess, like the formula at the end of the Incantation, goes back to the first organized Daoist community, known as Orthodox Unity (正一, Zhengyi) or Celestial Masters (天師, Tianshi), that began in the latter half of the second century CE. Faced with major natural disasters, demonic infestation, and social instability, they created "a new covenant that bound the demons and faithful into an alliance through a mutual oath to adhere to sets of rules and prohibitions" (Lai 2002, 270). At the same time, they made their members into supernatural officers, serving as "minor functionaries on the margins of the vast bureaucratic pantheon of the otherworld" (Nickerson 1994, 49), thus forming a "guild of ordained religious specialists" (1994, 64). In this function, they had control over an extensive corps of divine or spirit generals—heavily armored, fierce, and awe-inspiring—that would make short shrift of any potentially harmful supernatural entity (Kleeman 1998, 72; 2016, 189; Kohn 2019, 37).

Everyone, from children on up, underwent formal initiations at regular intervals to receive registers (籙, *lu*) that contained a list of such spirit generals and specified its bearer's identity, rank, and home district. Although these divinities lived within the body of the bearer, he or she had to wear the written list in a piece of silk at the waist constantly, removing it only temporarily (Kleeman 2016, 275-76; Bumbacher



2012, 108). At about age seven, youngsters typically received nine soldiers and clerks; after five years of training, during adolescents, they advanced to be protected by one divine general complete with extensive troops and administrative staff. After another four years, as young adults, members commanded a set of ten spirit generals and were able to represent the pleas of others, submitting petitions to the otherworld (Kleeman 2016, 278). Eventually leading register disciples held as many as seventy-five generals if unmarried, and 150 if a married couple. “Reaching this level of register, one would have a full complement of spirits” (2016, 279).

These spirits were activated through ritual which also included spells and incantations; they served to exorcise demons, heal diseases, and generally enhance harmony and well-being. The Daesoon Jinrihoe practice of chanting the names of inspiring leaders, honored as divine generals, thus follows the ancient Daoist model, bringing the twenty-four seasonal divisions into practitioners’ daily lives.

## The Twenty-four Directions

Another major application of the number twenty-four is spatial in addition to temporal and manifests in the so-called twenty-four directions. They appear first in the early Celestial Master community in Sichuan as a set of twenty-four districts or parishes, called *zhi* 治, a word that means “to order” or “govern.” Each of these was governed by a so-called libationer (祭酒, *jijiu*) who served as its leader and reported directly to the Celestial Master himself, marking the system of twenty-four as the backbone of the organization (Kleeman 2016).

In more abstract cosmology, the directions consist of six distinct positions in each of the four cardinal directions, marked by star clusters that the sun passes through in the course of the year. In that, they are not unlike the twenty-eight lunar stations or mansions (宿, *xiu*), which represent constellations that the moon passes through, allotting thirteen days on average for each, but in fact varying in duration (Hsieh 2020, 279, 289).

The Chinese stations follow the same principle as the Indian *nakṣatras* and the Arabic *manzils*, but are fundamentally different (Kotyk 2021). They divide into groups of seven, one each located in the cardinal directions of the night sky and illustrating their dominant animals. Thus, for example, the eastern stations describe positions on the dragon, including its horn (角, *jiao*), neck (亢, *kang*), heart (心, *xin*), and tail (尾, *wei*), while those of the south indicate parts of the bird, indicating its wings (翼, *yi*), extension (張, *zhang*), and likeness to the willow (柳, *liu*). Each station, moreover, carries content in that its days are good for certain activities, and Daoists take care to observe their warnings (Kohn 2021, 78).

The main way of understanding the four directions as intersected by both solar and lunar circuits in traditional China is in terms of the “four images” (四象, *sixiang*) or

heraldic animals (四靈, *siling*). Massive constellations in the night sky that comprise a number of stars not unlike Western zodiac images, they are most potent guardians of the universe (Staal 1984; Major 1986; Chao 2011, 15-20).

Thus, the immense constellation of the cerulean (green or blue) dragon (青龍, *qinglong*), representative of the east, includes stars from *Virgo to Scorpio* (Pankenier 2013, 45). The vermilion or red bird (赤鳥, *chiniao*) in the south “extends from lunar mansion *Willow* (δ Hya) to *Chariot Platform* (β Crv)” (2013, 196). In their animal shape, including also the white tiger (白虎, *baibu*) in the west and the turtle, later combined with a snake and known as the dark warrior (玄武, *xuanwu*), in the north, all four appear first as mussel shell mosaics in a Neolithic tomb of the Yangshao (仰韶) culture, dating from the late fourth millennium BCE (Pankenier 2013, 337). After this, they are depicted on a dragon basin and mentioned in an oracle-bone inscription of the Shang dynasty (1953-1046 BCE), then appear on an eave tile from Fengjing (豐京), one of the capitals of the Zhou before they conquered the Shang (2013, 78, 212).



Figure 8. The Four Heraldic Animals

Essential to Han cosmology and calendrics, the four heraldic animals with their changing positions in the course of the year, like various other celestial omens, provided divine guidance of when to sow and plant in agriculture, when to advance and retreat in warfare. The physical root of the idea of the heavenly mandate (天命, *tianming*), they literally guided the ancients in their most essential undertakings and were responsible for the survival and prosperity of nations. Having them as personal guardians, therefore, provided a level of protection like none other.

In addition, the four cardinal directions are ruled by a set of divine figures known as emperors (帝, *di*), grouped together as the Five Emperors, also adding a divinity

of the center. They are marked by the respective colors of their directions, matching the cosmology of the five phases or movements (Hsieh 2020, 278). The twenty-four directions, then, are subject to these emperors and placed within the constellations of the four heraldic animals. They consist of twelve positions plus twelve stars.

The twelve positions match the twelve earthly branches (地支, *dizhi*). Originally stations of the planet Jupiter, which orbits the sun once in twelve years, they go back to particular constellations that form the root of their unique names. In addition, since the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE, they have been associated with twelve zodiac animals like sheep, dragon, or dog (Needham et al. 1958, 405) that still dominate the energy of individual years and are actively used in horoscopes. This twelvefold system applies to years and positions within the year; it is also used to name days and, most importantly, the double-hours within each day. To make up the full complement of twenty-four, there are also twelve stars that can be either auspicious or baleful and, like the seasonal divisions, are understood to appear as deities or divine generals.



Figure 9. A Starry Deity of the Twenty-four Directions.

The following table outlines the system, placing the branches and stars in the four directions and in the 24-hour system, complete with the starry deities as well as the zodiac animals and internal organs (Wu and Wu 2014, 95-167; Needham et al. 1958, 402-04; Hsieh 2020, 286).

Table 4: The Twenty-four Directions

Direct	Time	Branch		Star		Zodiac	Organ
North	21-23	Hai/Ha	亥	Dengming/Deungmyeong	登明	Pig	triple heater
Black	23-1	Zi/Ja	子	Shenho/Shinhu	神後	Rat	gallbladder
	1-3	Chou/Chuk	丑	Daji/Daegil	大吉	Ox	liver
East	3-5	Yin/Ihn	寅	Gongcao/Gongjo	功曹	Tiger	lungs
Green	5-7	Mao/Myo	卯	Taichong/Taechung	太沖	Hare	large intestine
	7-9	Chen/Jin	辰	Tiangang/Cheongang	天罡	Dragon	stomach
South	9-11	Si/Sa	巳	Taiyi/Taeceul	太乙	Snake	spleen
Red	11-13	Wu/Oh	午	Shengguang/Seunggwang	勝光	Horse	heart
	13-15	Wei/Mi	未	Xiaoji/Sogil	小吉	Sheep	small intestine
West	15-17	Shen/Shin	申	Zhuansong/Jeonsong	傳送	Monkey	bladder
White	17-19	You/Yu	酉	Zongkui/Jonggoe	從魁	Rooster	kidneys
	19-21	Xu/Sul	戌	Hekui/Hagoe	河魁	Dog	pericardium

## Practice Activation

In traditional China, the twenty-four directions were activated in prayers and rituals to honor their deities as well as in the observation of precautions depending on the auspicious or baneful nature of the star. Thus, for example, the star called Xiaoji, “minor fortune,” by its very name indicated potential harm and its direction and days had to be treated with great care (see Hou 1979). The star known as Taiyi, “great oneness,” on the other hand, was linked with the prime origins of the universe and thus full of creativity, rising energy, and renewal.

In Daesoon Jinrihoe, the tendency is to use written characters rather than vocal incantations to activate the powers of the twenty-four directions. Thus, at one time

Sangje ordered Hyeong-Ryeol to mark the sixty-four hexagrams and write down the names of the twenty-four directions on paper and give them to Him. He then went out of the door with the paper and said, burning it towards the sun, “Stay with me” (*Progress of the Order* 1: 62).

Both the writing down and the burning of the paper in a particular direction are practices that go back to the early Celestial Masters. Firmly believing that any disease or misfortune was caused by the invasion of demonic forces due to moral failure, they focused on exorcism and divine magic as ways of healing. First, they isolated the sick

person in a so-called quiet chamber (靜室, *jingshi*), an adaptation of a Han institution for punishing wayward officials involving solitary confinement. There they had to think of their sins going all the way back to their birth to try and find an explanation for the illness.

Once certain sins had been identified, a senior master would come to write them down—in triplicate and together with a formal petition for their eradication from the person's divine record. The three copies would then, in a formal ceremony, be transmitted to the bureaus of heaven (by burning), earth (by burying), and water (by casting into a river), whose officials supposedly set the record straight and restored the person's good health. Another measure of purification that similarly involved the writing down of sacred words and burning was the ingestion of "talisman water" (符水, *fushui*)—the ashes of a talisman covered with holy writing dissolved in water (Bumbacher 2012, 65). By extension, more complex social issues would similarly be dealt with through exorcistic rituals involving celestial and starry deities, thereby righting the structures of the world and enhance the benefits of the Daoist community.

Another occasion of a formal ritual involving the twenty-four directions placed their names on a bell, again after having been written out on paper:

Sangje made a bell by tying an armful of rice straw together and proceeding to hang the bell from the ceiling in the middle of the room, around which He glued blank paper. After He wrote the characters of the twenty-four directions around the bell, He wrote additional characters between some of those characters. He then cut paper in the shape of fish scales and put all the pieces around the bell. It looked like a suit of iron armor (*Reordering Works* 2: 2).

The purpose of this was to purify the area and establish the correct Degree Numbers as part of the great Reordering Work. This is clarified in another entry of *The Canonical Scripture*:

When Sangje practiced a Reordering Work in Chest-Rock (Nongam) Hamlet, He said to Hyeong-Ryeol, "Strings of fortune are connected to the 12,000 floor boards of Immortal-Descending Pavilion (Gangseonru) in Converged Stream (Seongcheon) remodeled by Heo Misu, while an ominous energy is attached to the 12,000 peaks of the Geumgang Mountain. I shall rid the place of that ominous energy." He added, "With Kim Gwang-Chan and Shin Won-Il, cut blank paper into pieces of one square chon (1.19 inch) size and write the character *si* 侍, meaning "to serve," on each piece. But each of you must write this word 400 times each day for ten days and put them on the four walls. Also, you shall fetch a pot of fresh water and divide it into twenty-four bowls in the morning and in the evening every day. At night, recite the Scripture of the Seven Stars (Chilseong-gyeong 七星經) twenty-one times" (*Reordering Works* 2: 13).

A yet more elaborate practice, also working with personal cultivation, is reported about Doju:

Doju finished the work in the ninth month of the Gyehae Year (1923). After building up a stone altar on the heights behind the Seven Stars Shrine (Chilseong-gak) in Tushita Hermitage (Dosol-am) of Pebble-Stream Temple (Jeokcheon-sa) and designating the twenty-four directions, he summoned divine beings of heaven and earth. Then he set up the time period for Holy Works: seven o'clock in the evening to six o'clock the next morning. And he, punctual down to the second, devoted his time to Holy Works for four months from the tenth to middle of the second month of the following year. (*Progress of the Order 2: 28*)

The most elaborate ceremony recorded in *The Canonical Scripture*, finally, involves both written pieces of paper and incantations. Accompanied by four disciples, placed in the four directions of a central room, Sangje ordered them to cut paper in the shape of money and stuff them into an ink-stone case.

Then Sangje had one disciple call out “Deungwu” when pulling out a piece and pass it on to the next. The recipient was to call out “Deungwu” and then pass it on to a third. Sangje had the last disciple say, “China knows the face.” He had them repeat the process but use “Ma Seong” and end with “Japan knows the face.” Next, the disciples were made to say “Oh Han,” followed by “Korea knows the face.” They did this until the Divine Generals of the Twenty-Eight Constellations and the Divine Generals of the Twenty-Four Seasonal Divisions had all been called out, and the disciples repeatedly picked up the paper pieces. Finally, there were no pieces left in the case, because their number was equal to that of the divine generals (*Reordering Works 3: 28*) .

This, too, served to eliminate inauspicious influences, stabilize the energies of the various directions, and bring good fortune and well-being to the region.

## Conclusion

Numbers pervade life. We use them in all different dimensions, but most importantly to mark and structure time, space, and the body, using them to establish calendars, schedules, regions, roadways, and a variety of different bodily signifiers, from age through height and weight to calorie intake and blood pressure.

Numbers in themselves are neutral, but they always come in sets and have an inbuilt dynamic, going from smaller to bigger, from higher to lower. This also means that they



consistently establish hierarchies and inevitably invite comparisons—between 8 am and 12 noon, road number 15 and highway 22, dress size 4 and dress size 10. They also create systems and ranked structures, so that getting first place means winning and ending on tenth place means losing, operating at the ninth level of the imperial bureaucracy is better and implies having more experience than being an initiate of the first.

What is more, human beings absorb the numbering systems of their respective cultures into their very bodies, leading to distinct physical and emotional reactions. For example, if you say to most people in the world, “It is 20 degrees outside,” they will feel comfortable and think of going for a walk. If you say the same to an American, he or she will start to shiver and imagine sitting by a warm fire. The number is the same, but the counting systems differ, referring to degrees Celsius and Fahrenheit respectively: 20 degrees in the latter match minus-7 in the former.

By the same token, working with a seven-day week is deeply ingrained in people today, and we all distinguish work-days from weekends and feel more relaxed on Saturday and Sunday. In contrast the traditional Chinese system worked with a five-day base-week. Using the ten heavenly stems, in close conjunction with the twelve earthly branches, as their names, it provided a more regular and predictable system, where the same kind of day appeared three times in any given month. Also, unlike the West, where days and most other time signifiers are neutral, in China, each day’s name also carries content. On days including the stem *jia* (甲), which means “scale,” for example, it is thus advisable to abstain from eating shrimp and shellfish—a feature that may well involve an active physical revulsion at this time. Altogether, being deeply rooted in the seven-day system, it is hard for us to imagine, let alone activate, this way of working with the rhythm of days—showing just how deeply embedded numbered structures are in the way we function in the world.

Beyond this, numbering systems are always political and reflect the exercise of power, often demanding a disregard of reality. Current examples include daylight-savings time, which everybody hates and nobody changes, expressing the power of governments to make people get up and work at an hour of their choosing—in complete disregard of the natural cycles, so that, instead of the sun reaching its zenith at noon, it gets there around 2 pm. Another example involves the medical profession, which uses numbers of weight, cholesterol, and blood pressure—to name a few—to create certain threats of disease and cause people to take medications that may or may not in fact be beneficial.

Changing numbering systems alters the way people think of themselves and the world, which is why Sangje was so intent on recalibrating the Degree Numbers of various cosmic entities. This is also the reason why Americans have resisted the mandate by Congress and still measure space in miles and temperature in Fahrenheit. On a more positive note, Americans did away with some key numbers in the life cycle and

eliminated the mandatory retirement age, allowing people to think of themselves as being strong and productive for many more years.

Traditional Daoist cosmology assigns strong meanings to each of the cardinal numbers from one to nine and, like many other early cultures, also emphasizes multiples of six, such as twelve, twenty-four, and thirty-six. The system of dividing the year into twenty-four divisions and the night sky into twenty-four directions is a key example on how numbering affects perception and embodied reality. Part of the same space-time, matching the visible progress of the sun through the four directions and the four seasons, the twenty-four divisions determine the time people get up and retire, the food they eat, the clothes they wear, and the way they relate to life. Activated in Daoist self-cultivation in a set of healing exercises and the internal circulation of energy, they are also at the core of spatial organization and ritual expression, notably among the early Celestial Masters. Many aspects of their worldview and practice, then, have made their way into Daesoon Jinrihoe as and when Sangje adapted the twenty-four based system to His own unique project. Not only changing the starting point of the seasonal division, He also encouraged the chanting of relevant incantations and writing of potent characters, allowing followers to connect to the cosmic patterns in their very own bodies and affecting change for the better in the world around them.

## Conflict of Interest

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

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> These numbers refer to the pages and paragraphs of *The Canonical Scripture*.

<sup>2</sup> The abbreviation DZ stands for *Daozang*, the Daoist Canon of 1445. The numbers refer to the index in Schipper and Verellen 2004.

<sup>3</sup> The same set is also found in the *Zunsheng bajian* (尊生八箴, Eight Folios on Honoring Life), in 20 juan, by Gaolian Shenfu (高濂深甫) of the late Ming dynasty. Translated by John Dudgeon, it is found today in Berk 1986, 19-47.



## References

- Allan, Sarah. 1991. *The Shape of the Turtle: Myth, Art, and Cosmos in Early China*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Andersen, Poul. 1980. *The Method of Holding the Three Ones*. London: Curzon Press.
- Berk, William R. 1986. *Chinese Healing Arts: Internal Kung-Fu*. Burbank, CA.: Unique Publications.
- Bodde, Derk. 1991. *Chinese Thought, Society, and Science: The Intellectual and Social Background of Science and Technology in Pre-modern China*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Bumbacher, Stephan-Peter. 2012. *Empowered Writing: Exorcistic and Apotropaic Rituals in Medieval China*. St. Petersburg, FL.: Three Pines Press.
- Chao, Shin-yi. 2011. *Daoist Rituals, State Religion, and Popular Practices: Zhenwu Worship from Song to Ming (960-1644)*. London: Routledge.
- Despeux, Catherine. 2019. *Taoism and Self-Knowledge: The Chart for the Cultivation of Perfection (Xiuzhen tu)*, Translated by J. E. E. Pettit. Leiden: Brill.
- Daesoon Institute for Religion and Culture (DIRC) 2020. *The Canonical Scripture*, Yeosu: Daesoon Jinrihoe Press. <http://dirc.kr/dictionary/app/dt/scripture/dic.php?idx=2#e>
- Harper, Donald. 1998. *Early Chinese Medical Manuscripts: The Mawangdui Medical Manuscripts*. London: Wellcome Asian Medical Monographs.
- Hou, Ching-lang. 1979. "The Chinese Belief in Baleful Stars." In *Facets of Taoism*, edited by Holmes Welch and Anna Seidel, 193-228. New Haven, CN: Yale University Press.
- Hsieh, Tsung-hui. 2020. "Dianjing zhong de daoshu sixiang lai yuan yu zhuanhua yun yong yan jiu" *The Journal of Daesoon Academy of Sciences* 36: 267-98. [Chinese Language Text] 謝聰輝,

「典經中的道術思想來源與轉化運用研究」『大  
巡思想論叢』 36, 267-98. [https://doi.org/10.25050/  
jdaos.2020.36.0.267](https://doi.org/10.25050/jdaos.2020.36.0.267)

- Kleeman, Terry F. 1998 *Great Perfection: Religion and Ethnicity in a Chinese Millenarian Kingdom*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- 2016 *Celestial Masters: History and Ritual in Early Daoist Communities*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Yenching Institute.
- Kohn, Livia. 2001 *Chen Tuan: Discussions and Translations*. Cambridge, MA: Three Pines Press.
- 2008 *Chinese Healing Exercises: The Tradition of Daoyin*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- 2012 *A Source Book in Chinese Longevity*. St. Petersburg, FL.: Three Pines Press.
- 2019 "Armored Gods: Generals, Guardians, Killers, and Protectors." *Journal of Daoist Studies* 12: 35-64. [https://doi.org/10.1353/  
dao.2019.0002](https://doi.org/10.1353/dao.2019.0002)
- 2020a *The Zhong-Lü System of Internal Alchemy*. St. Petersburg, FL: Three Pines Press.
- 2020b *Daoism: A Contemporary Philosophical Investigation*. London: Routledge.
- 2021 *Taming Time: Daoist Ways of Working with Multiple Temporalities*. St. Petersburg, FL: Three Pines Press.
- Komjathy, Louis. 2009 "Mapping the Daoist Body (2): The Text of the Neijing tu." *Journal of Daoist Studies* 2: 64-108. [https://doi.  
org/10.1353/dao.2009.0002](https://doi.org/10.1353/dao.2009.0002)
- Kotyk, Jeffrey. 2021 "Horoscopy in Tang Daoist Astrology." In *Time in Daoist Practice: Cultivation and Calculation*, edited by Livia Kohn, 84-102. St. Petersburg, FL: Three Pines Press.

- Lai, Chi-tim.  
2002 "The Demon Statutes of Nüqing and the Problem of the Bureaucratization of the Netherworld in Early Heavenly Master Daoism." *T'oung Pao* 88: 251-81. <https://doi.org/10.1163/156853202100368389>
- Li, Juntao.  
2020 "Cosmic Body Charts and the Twenty-four Calendar Divisions." *Journal of Daoist Studies* 13: 137-51. <https://doi.org/10.1353/dao.2020.0005>
- 2021 "Cosmic Body Charts and the Twenty-four Solar Periods." In *Time in Daoist Practice: Cultivation and Calculation*, edited by Livia Kohn, 189-202. St. Petersburg, FL: Three Pines Press.
- Loewe, Michael.  
1995 "The Cycle of Cathay: Concepts of Time in Han China and Their Problems." In *Time and Space in Chinese Culture*, edited by Chun-chieh Huang and Erik Zürcher, 305-28. Leiden: Brill.
- Lo, Vivienne.  
2014 *How to Do the Gibbon Walk: A Translation of the Pulling Book*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Major, John S.  
1986 "New Light on the Dark Warrior." *Journal of Chinese Religions* 13/14: 65-87. <https://doi.org/10.1179/073776985805308220>
- Needham, Joseph, et al.  
1958 *Science and Civilisation in China, vol. III: Mathematics and the Sciences of the Heavens and the Earth*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nickerson, Peter.  
1994 "Shamans, Demons, Diviners, and Taoists: Conflict and Assimilation in Medieval Chinese Ritual Practice." *Taoist Resources* 5.1: 41-66.
- Pankenier, David W.  
2013 *Astrology and Cosmology in Early China: Conforming Earth to Heaven*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Robinet, Isabelle.  
1989 "Original Contributions of Neidan to Taoism and Chinese Thought." In *Taoist Meditation and Longevity Techniques*, edited by Livia Kohn, 297-330. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, Center for Chinese Studies.

- 2011 *The World Upside Down: Essays on Taoist Internal Alchemy*. Translated by Fabrizio Pregadio. Mountain View: Golden Elixir Press.
- Schafer, Edward H.  
1977 *Pacing the Void: Tang Approaches to the Stars*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Schipper, Kristofer M.,  
and Franciscus Verellen,  
eds. 2004 *The Taoist Canon: A Historical Companion to the Daozang*. 3 vols. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Sivin, Nathan.  
1976 "Chinese Alchemy and the Manipulation of Time." *Isis* 67: 513-27.
- Staal, Julius.  
1984 *Stars of Jade: Calendar Lore, Mythology, Legends and Star Stories of Ancient China*. Decatur: Writ Press.
- Sung, Z. D.  
1971 *The Text of Yi King: Chinese Original with English Translation*. Taipei: Chengwen.
- Wheatley, Paul.  
1971 *The Pivot of the Four Quarters: A Preliminary Enquiry into the Origins and Character of the Ancient Chinese City*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Wilhelm, Richard.  
1950 *The I Ching or Book of Changes*. Translated by Cary F. Baynes. Princeton: Princeton University Press, Bollingen Series XIX.
- Wu, Zhongxian, and Karin  
Taylor Wu.  
2014 *TianGan DiZhi—Heavenly Stems and Earthly Branches: The Heart of Chinese Wisdom Traditions*. London: Singing Dragon.



# Yiguandao in Korea: International Growth of a Chinese New Religion

**Edward IRONS and  
LEE Gyungwon**



JDTREA 2022,2(1): 85-109

## Original Articles

Edward Irons is a leadership consultant and researcher of contemporary religion. He gained PhD in Chinese Religions from the Graduate Theological Union (Berkeley, CA) and earned MAs in International Business, Asian Studies, and Creative Non-Fiction Writing from Thunderbird School of Global Management, University of Hong Kong, and Bennington College. He is director of the Hong Kong Institute for Culture, Commerce and Religion. Lee Gyungwon is a professor of Daesoon Theology at Daejin University. He earned his PhD in Korean Philosophy and Religion from Sungkyunkwan University. He also obtained 3 MAs in Confucianism, Buddhism, and Christian Theology at Sungkyunkwan, Dongguk, and Sogang University. He is president of the Korean Academy of New Religions and a committee member of the Korean Association of Religious Studies.

Correspondence to

**Edward IRONS**

The Hong Kong Institute, for Culture,  
Commerce and Religion, USA

[robinrobinhk@gmail.com](mailto:robinrobinhk@gmail.com)

ORCID

**Edward IRONS**

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5515-8102>

**LEE Gyungwon**

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7811-1099>



*Journal of Daesoon Thought and the Religions of East Asia* Vol. 2. Issue1 (September 2022): 85–109

© 2022 by the Daesoon Academy of Sciences, Daejin University, Korea

<https://doi.org/10.25050/JDTREA.2022.2.1.85>

**Day of submission:** 2022. 08. 08.

**Completion of review:** 2022. 08. 15.

**Final decision for acceptance:** 2022. 08. 31.

P-ISSN: 2799-3949

E-ISSN: 2799-4252

## Abstract

Yiguandao missions arrived in Korea no later than 1947. Despite many obstacles, including war and internal dissension, the movement has flourished in South Korea. Today there are three active major lineages and another seven smaller networks. This article relates the movement's overall development in Korea. We begin by discussing key missions dispatched to Korea by Yiguandao's founder Zhang Tianran. The northern port city of Tianjin was key to this effort, in particular a single temple, the Hall of Morality. In Korea the leaders found an unfamiliar cultural landscape that was soon engulfed in war. The Yiguandao missions tended to develop independently, without coordination. In an effort to unify the movement, the Morality Foundation was established in Busan in 1952. The article shows how Yiguandao's subsequent success in Korea is connected to the development of indigenous leadership. Local Korean leadership ousted Chinese members from the Morality Foundation in 1954, and this branch has continued under Korean leadership to this day. The ousted Chinese leaders continued to develop their own lineages. Two major leaders, Zhang Ruiquan and Kim Bokdang, were able to establish enduring legacies. A final section looks at organizational traits that will determine the movement's future prospects in modern Korean society.

**Keywords:** : Yiguandao, leadership, lineage, indigenous leadership,  
Kim Bokdang, Zhang Ruiquan, schism

## Introduction

Yiguandao's founder Zhang Tianran (張天然, 1889-1947) began discussing Korea as early as 1945. At that time, the movement was barely fifteen years old in its homeland of China. Its growth had been nothing less than breathtaking. Following the rail networks connecting a rapidly urbanizing China, the movement established Yiguandao temples in all the major urban centers, from Guangzhou in the south to Mukden in the northeast (瀋陽, today's Shenyang). Each temple was led by a dedicated individual charged with a simple mission: salvation through growth. For Yiguandao at its core is a religion of salvation. Each member is charged with spreading this message, and every second counts (分秒逼真, *fennmiao bizhen*).

The northern port city of Tianjin occupied a special place in the Yiguandao network. In 1930 Yiguandao began when co-leaders Zhang Tianran and Sun Suzhen (孫素貞, 1895-1975) united their followers and formally took leadership of a small religious network in Jinan (濟南), a city to the south of Tianjin. Zhang and Sun were jointly recognized as the 18<sup>th</sup> generation holders of the Dao mandate, the *tianming* (天命). Holding the *tianming* allowed them to speak on behalf of the supreme Yiguandao deity, the Unborn Mother (無生老母, *wusheng laomu*). They and their followers could claim unimpeachable authority to speak truth and save humanity. Salvation was possible for the downtrodden and pitiful human race, they taught, but only through Yiguandao.

Zhang and Sun immediately embarked on a strategy of rapid growth. And one of the first places visited with his message of salvation was Tianjin. Like Shanghai, Tianjin was a concession city, a quasi-colony outside the reach of Chinese civil authorities. These jurisdictions could be used as havens for illegal activities and political activists. By the same token the foreign authorities, generally committees of influential business people, gave free range to publishers, educators and business in general. The treaty ports became generators of wealth and magnets for in-migration. The new migrants generally found a free-wheeling atmosphere where new ideas could be encountered and discussed without fear. It was an ideal environment for religious ferment.

Zhang Tianran made a fateful visit to Tianjin in 1934 (Irons 2017). While there he succeeded in converting the two founders, Sun Xikun (孫錫昆) and Yang Guanchu (楊灌楚), of a martial arts academy, Daode Wuxueshe (道德武學社). The academy was renamed the Temple of Morals (道德佛堂, *daode fotang*). The Daode lineage and other Tianjin halls would become a primary vector for the overseas transmission of the Dao. All three of the first missionary groups sent to Korea were sent from Daode lineage halls (Lin Rongze 2018).

This article describes Yiguandao's development in Korea. We rely primarily on what is available in Korean and Chinese sources, supplemented by visits and on-line searches. We will explain the historical events and those individuals who played a large part in



them. Throughout we will need to distinguish between several organizational levels within Yiguandao groups. In Yiguandao settings the Chinese language terms *tan* (壇, altar), *fotang* (佛堂, Buddha hall), and *daochang* (道場, “Dao field”) are often used interchangeably in names and everyday discussions, and will be rendered here using the generic English term “temple.” The category of temple also includes home temples (家庭佛堂, *jiating fotang*), private altars used for community ritual and gathering. The larger category of public temples (公共佛堂, *gonggong fotang*) are staffed by full-time personnel and are open to anyone. Network is a term introduced here to mean groupings of temples, numbering from two to twenty or more, which share some affiliation, for instance, having been founded by the same person or overseas lineage. Lineages (支線, *zhixian*) are larger, more complex groupings centered around a head temple. The major lineages in Korea are registered as societies or associations, while networks are not.

### The Three Missions

Three Yiguandao groups departed Tianjin for Korea in 1947. All three group leaders had been recruited by Zhang Tianran personally. Each group was led by a senior (前人, *qianren*), a title usually indicating the venerated head of a lineage or sub-lineage. The first group, led by Zhang Ruiquan (張瑞荃), departed in July.<sup>1</sup> A second, led by Li Defu (李德福), left in October. And the third group, headed by Jin Enshan (金恩善), left in September. (Lin 2018, 2) All three would provide a powerful stimulus for Yiguandao’s initial development in Korea.

1947 was a momentous year for Yiguandao. Zhang Tianran had only recently been released from prison, where he was held due to charges of collaboration with the Japanese-backed Wang Jingwei (汪精衛) regime during World War II. Yiguandao had in fact grown dramatically during the war, both behind and within lines of occupation. While nominally residing in Chongqing (重慶) during this period, Zhang apparently moved freely throughout different parts of China. With the end of the war, Yiguandao continued its rapid growth. Zhang presided over dharma assemblies (法會, *fabui*) attended by thousands. A major focus of such meetings was the recruitment and training of new transmission masters (點傳師, *dianchuanshi*). New personnel in turn propelled for the movement into its next phase. Zhang’s decision to send three separate groups to Korea can be seen in this light as part of his incessant urge to propagate the Dao. Expansion was part of the movement’s organizational DNA.

At the same time, Zhang Tianrans’ health was ailing—he died later in 1947—and he may have wanted to start as many projects as possible. Possibly too, he may have had an inkling that the Chinese civil war would not end well, and that the communist regime would not be partial to Yiguandao. So it was with some urgency that he directed

Zhang, Li and Jin to go to Korea. As early as 1945 Zhang Tianran had already told Zhang Ruiquan to convert (濟度, *jidu*) the “three thousand bodhisattvas and five hundred lohans” (三千菩薩和五百羅漢, *sanqian pusa he wubai luohan*) [waiting] in Korea (Lin 2018, 3). In an urgent 1947 meeting held at what was then the Tianjin head temple, Tianzhen Temple (天真壇, *tianzbentan*), Zhang Tianran bluntly told all three of the missionaries that his time was running out, and that he would in the future incarnate as a youth in Korea (Lin 2018, 3). This exhortation was evidently enough to spur all three to action, for as we have seen all three left later that year.

The discourse of three missions to Korea reflects the findings of Lin Rongze (林榮澤), who has done original research on Yiguandao missionary efforts. These three parties were certainly the primary vector for Yiguandao’s growth in Korea. However, it is probable that other transmission masters also arrived throughout the late 1940s. For example, Gao Yuncheng (高雲程, later using the name Gao Jincheng 高錦程 1914-1999), originally a transmission master working with Zhang Ruiquan, later became a senior in his own right. (Lin 2018, 3).

## The Unification of the Three Altars (三壇合一)<sup>2</sup>

The early Yiguandao pioneers from China operated independently. The very external environment made cooperation and communication difficult. In China, the victory of the communist forces in the civil war in 1949 ushered in a radically different social environment. It was not long before the new state actively repressed Yiguandao. Leaders were either arrested or forced to go underground. Any central leadership that may have existed during Zhang Tianran’s tenure was probably non-existent after 1949. As a result, missions to other countries were on their own. On top of that, war broke out in Korea in 1950. Fighting raged up and down the entire Korean peninsula. It was a time of turmoil and suffering for the Korean people. The Allied counter-offensive at the Battle for Busan, a desperate, last-ditch effort to turn the tide, lasted between June and September of 1950.

It was at Busan where a major effort was made to unify all Yiguandao groups under one banner. This event is generally referred to in Yiguandao literature as the “Unification of the Three Altars” (三壇合一, *santan beyi*). The three temples involved were the Society of Morality (道德社, *daodeshe*), established by the transmission master Kim Bokdang (金福堂), the Jili Temple (濟黎壇, *jilitan*), and the Guangji Temple (廣濟壇, *guangjitan*) (International Moral Association 2011,6).<sup>3</sup> A revealed text received in the Guangji Temple in September of 1951, from no less than Zhang Tianran, was interpreted as directing the active temples to merge into one organization. This resulted in the formal establishment of a new organization, the Morality Foundation (道德礎基會, K. *dodeok chogibhoe*), in Busan on January 5, 1952. (Lin 2018, 3; Lin Muye 2014,

249) While we can surmise that all three of the component temples are descended from the three seniors originally dispatched from Tianjin in 1947, we cannot be absolutely sure. The sources describing the events are unclear. We know almost nothing about the leadership of the Jili and Guangji temples, for instance. What is clear is that a Korean member, Son Wooheon (孫佑憲, b. 1920), was appointed as president (會長, *buizhang*) of the new organization. We also know the new organization was riven with tension. (Lin 2018, 3; Lin Muyu 2014, 249) There were serious disagreements between the Korean and Chinese leadership. These eventually led to the expulsion of Chinese members in 1954.

The Unification of the Three Altars is one of the most formative early events in Yiguandao history in Korea. The incident can be seen as an attempt by some parties (we do not know whom) to exert control over competing temples. In addition, it clearly reflects the assertion of power by indigenous Korean members. Organizationally this jostling for control resulted in the creation of the Society of Ethics (K., *dodeokhoe*; hereafter, SOE), a major contemporary lineage. At the same time the exclusion of ethnic Chinese leaders forced them to embark on separate paths of development. Like the Korean nation itself, disunity has characterized Korean Yiguandao ever since.

## Yiguandao Religious Bodies in the Contemporary Korea

Today there are still three major Yiguandao lineages in Korea. These are the Society of Ethics (道德會), the Greater Korea Ethics Society (大韓道德會), and the International Moral Association (國際道德協會). As noted, the first group derived from the Morality Foundation in 1952. The second two were founded by the important seniors Zhang Ruiquan and Kim Bokdang. Each group is currently registered as a religious organization with the Bureau of Culture, Sports and Tourism of the South Korean central government. And each one can be accurately studied as a new religious organization within the Yiguandao tradition—using the terminology introduced above, they are lineages. The following section will introduce these lineages as well as smaller temple networks currently active in South Korea.

### A) Society of Ethics (道德會)

After the expulsion of Chinese members in 1954 the Morality Foundation changed its name to the Society of Ethics. The SOE functioned as a purely Korean religious organization. In 1964 its legal structure was changed to that of a foundation, the Jaedan Beopin Dodeokhoe (財團法人道德會). The head office moved to the Gayang-dong district of Daejeon City (大田市佳陽洞) in 1990 (Lin 2018, 6). Today the Society has some 17 branches in addition to the headquarters. There are around 80 transmission master serving around 2000 active members (Lin 2018, 6).

The group's primary scripture, *The Book of Heaven* (天書, *tianshu*) is a massive compilation of multiple texts and historical records, including *fuji* (扶乩) revelation sessions, in three volumes.<sup>4</sup> This work contains transcriptions of revelations received between 1948 and 1953—many predating the formation of the Morality Foundation in 1952. *The Book of Heaven* is thus an important document in the early development of Yiguandao in Korea overall. The original texts were first published Chinese in three volumes in 1980, 1983, 1993, respectively. A single-volume Korean version was not published until much later, in 2012. While the SOE's foundational textual material was all in Chinese, all of the organization's activities and texts are currently published in Korea.

The SOE has a complex organizational structure. In addition to transmission masters and office staff, the Society has developed two unique organizational positions, the promoter (宣傳師, *xuanchuanshi*) and the specialist (專員, *zhuan yuan*). These positions perform functions similar to those of a (中勸士, *zhongqinsbi*) in many Chinese Christian churches. In addition, there are representatives (道宗師, C. *daozongsbi*) and directors (理事長, C. *lishizhang*) involved in governance issues.



Figure 1. Altar in Society of Ethics headquarters, Daejeon City. Note image of Dan Gun, legendary founder of Korea, to the right side of the altar I.

## B) Greater Korea Ethics Society (大韓道德會, K. *daehan doduckhoe*, hereafter, GKES)

Soon after his arrival in 1947, the senior Zhang Ruiquan moved quickly to set up temples, including a number in Busan(釜山), Daejeon(大田), and Daegu(大邱). Of particular importance is the Yukhwadan (育化壇) temple established in Pohng (浦項) of North Gyeongsang Province (慶尚北道) in 1949. This temple is significant because it marks the point at which Yiguandao began to attract significant numbers of Korean converts. (Lin 2018, 6) Zhang not only converted new members, he also trained new transmission masters and sancai (三才), including the sancai Su Ilyang (守一樣) in the southern City of Sacheon (泗川). In 1948, Zhang established the Bohwadan (普化壇) temple in Daegu City, together with the recently arrived senior Pu Huacheng (普化程, later known as Gao Jincheng (高錦程, 1914 - 1999) (Lin 2018, 7).

As we have mentioned, Zhang and other ethnic Chinese leaders were expelled from the Morality Foundation 1954. To make a living Zhang established the Heavenly Virtue Chinese Medicine Hospital (天德漢醫院 K. *cheondeokhanuiwon*) in Seoul's Myeongryun-dong (明倫洞) district. It was only after another ten years that Zhang was able to establish another public temple, in the Hongseun-dong (弘恩洞) district. Zhang established and registered the GKES in 1961. In that same year the Korean government decided to group foreign religious groups under one umbrella, to be called Dongdogyo (東道教), "Teachings of the Eastern Way." The GKES operated under that label for several years, until it withdrew from the umbrella organization in 1963.



Figure 2. Alter at Greater Korea Ethics Society head temple in Daejeon City.

The first GKES leader (全國代表會長, *quanguo daibiao buizhang*, "national representative") was O Seonggeun (吳聖根) (Lin 2018, 8). Zhang Ruiquan subsequently assumed formal leadership in 1963 and dedicated the rest of his life to the GKES. He moved the GKES headquarters to Daejeon in 1986. At that point, Zhang held the movement's first repentance class (懺悔班程, *chanhui bancheng*). And in 1988, shortly before his death, Zhang applied to the government for a new registration.

After Zhang's death in 1988, the society split into two factions. One was led by his son, the other by his widow. The son inexplicably promulgated an announcement of cessation (止道令, *zhidaoling*) ordering that all propagation activities would cease effectively, freezing the membership in its state at the time.

The GKES lists 38 separate branches, established between 1947 and 2011, in all major cities of Korea (Song Byeongcho 2011; Ethics Association Foundation 1980;1983). The current GKES headquarters are in the Dodeokdan Temple (道德壇) in Daegu. There are over one thousand active members (Lin 2018, 8).

A youth branch of the GKES, named the Association for Study and Cultivation of Dao Learning (道學研修會, *dobak yeonsuhoe*), was established inside Seoul Engineering University (首爾工大) in 1974 (Lee, Irons, and Lee 2019, 10). This development reflected the large number of students who were GKEA members (GKES 1974, 2). In 1973 this student group was renamed the Greater Korea Youth Ethics Association (大韓道德會青年會, *daehan dodeokcheongnyeonhoe*).



GKES purchased expanded premises at Hongeon-dong in Seoul in 1975, while Zhang was still alive. Due to financial constraints, construction dragged on for six years. The new headquarters was finally opened in 1980 (GKES 1980, 1). With the opening of the Daegu assembly hall in September of that same year, the assembly decided that the GKEA's primary mission and activities would henceforth be decided by the heads of relevant departments. These new regulation (新道規, *xindaogui*) were intended to guide all branches and missionary work from that point on (GKES 1980, 1). This resulted in a trend toward devolution of power from the central organization to local units. One presumably unintended result was the application of a number of transmission masters from Daegu who announced to Zhang Ruiquan their intention to separate from the movement (發表離異宣言, *fabiao liyi xuanyan*).

Zhang was succeeded by the second generation leader, Jang Yonghun (張永勳, 1960-2003), who officially assumed the title of senior in 1995. Jang worked to strengthen ties with Taiwan Yiguandao. He had welcomed a significant visit by senior leaders from Taiwan in 1989.<sup>5</sup> A third confession class, overseen by the Taiwan visitors, was held at Myeongdeokdan (明德壇) temple in Seoul. While GKES can clearly be categorized as an independent Yiguandao lineage in its own right, it has maintained close ties with several of the Taiwan lineages. Jang Yonghoon also led a delegation of 130 people to Taiwan to participate in the Taiwan Yiguandao General Association's Celebration of the sixtieth anniversary of Zhang Tianran and Sun Suzhen's mission in 1990.

In April of 2001 the leadership passed to the third generation leader, Kim Changin (金昌仁). He was followed in 2005 by Lee Hanseung (李漢昇). In 2009 the government issued a registration certificate, naming Lee as the legal representative. A fifth generation leader, Choi Dongseong (崔東晟, 1950~), was elected to head the GKES in 2015.

By the late 1990s it had become clear that the GKES was in a period of declining membership. In 2001 the senior Gwak Hyojin (郭孝振) rather inexplicably issued a cessation order prohibiting Dao transmission. (Lee 2019, 481) This meant that transmission masters were no longer authorized to transmit the Dao—in other words, they could no longer admit new members, a policy which was sure to exacerbate membership decline. Perhaps the most significant sign of GKES decline in the period after Jang Yonghoon was the departure of the Cheondeokdan (天德壇) temple in 2014 (Lee, Irons, and Lee 2019, 12). Cheondeok's leader Kim Gigon (金淇坤) proceeded to register his group as the Korean Maitreya Buddha Hall of Heavenly Grace (韓國天恩彌勒佛院, *hanguk cheoneun mireukbul-won*). This was a major event in several ways. First, it was a further splintering of the GKES. Second, it marked the formal entry of a competing Yiguandao-inspired religion, Maitreya Great Tao (彌勒大道). This group had originally been a splinter group of Yiguandao called the Heavenly Grace Hall of Maitreya (天恩彌勒佛院, *tianen mile foyuan*). Maitreya Great Tao did not formally register as a separate religion in Taiwan until 2000. Clearly, the Korean temple's departure was the result of early lobbying and a strategic shift on Kim's part.

In terms of religious practice, Zhang Ruiquan placed special emphasis on inner cultivation (內功修煉, *neigong xiulian*) (Lin 2018, 8). Upon his death he left several foundational texts, in Chinese, including *Ten Essentials for Cultivating the Way* (修道十要, *xiudao shiyao*, 1977) and *Ten Prohibitions for Dao Cultivation* (修道十不可, *xiudao ren shibuke*, 1978).<sup>6</sup> The Ten Prohibitions are of particular interest because they focus on issues relevant to women.<sup>7</sup>

Overall the GKES has been able to survive for sixty years, no mean feat. At the same time, it appears that neither Zhang Ruiquan nor his successors were able to avoid schisms and dissension. Some degree of dissension is not unusual Yiguandao groups. However, inter-lineage cooperation is also possible. While the GKES was not able to avoid factions, its major competitors, the SOE and the International Morals Association, have proven able to maintain better institutional cohesion over the same time period.

### C) International Moral Association (國際道德協會, K. *gukje dodeokhyoe*)

The International Morals Association (hereafter, IMA) was established by Kim Bokdang (金福堂) in 1953, before his exclusion from the Morality Foundation. Although the IMA formally submitted an application for registration to the government in 1953, the application was not approved until December 5, 1961. Kim Bokdong was not formally elected president until 1965.

The early IMA temples were generally home temples. The first IMA head temple, Indeok Beopdan (仁德法壇), was opened on Chungmu Street in Seoul's Jongro district in 1948 (Lin 2018, 23). It was moved south of the Han River to Heukseok-dong, in today's Dongjak-gu district, in 1965 (IMA 2009, 37). The largest IMA public temple, Seungmuk Beopdan(繩墨法壇) Institute (教育院), was inaugurated in Buyeo County in the same district in 1988 (Lin 2014, 442).



Figure 3. Altar at International Morals Association headquarters in Seoul City.

The IMA claims to have spread the Dao to one million seekers; some sources say 1.3 million (IMA 2009, 37). While not all of those who receive the Dao continue to practice, the figure of one million converts is suspiciously large and would make IMA one of the largest if not the largest Yiguandao branch in the world. What is irrefutable is that by Kim's death in 1991 the IMA had spread widely throughout South Korea, with some 165 temples organized into 16 districts.

Like many of the Yiguandao organizations in Taiwan, the IMA during the 1980s and 1990s was concerned with the need to train members. Such training took the form of talent trainings (人才培訓, *rencai peixun*) in two forms: national dharma assemblies (全國大法會, *quanguo dafahui*) and repentance classes (懺悔班, *chanbuihan*). These trainings probably reflect the influence of Taiwan lineages, where such trainings had become popular. In all training sessions, Kim Bokdang mandated the use of the principle of humanistic learning (人間學會, *renjian xuehui*). Application of this principle gave the organization's six functional departments latitude to plan and develop according to their own needs.<sup>8</sup> The Taiwanese scholar Lin Rongze considers this administrative innovation the key to the IMA's ability to survive after the departure of Kim Bokdang (Lin 2014, 442).

Organizationally, the IMA currently maintains several social service units, including one scholarship foundation (獎學法人, *jiangxue faren*), four charity funds (福祉法人, *fuzhi faren*), and one rural foundation (營農法人, *nongye faren*).

The IMA's publications run to over 100 titles, including *The Edited Talks of Kim Bokdang* (昆水谷人法語輯, *kunshui guren fayuji*), *Lectures on the Furnace Times* (爐期講義錄, *luqi jiangyilu*), *Recorded Lectures on Ethics* (道德講義錄, *daode jiangyilu*), *Essentials of the Way of Heaven* (天道簡說, *tiandao jianshuo*), *Instructions in the Three Treasures* (三寶說教, *sanbao shuojiao*), *The Precious Transmission of Bodhidharma* (達摩寶傳, *damo baozhuan*), *New Understanding of the Study of the Way* (道學新論, *daoxue xinlun*), and *Acknowledge Principle and Return to Truth* (認理歸真, *renliguizhen*) (Lee 2014, 217-269). Most significant of all the IMA publications are Kim Bokdang's collected writings, which have recently been published in Taiwan (IMA 2016). In addition the IMA began to publish a magazine, *Ethics* (道德, *daode*), targeted at members, from 1965.

One important development was Kim's announcement of the cessation of *fuji* (扶乩) revelations in 1955 (Lin 2018, 10). Up until that point all important decision and developments had been guided and validated by *fuji* revelations. While widespread in popular Chinese religion, the practice of consulting *fuji* had begun to fade in Taiwan Yiguandao groups as well.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, spirit writing continued to carry much weight among Yiguandao members, and *fuji* is still practiced today in some temples. There is no doubt that the divine revelations received through *fuji* have been treated as being to some degree the actual pronouncements of the deities contacted. The instruction to



stop using *fuji* revelations in the IMA was therefore a major development. Ironically, it came in the form of a revealed directive from a deity, the Master of Examinations (院長大人, *yuanzhang daren*), concerning the will of the Heavenly Ancient Mother (上天老母, *shangtian laomu*):

Do not carry out any further revelations. From today if there are any revelations carried out it goes against the celestial rules. From now on the Dao affairs in Korea will be carried out according to the instructions of Master Kim Bokdang. *His instructions are identical to the will of the Unborn Mother.* [Italics added.]

今後不要進行任何降筆, 從今天起如果再進行降筆就是違法佛規的行動。  
今後韓國得道務就跟隨金福堂前任的指示來進行, 金福堂的指示和上天老母的天命毫無差別. (IMA 2011, 15)

This revelation indicated that all of Kim's actions would carry the divine imprimatur. There would therefore be no need to practice *fuji* revelation in the future. Assuming that this announcement was orchestrated, we can only speculate as to the reasons Kim stopped using the *fuji*. At the very least it indicates that his influence was paramount within the IMA.

Another significant aspect of Kim Bokdang's tenure was his effort to position the IMA as a patriotic organization. In keeping with many other religious leaders in Korea, Kim held dharma assemblies to pray for unification between north and south (巡迴大法會, *xunhui dafahui*). The first of these symposia was held in 1981 and the second in 1982. Jichu(基礎) Lineage seniors Su Shouxin (蘇守信) and Zhang Peicheng (張培成) were invited to attend from Hong Kong and Taiwan, respectively.

By all indications Kim managed the organization tightly. He is today widely revered by IMA practitioners. Nevertheless, it is remarkable that Kim Bokdang's Korean branch of Yiguandao took root in Korea in the first place. One possible explanation is that Kim was adept at integrating Yiguandao's eschatological message, a key component of doctrine, into an environment of Korean millenarianism. When Kim Bokdang met with the Patriarch Sun Suzhen in 1971, he was given specific authority to develop an additional 500 transmission masters. These 500 leaders must have been recruited and trained in an environment of strong belief in the Yiguandao millenarian message, one which found strong echoes in Korea.

Kim Bokdang is no longer present. In contrast to practice in most Chinese Yiguandao groups, the IMA has not appointed a new senior to replace him. At this time there are several seniors heading sub-lineages, but no single leader has risen to prominence. This means that the IMA headquarters functions without a senior leader. The lack of strong leadership is in stark contrast to the situation during Kim Bokdang's tenure. Perhaps

as a result of the organizational stasis, there is some concern within the IMA that Yiguandao will gradually decline in Korea.

Besides these three major lineage organizations, beginning in the 1990s several other Yiguandao groups established temples in Korea. Some of these have developed into major temple networks with potential for further growth.<sup>10</sup>

#### **D) Korean Maitreya Buddha Hall of Heavenly Grace (韓國天恩彌勒佛院, *K. banguk cheoneun mireukbul-won*)**

As mentioned briefly above, the Korean Maitreya Buddha Hall of Heavenly Grace strictly speaking belongs to a separate religious tradition, Maitreya Great Tao. This new religion was formally registered in Taiwan in 2000. At that time, it became organizationally distinct from Yiguandao groups. Today there is little interaction between Maitreya Great Tao and traditional Yiguandao lineages. However, prior to its registration the same network claimed to be a part of Yiguandao. Indeed the group's original founder, Wang Haode (王好德, 1921-1999), claimed to have received the *tianming* directly from the joint 18<sup>th</sup> patriarch Sun Suzhen on her deathbed. In addition, all ritual and terminology used by Maitreya Great Tao remains recognizably within the Yiguandao fold. Maitreya Great Tao clearly shares a history and soteriology with Yiguandao groups. For this reason, we treat Maitreya Great Tao and its Korean branch as a member of the family of Yiguandao-derived religious groups.<sup>11</sup>

The transmission master Kim Gigon (金淇坤) had established the predecessor temple, Cheondeokdan, in 1996.<sup>12</sup> Up until the point where he disassociated his group from the Greater Korea Ethics Society, Kim had been a transmission master in the Puhua Temple established by Zhang Ruiquan and Gao Yuncheng in 1948. Kim's organization is now an official branch of Maitreya Great Tao. According to the *Dictionary of Korean New Religions*, the Korean Maitreya Buddha Hall of Heavenly Grace network had 16 temples in 2014 (Kim 2016, 1172).



Figure 4. Altar at Maitreya Great Tao (Korean Branch) head temple in Daegu City.

### E) Anyang (安養) Temple Network

We noted that Li Defu (李德福) led the second group which departed Tianjin in 1947. He arrived in Korea in 1948, and began working in the city of Anyang (安養), to the south of Seoul. We know that he established the Munhwadan (文化壇) in 1948. Li's successor was Wang Uishin (王義臣, Wang Yichen), who was in turn succeeded by Lee Jinbang (李振芳, Li Zhenfang), both originally from China.<sup>13</sup> There are currently between 10 and 20 temples in this network.

### F) Daren (大仁壇) Temple Network

Gao Yuncheng (高雲城), a native of Baozhi City (寶坻) in Hebei (河北), arrived in Korea in 1949, ostensibly with the goal of assisting Zhang Ruiquan. Gao worked in Daegu City, where he established the Cheonheungdan (天興壇) temple. Following the expulsion of Chinese members from the Morality Foundation in 1954 he worked independently. The major temple of this group is the Daegu Daeindan (大邱大仁壇) temple.

### G) Nanxing (南興) Temple Network

Nanxing was established in 1985 by 李翼淳, a Korean scholar who had received the Dao at the Xingyi Lineage (興毅組, *xingyizū*) Nanxing Temple (南興道場) in Taiwan (chinareviewnews 2010). As of 2000, this group's network had four temples. In addition to Nanxing Temple, Li also established the Goyngindang (宏仁堂) temple in Seoul in 1990, the Sun Family Temple (孫氏堂, *sonssidang*) in Daejeon in 1999, and Daejeon City Public Temple (大田市公共佛堂, K. *daejeon-si gonggongbuldang*) in 1990. This network can be considered a branch of Taiwan's Xingyi Lineage.

### H) Fayi Chongde Temple (發一崇德道場) Network

A major sub-lineage from Taiwan, Fayi Chongde (發一崇德), established several temples in Korea, beginning with the Bupyeong Kimssidang (富萍金氏堂) temple in 1998. This was followed by the Indeok Gongdang (仁德公堂) temple in Suwon (水源) and the Douideok Gongdang (道義德公堂) temple in Gangwon (江源). In 2000 the Yedeok Gongdang (禮德公堂) temple was established in Incheon (仁川). Two of the public temples in the network, Uideok (義德) and Jideok (智德), were opened by Korean followers, the rest by ethnic Chinese.

## I) Deokhwadang (德和堂) Temple Network

The Dukhwadang Temple Network is a second temple network under Taiwan's Fayi Lineage (發一組, *fayizu*), specifically under the Tianyuan Changsheng Temple (天元長聖道場, *tianyuan changsheng daochang*) sub-lineage. Dukhwadang was established in Seoul in 1987. It was followed by the Dukguangdan (德光堂) temple. The network has over 10 affiliated temples, including some in Busan and Jinju (晉州).

## J) Tianxiang Temple (天祥道場) Network

This temple was established in Seoul in 1991. There are two temples in the network. Overall the many smaller networks in Korean Yiguandao are affiliated with various Taiwanese lineages. They reflect the growing influence of Taiwanese Yiguandao groups, as well as the effort to spread Yiguandao internationally.

## Major Leaders in Focus—Zhang Ruiquan and Kim Bokdang

Little information exists on the major Yiguandao leaders, with two exceptions, Zhang Ruiquan and Kim Bokdang.<sup>14</sup> The lineages they founded, the Greater Korea Ethics Society and the International Morals Association, have collected large amounts of relevant material on their lives. In this section we will fill in some of the personal details for both men's lives. Both were born in northern China and received the Dao in Tianjin. Both were asked to go to Korea by the 18<sup>th</sup> patriarch, Zhang Tianran. Once in Korea their paths diverged, and the organizational networks they founded remain separate to this day.

### A) Zhang Ruiquan

Zhang Ruiquan's party of three was the first known group of Yiguandao masters to depart for Korea. A native of Ningjin (寧津) County near Tianjin, Zhang received the Dao in 1941, when he was 27. He was mentored by his direct transmission master, the senior Yang Guanchu (楊灌楚直屬前人). After receiving the Dao, Zhang established a clinic near the Chonghua Temple (崇華堂, *chonghuatang*) in Tianjin. He worked there for five years, under the supervision of the Dao Master (道長) Zhang Wenyun (張文運) (Song 2011, 5). Zhang Ruiquan met Zhang Tianran and Sun Suzhen several times during this period, at one point serving them a meal. It was at one of these moments that Zhang Tianran requested Zhang Ruiquan help spread the Dao in Korea (Song 2011, 5).

Yiguandao's founder Zhang Tianran issued an order to cease propagation of the Dao (止渡令, *zhidaoling*) in 1945 (Lee S. 2011, 106). He said that it was time for the Dao to spread internationally, and he specifically noted that Korea would be the first choice

for propagating the Dao outside China: “Our Dao of Prior Heaven must spread outside,” he said.<sup>15</sup> With such a portentous instruction, it is not surprising that Zhang Ruiquan responded quickly.

Zhang Ruiquan’s first step was to move to Andong (安東), in China’s far northeast. There he enlisted financial help from a local senior, Chen Huiquan (陳惠泉) (Song 2011, 22). This stopover turned into an extended stay of three years, during which Zhang worked on spreading the Dao and saving up funds for the mission to Korea.

Zhang finally made arrangements to depart on a small sailing vessel on July 7 of 1947. He was accompanied by Zhou Shenxiu (周慎修), the transmission master Wang Shaowen (王紹文), the young *tiancai* (天才) Li Zhaoxu (李兆煦), and the temple master (壇主 *tanzhu*) Zhang Nianxue (張年學). They brought some building materials and enough food for 20 days, which reportedly took all their cash. (Song 2011, 26)

The trip did not go smoothly. The boat was forced by bad weather to take cover near an island in China. Arriving eventually in Korea, the party was interrogated at Jinnampo (鎮南浦), in what is now North Korea. They next reached Dukjeok Island (德積島). From there they moved to Wolmi Island (月尾島). The entire trip took 49 days (Song 2011, 30). Not only was this the first Yiguandao mission in Korea, it was one of the earliest Yiguandao missions overseas.<sup>16</sup>

The period between 1952 and 1961 was one of hardship. Zhang’s greatest challenge came after the Three Altars Incident, when he was shunned by all temples and existing Yiguandao organizations. To survive he opened up a Chinese medicine shop in Daegu (大邱). He eventually moved to Seoul, where he lived simply in the Mungryundong (明倫洞) district in a one-room residence. He later started yet another Chinese medicine shop. He eventually received a license to practice Chinese medicine, and established the Cheondeok Hanui-won Hospital (天德漢醫院) (Song 2011, 38-40). All of this activity kept him occupied throughout the 1950s. The GKES did not begin until 1961.

Clearly, Zhang’s career in Korea was filled with challenges. He did not achieve the major breakthrough for Yiguandao that he probably wanted. But his followers admire his perseverance to this day (Song 2011, 31).

## B) Kim Bokdang

Kim was born into an ethnic Korean family in Wuyi County (武邑縣), Hebei province. He moved to Tianjin when he was 16 and later graduated from Nankai University, where he majored in philosophy. After graduation he established a small factory and retail store selling belts.

Not only was Kim of Korean ancestry, his ancestors had in fact been from the aristocracy. The IMA exhibition hall in Seoul displays a genealogy chart (家譜, *jiapu*) tracing his family back to a branch of the Kim (金) family of Gyeongju (慶州). His ancestor thirteen generations prior had been sent to the Qing court as an emissary from

the Chosun dynasty, and the family continued to live in China thereafter.

Kim's wife Zhang Fenglan (張鳳蘭) was the first to convert to Yiguandao. Moved by her example, Kim Bokdang received the Dao in 1936 at the Gangyi Temple (剛毅佛堂) in Tianjin. Gangyi was a sub-temple in the Daode Lineage, which was introduced above as the first major altar in Tianjin (International Moral Association 2011, 4). At that point Kim was 22, probably just out of university.

In 1945, after having practiced for ten years, he became a transmission master. Soon after this Zhang Tianran asked him to go to Korea to spread the Dao, to serve, in other words, as a missionary. Zhang urged Kim on, saying, "When you return to Korea, all the saints and ancestors will help you achieve your mission."<sup>17</sup> Kim left for Korea by steamer via Shanghai; the specific year is not known, but we assume it was 1947 or 1948. In the process Kim left behind his wife and six children. He evidently did not expect to be gone long. Yet he may have had an inkling of the possibility of a separation, as he told his children, "when you are grown up, you will understand me." Kim never saw his parents, his wife, or his eldest son Jin Shuxin (金樹新), again. Both his wife and eldest son were arrested and died in captivity after the communist conquest of China in 1949.

Kim traveled to Korea with two others, Dao master (道長, *daozhang*) Kim Eunchung (金恩忠) and transmission master Cho Uimin (曹義敏). Together they founded the Society of Morality (道德社).<sup>18</sup> The trio at first focused on converting Chinese residents. Ethnic Korean membership began to grow after they converted the Korean wife of one member, Lee Soon Ae (李順愛). The date of the Society of Morality's establishment is not known, but we can assume it came prior to the establishment of the IMA in 1953, since as discussed above the Society of Morality was one of the three major branches folded into the Foundation of Morality in 1952.

Internal sources on the history of the IMA are not always clear. Kim eventually became the pre-eminent power within the organization. But his authority did not go unchallenged. He was, most notably, arrested on several occasions. In 1968 he was accused by a follower, Pan Nam Hong, of being a spy sent by Mao Zedong (IMA 2011, 17). He was reportedly called in to the National Security Planning and tortured before being released at night into a public cemetery in Seoul. His life had in fact been spared through the intervention of a colonel in the military police, Yang Yeongtae (梁英泰), whose wife was in turn the niece of a Yiguandao Great Master (IMA 2011, 24).

According to the Association's material, competing parties continually conspired to spread rumors and falsehoods about Kim throughout his life. In 1976 another serious accusation by seven followers led to Kim's imprisonment. After this he remained under constant police surveillance. His legal trials continued well into the 1990s, when he was finally acquitted in court.

On yet another occasion Kim was deceived by a transmission master named Lee Man Shik (李萬植) who oversaw the Jesebuldang (濟世佛堂) temple in Busan. It was Lunar New Year's Eve. Li warned Kim that he was about to be arrested, and that he should go



into hiding. Kim and another member, Shin Bok Gyun (申福均), then went into hiding for several days. At the same time Lee reportedly tricked Kim into passing him a large sum of money.

Following his death in 1991 Kim was given the posthumous title of Ancient One of the Turbulent Waters (昆水谷人, *kunshui guren*). He is widely believed to have been an incarnation of Maitreya Buddha.<sup>19</sup>

## Discussion and Conclusion

This survey focuses on institutional development of a major world religion, Yiguandao, in a specific national context, South Korea. While we mention historical events and the major individuals behind Yiguandao's push into Korea, our main focus is to understand how Yiguandao institutions have developed in Korea. Several elements of institutional identity are clear. Firstly, Yiguandao's move to Korea, from both the adjacent bases in Tianjin and Andong and, later, from Taiwan, was a natural evolution. Korea lies next to China's northeast and has always enjoyed close cultural and trade interaction with a number of Chinese cultures. Korea has a shared background in Buddhism and Confucianism, as well as some Daoism, all of which are components of Yiguandao ideology and practice. And in the post-WWII period of economic prosperity South Korea became a wealthy and open society, posing relatively few barriers to propagation. Taiwan, Japan, and Korea have developed deep ties throughout the post-war period. It should not be surprising that a Chinese religious tradition focused on growth and ritual practice should take root in Korea.

A second salient feature of Yiguandao in Korea is indigenization. A significant percent of the active lineages is fully Korean, especially the Society of Ethics. This situation with Yiguandao is not unique—it mirrors the indigenization of other forms of Korean religiosity, in particular Buddhism and Christianity. Nevertheless, not all Yiguandao satellite temples manage to take root in other parts of the world. Based on the current authors' observations, in many cases they remain ethnic temples run by Taiwanese, Chinese, or Vietnamese immigrants, with at best a small number of token local members. Yiguandao has had great success in such countries as Korea and Thailand, where the initial Taiwanese leadership has been replaced by locally trained transmission masters. For this reason, the degree of indigenization in Korea is worthy of note, and a sign that Yiguandao still has potential to be a major religion on the world stage.

A third finding is in the area of doctrine. The sacred texts found in the active lineages in Korea often consist of standard Yiguandao ritual and divination texts. The Society of Ethics has a major collection of writings, in both Korean and Chinese, but these were collected early on, in the 1950s, and consist largely of the revealed texts obtained through *fujī* divination. The International Morals Association holds many of the writings of Kim

Bokdang, in Chinese, which have yet to be fully studied. Kim had a background in academic philosophy, as well as a thorough knowledge of Yiguandao, so there may very well be unique theological innovations in his writings. However, from the point of view of practice the lineages surveyed here have kept to standard Yiguandao teachings and ritual practice. There are as yet few signs of innovation in theology. The relative resistance to doctrinal change is not confined to Korea, of course. Many of the Taiwanese lineages are similarly ambivalent about doctrinal innovation.

A fourth topic is relations between the Korean units and the Taiwan lineages. Throughout this period of turmoil and development in Korea, Yiguandao was undergoing its own course of development in Taiwan. The numerous *qianren* and transmission masters who had moved there from China included many senior Dao masters from major lineages and temples in China. In addition the wife of the founder, Sun Suzhen (孫素貞), had herself located to Taiwan in 1953. From no later than the 1970s at least eighteen active lineages and more sub-lineages have been active in Taiwan. Many of these had large membership bases and stable funding resources, allowing them to spread overseas. Based on our description above, in the Korean context Fayi and Xingyi were the most active Taiwan lineages.

Relations between Korean Yiguandao and the Yiguandao lineages in Taiwan appear to have been limited until the 1970s. Sun Suzhen finally dispatched a delegation to visit Korea, and specifically Kim Bokdang, in 1971. The delegation was led by Yiguandao leaders Dong Yiming (董義冥) as well as Su Shouxin (蘇受信) (IMA 2011). From the importance attached to this visit in the IMA's account we can confidently assume that Kim still paid allegiance to Sun. And he personally visited her in Taiwan in 1973. While there he received confidential instructions from Sun. First was a teaching on the saving of sinners through repentance (懺悔渡罪經, *chanbui duzuijing*). He was also given the authority to develop 500 transmission masters. The GKES also appears to have enjoyed close relations with Taiwan lineages, in particularly Fayi.

A final finding seen clearly in this article is that the various lineages and networks in Korea are not united. From a civil society standpoint, the lineages and networks share a common background but have failed to join together into a single organization to represent their shared interests. Such pan-lineage and pan-network cooperation has been difficult in Yiguandao in general. In fact, it has only happened in Taiwan. Yiguandao organizations in other locations, including mainland China before 1949, maintained sole loyalty to the respective lineage and founder. Even in Taiwan only about 60% of temples belong to the umbrella organization, the Yiguandao Association.

From one angle this lack of unity is not surprising. The temple's mission is to propagate the Dao, and the organizing mechanism to accomplish this is through motivated transmission masters going out into the field, supported by temples. In theory there is no remit to cooperate beyond the lineage. In practice, lineage rivalries block potentially



beneficial inter-lineage cooperation. This competition can be seen as an organizational trait of Yiguandao lineages in general, dating back to the very founding of the movement in 1930, when Zhang Tianran and Sun Suzhen joined forces and received the *tianming*. At the time the *tianming* had been “temporarily held” by the daughter of the 17<sup>th</sup> patriarch. Following Zhang Tianran’s death in 1947 there were new splits between followers of his first wife and Sun Suzhen. And once in Taiwan the various lineages, all deriving from different mother temples in China, generally focused on their own internal development. So inter-group rivalry is nothing new.

Yet there is also a strong argument for some level of cooperation. A single organization can speak with a powerful voice in civil society settings. It can promote certain values and present an accurate image of the religion. It can control messaging. And it can effectively lobby the government. Taiwan’s Yiguandao Association, while sometimes struggling, has proven its value in these regards.

The Korean example of Yiguandao is at once a great success and, paradoxically, a possible failure. The largest branch, IMA, claims to have registered over a million adherents. In the Yiguandao context this means that a large number of people have sought the Dao (求道, *qiudao*) at lineage altars. This is an extraordinary success, by most measures.

At the same time there is a time bomb ticking under the surface. Kim Bokdang, the Patriarch of the major lineage, the IMA, died in 1991. At the time there were five subsidiary *qianren* under Kim; three have since died, and the last two are elderly. The movement’s current leader is not a *qianren*, but the Head Transmission Master (領導點傳師, *lingdao dianchuanushi*).

The organization continues to function, but without its charismatic leader. In some ways the IMA appears to be frozen in its tracks, unable to change course. This may also be the case with all the other lineages and networks discussed above, with the exception of the Maitreya Great Tao branch. Several of the Taiwan-affiliated networks may also show institutional vitality.

Yiguandao successfully spread into a Korea that was reeling from war and beginning to develop. Today’s South Korea is a very different setting. Institutional flexibility and accommodation will still be needed to adjust to modern society. South Korea’s current condition as a developed nation will continue to test Yiguandao’s resilience.

## Conflict of Interest

Edward Irons has been on the Editorial Board of *JDTREA* and Lee Gyungwon has been the Associate Editor of *JDTREA* since July 2021 but neither had any no role in the decision to publish this article. No potential conflict of interest relevant to this article was reported.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> In this text Chinese romanization will be used to refer to these three original leaders. Korean romanization will be used for other Chinese leaders who stayed in Korea, as well as for all Korean individuals. Chinese characters are given for reference, for all names.
- <sup>2</sup> Lin Rongze has used two terms to refer to the Unification of the Three Altars in Chinese: 三團合一 (*santuanbeyi*) and 三壇合一 (*santanbeyi*). This paper will follow the later term. See Lin (2018, 3).
- <sup>3</sup> This source, provided from the IMA temple, states that Kim Bokdang was named the first president of the Foundation of Morals Association. This claim is not matched in other sources, however.
- <sup>4</sup> The three sections of the Tian Shu are the Scripture of the Heavenly Lord Heavenly Harvest (神主收天經, *shenzhu shoutian jing*), the Scripture of the Imperial Spirit (皇靈經, *huanglingjing*), and the Scripture of the Three Sacred Miracles (三聖妙經, *sansheng miaojing*). Fuji revelatory texts contained in the Tian Shu date from the SOE's early period, and were all originally written in Chinese. Fuji revelation is no longer practiced in SOE.
- <sup>5</sup> The visitors were Zhang Wenyun (張文運), a Dao leader (道長, *daozhang*) from Taiwan's Tianzhen Zongtan lineage (天真總壇, *tianzhen zongtan*), and the senior Gao Banqi (高斌凱, 1924-2008) of Taiwan's Andong Lineage(安東組). See Lin 2018, 8.
- <sup>6</sup> The ten essentials discussed by Zhang are: 1.認道要真要知道道是真的; 2.目標要准要看準目標; 3.修道要誠 要至誠修道; 4.心身要正心靈和身體都要正直; 5.行道要篤行道要篤實; 6.考魔要識要了解考與魔的意思; 7.意志要堅要帶有堅定的意志; 8.責任要負要負起責任; 9.誓愿要了了的愿要了; 10.天恩要報要報答上天的恩德. (GKES 1977, 1-2)
- <sup>7</sup> The ten prohibitions are: 1.不可自己尋死若自己結束生命,會變成魔鬼,遇到再怎麼困難的事,也不可自; 2.不可口說是非不可將他人的過失當成與別人談論的話題; 3.不可嫌夫貧醜不可厭惡家道貧困或丈夫外表不揚; 4.不可搽胭脂粉不可化妝花俏,或過多裝飾,這樣會導致誘惑他人的結果; 5.不可殺生命不區分生命,不隨意危害生命; 6.不可獨自觀劇不可獨自去劇場或獨自觀賞; 7.不可獨自登山遊寺不可獨自登山或去寺廟遊玩; 8.不可串鄰賭博吃嘴不可聚集富有鄰居們賭博,以及好吃; 9.不可好認乾兒不可收養兒女; 10.不可溺女害命不可虐待,傷害前妻小孩. (GKES 1978, 2)
- <sup>8</sup> The six functional departments are general affairs (總務, *zongwu*), international affairs (國際, *guoji*), editorial (編輯, *bianji*), external affairs (涉外, *shewai*), education (教育, *jiaoyu*), and research (學術研究, *xueshu yanjiu*).
- <sup>9</sup> Many Yiguandao members at the time felt it to be superstitious and non-scientific to hold *fuji* sessions. In addition, a series of sensationalist revelations in Taiwan newspapers exposed instances whereby temple seniors had planted the contents of the revelations in advance.
- <sup>10</sup> Much of the following material on the Yiguandao networks in Korea is summarized in Lin Muyu (2002, 134-6).
- <sup>11</sup> The category of groups with resemblances to Yiguandao was first described by Wang Cishan (2009).
- <sup>12</sup> Lin Rongze notes that Kim started the Korean Maitreya Buddha Hall of Heavenly Grace in 1966, which does not make sense, since at that point Sun Suzhen was still alive and Wang Haode had not yet broken with the established Yiguandao lineages. See Lin (2018, 8).
- <sup>13</sup> Li Zhenfang had been in the second mission which departed from Tianjin in 1947, led by Li Defu (Lin Muyu 2014, 193).
- <sup>14</sup> Zhang Ruiquan's background is contained in the GKES publications Song Byeongcho(2011) and Lee Soonhyu(2011), as well as in particular entries in the monthly publication *Ethics Monthly* (道德月報) between 1972 and 1982. Kim Bokdang's life story is found in numerous IMA publications, such as the aforementioned "A brief biography."
- <sup>15</sup> "Our Great Way of Former Heaven must develop overseas" (我們先天大道要傳到外, *women xiantian dadao yao chuandaowai*). Song (2011, 23).

<sup>16</sup> The first Yiguandao mission to Taiwan was in 1945. See Lin (2015).

<sup>17</sup> “Go to Korea, ten million ancestors will assist you to complete your great mission” (你回韓國, 千佛萬祖會幫助你大功告成的, *ni buibanguo, qianwanzu bui bangzhu ni dagong gaobengde*) (IMA 2011, 4).

<sup>18</sup> Kim Eun Chong and Cho Eui Min are mentioned in the IMA source “A brief biography.” Neither of them appears in other records. The authors assume they were ethnic Korean heritage and so use the Korean romanization for their name.

<sup>19</sup> Maitreya fulfills the role of savior in Korean Buddhism. Maitreya belief was a Korean millenarian faith long before the arrival of Yiguandao in 1947 (IMA 2010).

## References

- Chinareviewnews “Yiguandao Spreads Overseas 一貫道: 劫波之後從 台灣走向世界.”, accessed 10 July, 2010 on chinareviewnews website. [http://hk.crntt.com/doc/1013/7/2/3/101372351\\_16.html?coluid=7&kindid=0&docid=101372351&mdate=0730003332](http://hk.crntt.com/doc/1013/7/2/3/101372351_16.html?coluid=7&kindid=0&docid=101372351&mdate=0730003332)
- Ethics Association Foundation. 1983[1980]. *The Book of Heaven*. [Chinese Language Text] 財團法人道德會, 『天書』, 1980[1980].
- Greater Korea Ethics Society (GKES) 1974. *Ethics Monthly*, No. 20 [Korean Language Text] 『道德月報』 20, 大韓道德會, 1974.
- 1977 *Ethics Monthly*, No. 54 [Korean Language Text] 『道德月報』 54, 大韓道德會, 1977.
- 1978 *Ethics Monthly*, No. 71 [Korean Language Text] 『道德月報』 71, 大韓道德會, 1978.
- 1980 *Ethics Monthly*, No. 92 [Korean Language Text] 『道德月報』 92, 大韓道德會, 1980.
- International Moral Association (IMA) 2009 *Essentials of the Way of Heaven*. International Moral Association. [Korean Language Text] 『天道簡說』. 서울: 국제도덕협회(일관도), 2009.
- 2010 *Vestiges of the Teachings of the Ancient One of the Turbulent Waters* [Chinese Language Text] 『昆水谷人傳道行跡集』 서울: 국제도덕협회(일관도), 2010.
- 2011 *A Brief Biography of Great Master Bok Dang Kim (Gon Su Gok In)*, Second edition. Seoul: International Moral Association. [Korean Language Text] 『昆水谷人祖國開荒一貫道傳道簡介』. 서울: 국제도덕협회(일관도), 2011

- 2016 *Dao Scripture of Korean Yiguandao: Recorded Talks of the Sage of Turbulent Waters*. Vol. 1-7. Lin Rongze, and Zheng Zhiming eds. Taipei: International Moral Association Editorial Office. [Chinese Language Text] 國際道德協會(一貫道), 編輯室, 林榮澤, 鄭志明 編, 『韓國一貫道經: 昆水谷人法語輯 1-7』, 臺北 一貫義理 編輯苑, 2016.
- Irons, Edward.  
2017 “Yiguandao Timeline.” *World Religions and Spirituality Project*, 2 December, 2017, <https://wrldrels.org/2017/12/02/yiguandao/>.
- Kim, Hongchul  
2016 Dictionary of Korean New Religions. Seoul: Mosinensaramdle Publishing. [Korean Language Text] 김홍철 『한국신종교대사전』. 서울: 모시는사람들, 2016
- Lee Gyungwon  
2014 “Transmission and Doctrinal Characteristics of China’s Yiguandao” in *Essentials of Yiguandao* [Chinese Language Text] 「中國一貫道的韓國傳來與教理의 特色」, 『一貫道概要』. 서울: 국제도덕협회(일관도), 2014
- 2019 “The History of Korean Moral Society and Its IKuandao Thought”. *Won-Buddhist Thought & Religious Culture* 81. [Korean Language Text] 이경원 「대한국도덕회의의 역사와 일관도사상」, 『원불교사상과 종교문화』 81, 2019.
- Lee Gyungwon, Edward  
Irons, and Suhyun Lee “Research into Korean Yiguandao: The Examples of Greater Korean Ethics Association and the International Morals Association” unpublished paper. [Chinese Language Text] 李京源, 艾恩思, 李秀賢, 「韓國 一貫道 領導研究: 以大韓道德會與國際道德協會為例」. 未刊行論文
- Lin, Muyu  
2002 *Essentials of Yiguandao*. Taipei: Chinese Yiguandao Association [Chinese Language Text] 林慕禹(萬傳), 『一貫道概要』, 臺北: 中華民國一貫道總會, 2002
- Lee Soonhyu  
2011 Oral Lectures of Senior Zhang Ruiquan. Seoul: Greater Korea Ethics Association [Korean Language Text] 이순휴 편, 『張瑞荃老前人講道語錄』, 서울: 대한도덕회, 2011.

- 2014 *Essentials of Yiguandao Korean edition*. Translated by Lee Gyungwon Seoul: Moonsachul Publishing [Korean Language Text] 린완찬, 이정원 역, 『一貫道概要』, 서울: 문사철, 2014.
- Lin, Rongze  
2014 “Studies in the Indigenization of Korean Yiguandao,” *Research in the Study of Yiguandao* 2 [Chinese Language Text] 林榮澤, 「韓國一貫道的「在地化」研究」, 『一貫道學研究』 2, 2014.
- 2015 *Biography of the Senior Chen Wenxiang of the Yiguandao Taiwan Center*. Taipei: Taiwan Yiguandao Studies Archive. [Chinese Language Text] 林榮澤, 『一貫道臺灣樞紐陳文祥老前人傳』, 臺北: 臺灣一貫道學研究院文獻館, 2015
- 2018 “A Study on the Characteristics of I-Kuan Dao that was introduced into Korea from China” Paper presented at the Conference on Yiguandao Studies, Academia Sinica, 2018, 429-459. [Chinese Language Text] 林榮澤, 「一貫道在韓國的發展與其在地化特色」
- Song, Byeongcho  
2011 *Record of the Age of the Revered Seniors*. Seoul: Greater Korea Ethics Society Editorial Department. [Korean Language Text] 송병초, 『馨山 老前人 一代記』, 서울: 대한도덕회편집부, 2011.
- Wang, Cishan  
2009 *The Religious Form of Maitreya Great Tao* (Taipei: Ciguang Publishing). [Chinese Language Text] 汪慈善, 『彌勒大道的宗教型態』, 臺北: 慈光出版社, 2009



# An Analysis of the Meaning Enshrined in the Architecture of the Tay Ninh Holy See of Cao Dai

**NGUYEN Phuoc Tai**  
**DINH Van Thuy**  
**NGUYEN Thuan Quy**  
**TRAN THI Kim Hoang**

Nguyen Phuoc Tai was born in Dong Thap Province, Vietnam, on August 29, 1986. He began his doctorate in Chinese Philosophy at Xiamen University, China in 2015 and graduated in 2020. Phuoc Tai is a lecturer at FPT University, Can Tho Campus, Vietnam. His research focus is Vietnamese indigenous religions, folk beliefs, and Chinese religious studies. Dinh Van Thuy is an associate professor at Ho Chi Minh National Political Academy, Vietnam. Nguyen Thuan Quy is a lecturer at Dong Thap University, Vietnam. Tran Thi Kim Hoang is a lecturer at Kien Giang Teachers Training College, Vietnam.



JDTEA 2022,2(1): 111-132

## Original Articles

Correspondence to

**NGUYEN Phuoc Tai**

FPT University, Can Tho Campus, Vietnam

**tainp11@fpt.edu.vn**

ORCID

**NGUYEN Phuoc Tai**

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8992-6656>

**DINH Van Thuy**

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1747-4512>

**NGUYEN Thuan Quy**

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1324-1690>

**TRAN THI Kim Hoang**

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8342-0>



*Journal of Daesoon Thought and the Religions of East Asia* Vol. 2. Issue1 (September 2022): 111–132

© 2022 by the Daesoon Academy of Sciences, Daejin University, Korea

<https://doi.org/10.25050/JDTEA.2022.2.1.111>

**Day of submission:** 2022. 03. 01.

**Completion of review:** 2022. 08. 15.

**Final decision for acceptance:** 2022. 08. 31.

P-ISSN: 2799-3949

E-ISSN: 2799-4252



## Abstract

In the 1920s, a new religion emerged in Tay Ninh Province, Southern Vietnam, under the name Caodaism; also known as the Third Universal Salvation of the Great Dao. It is the result of the typical combination of three main religions (Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism). Different ethnic groups populated Tay Ninh, such as Chinese, Khmer, Cham, and Kinh. Additionally, the core principle of Caodaism is known as The Three Religions Returned to the Origin, and it is also expanded as The Five Branches Reunited. The Five Branches are humankind's five ways of self-cultivation: the Way of Humans, the Way of Deities, the Way of Saints, the Way of Immortals, and the Way of Buddhas.

Although Caodaism was only founded in 1920, this religion is well known domestically and internationally. This is because Caodaism has a distinctive identity; it is a new religion that advocates a syncretistic combination of essential religious teachings that follow the harmonization and reconciliation between the East and West as well as between the past and present. Moreover, the Tay Ninh Holy See is the most important, first, and largest Cao Dai temple in Vietnam. The temple is located in Tay Ninh Province in southwestern Vietnam.

This article aims to introduce the Tay Ninh Holy See as the birthplace of Caodaism and as the largest Cao Dai religious palace, not only in Vietnam but also in other countries that practice Caodaism. A brief overview of Tay Ninh Holy See's origin, history, and planning will be provided. Most importantly, the style of the architecture at the Tay Ninh Holy See will be comprehensively analyzed to shed more light on the meaning of each section and the details of this temple structure.

**Keywords:** Tay Ninh Holy See of Caodaism; Caodaism; the Third Universal Salvation of the Great Dao; The three religions returned to the Origin; The Five Branches Reunited

## Introduction

Caodaism was formally established in 1926 in the South of Vietnam. It is considered one of the indigenous religions founded by Vietnamese people. This religion provides a mixed philosophy that includes three religions (Buddhism, Daoism and Confucianism). This combining of religious thought is called “the Three Religions Returning to Their Origin (三教歸源)”, and “the Combination of the Five Branches (五支合一)”. In the Later, the five religions refer to Buddhism, Daoism, Christianity, Confucianism, and Geniism. Caodaism is also called “The Great Way of The Third Amnesty Era (Đại Đạo Tam Kỳ Phổ Độ, 大道三期普度)”, and this name has several connotations related to Caodaist soteriology. The following description of the eras can be summarized from Caodaist documents:

First revelation period: [before 2500 BCE] During the development of the Universe, Earth, and life, humankind was still under-developed. God revealed Himself to inspire selected religious leaders in different parts of the world to teach humans different ways to survive and develop. He selected religious leaders (prophets/founders) for each religion: Abraham was the founder of Judaism in the Middle East, Dipankara was the founder of proto-Buddhism in India, and Fu-xi (Vn: Phục Hy) was the founder figure of I Ching Thought (易經, Chn: Yi Jing), in China.

Second revelation period: [thousands of years later] When humans established the earliest forms of society, culture, and nationalism, God created Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism, Christianity, and other religions to bring order out of chaos, and to teach human different concepts of humanity, societies, and different sciences of truth.

Third revelation period: [third amnesty period] In the twentieth century and thereafter, when humans started to recognize the concept of democracy, globalization, worldwide communication, and shared knowledge. God started a new religion calling for religious unification and acceptance. In our modern days; however, people have not always lived in peace and harmony because of the multiplicity of religions. The Caodai religion was announced with the purpose of solving religious conflicts and bringing all religions back to their primordial unity. With that purpose, the Caodai religion emphasizes that all religions are from the same origin: The Supreme Being. Caodai highlights that all religions teach humans the very basic need of love and justice. Caodai stresses that different religions are just different forms of the same truth. Caodai teaches humans to believe in God, believe in humanity, and believe in self, and the key to strengthening that belief is to build up Love, Wisdom, and Inner Strength (Túy 2014).

The history of the Cao Dai religion mentions that the first member of Caodaism was Ngô Văn Chiêu (吳文昭), an official in the French Government at that time. He was influenced by the Minh Sư Đạo (a religion from the Ming Dynasty China that considered itself able to contact God), so he and his friends used a form of planchette writing

known as Cơ Bút (機筆) (Duc 2000) to communicate with invisible beings. When Cơ Bút was used to contact the invisible divine beings. They were taught by Đức<sup>1</sup> Chí Tôn (德志宗, a God of Caodaism) to establish the Cao Dai religion and enshrine the Divine Eye. They went to Tay Ninh to build a church.

Caodaism easily attracted many peasants to follow religious activities through its system of religious philosophy. In addition, the scriptures of Caodaism were written in the form of poems that alternated lines of six and eight syllables (詩六八, thơ lục bát). These poems were easy to read, understand, and learn, and this enabled people to easily become followers. Moreover, Caodaism always adhered to the beliefs and customs of the people, and did not force believers to abandon or restrict activities related to their traditional beliefs or customs. This ensured that people would feel comfortable about joining Caodaism. Therefore, the number of Caodaism followers grew rapidly in the South of Vietnam. In the first year of formation, the number of followers of Cao Dai reached 50,000 (1926). This number continued increasing, and the number of Caodaism followers was about 150,000 in 1928, 350,000 in 1931, about one million people in 1935, and about two million people in 1995. According to the Government's Religious Affairs Commission, by 2015, the number of followers of Cao Dai was 2.7 million. Currently, Caodaism in Vietnam includes Cao Đài Tiên Thiên, Cao Đài Ban Chính Đạo, Cao Đài Minh Chơn đạo, Cao Đài Minh Chơn lý, and the building that will be focused upon in this article is Cao Dai's Tay Ninh Holy See.

## The Architecture of Caodaism's Holy See

Tay Ninh Holy See is located in Tay Ninh province, in the south of Vietnam, approximately 100 km to the northwest of Ho Chi Minh City, and 8 km from Mount Ba Den. The interior of the church has an area of 100 acres, surrounded by 4,000m of brick-walled fences. There are 12 entrances built in Tam Quan style (3-gate style), decorated with lotuses and the Tứ Linh (四靈), four animals with supernatural powers, namely, the dragon (龍, long), the East Asian 'unicorn' (麟, lân), turtle (龜, quy), and phoenix (鳳, phụng). The main gate is taller and wider than the other gates, and is decorated with the paintings of the two dragons fighting for a pearl, lotus flowers, and the three ancient dharmas: the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (春秋, Xuân Thu), begging bowl (鉢盂, Bát Vu), and feather duster (拂塵, Phất Trần).

The *Spring and Autumn Annals* is the name of a Confucian book that posited a theory of Righteousness, Consistency, Concentration, and Great Spirit in order to live in harmony. The begging bowl is a container for food used by Buddhist monastics when collecting alms. The feather duster is tool used by the Daoist deity, Taishang Laojun (太上老君, Vn: Thái Thượng Lão Quân), the apotheosized version of Laozi, to eliminate the dust of the mundane world the covers the human spirit.

Prayer to God the Mother:  
Urging all human races to unite behind one religion,  
God the Mother intends to bring back their conscience.  
Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism  
Unite to teach the true religion.  
(Hiệp vạn chủng nhứt môn đồng mạch,  
Qui thiên lương quyết sách vạn trù.  
Xuân Thu, Phất Chủ, Bát Vu,  
Hiệp qui Tam giáo hữu cầu Chí Chơn.)

Cao Dai directed these three ancient symbols to emphasize the unity of Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism in the Great Religion on the main gate. There is a straight path that leads the east to the temple from the main gate which is inscribed with a couple of statements on the principles of Cao Dai:

CAO THƯỢNG CHÍ TÔN ĐẠI ĐẠO HÒA BÌNH DÂN CHỦ MỤC  
ĐÀI TIỀN SÙNG BÁT TAM KỲ CỘNG HƯỞNG TỰ DO QUYỀN.

This can be roughly translated as:

THE GREAT WAY OF THE SUPREME BEING - PEACE AND HARMONY- DEMOCRACY  
THE THIRD AMNESTY ERA - FREEDOM AND LIBERTY - HUMANITY  
高上至尊大道和平民主目  
臺前崇拜三期共享自由權.

*Explanation:* This religion is above all and opens a great, harmonious, and equal path towards democracy. The couplet praises the worship of Cao Dai during the third era of amnesty as a time to enjoy freedom.

From the main gate to the Holy Temple, there are three stupas containing the body of the Đức Hộ Pháp, in the middle, and Buddhism's Highest Paradise (上品, Thượng Phẩm) and Upper Life (上生, Thượng sanh) on each side. The Towers were sculpted with many subtle patterns and shapes of the Bagua (八卦, *Vn*: bát quái).

Crossing the towers, we can see the Great Terrace of Universal Fraternity (大同社, Đại Đồng Xã) yard with the statue of Prince Siddhartha riding a horse to find truth, followed by Channa, his servant. Next is the tower named Nine Heavens (九重天, Cửu Trùng Thiên). The trigrams with 9 steps are painted in yellow, blue, and red colors. Nearby is an ancient Bodhi Tree cultivated by Thera Narada with seedlings from Bodhidharma (1953). In Bodhgaya, Prince Siddhartha became the Enlightened Śākyamuni Buddha.



Figure 1: A tomb comprised of three stupas, the middle of which enshrines the remains of Đức Hộ Pháp and the other two signify Buddhism's Highest Paradise and Upper Life.

The two sides of the Great Terrace of Universal Fraternity have two paths leading to the Temple. A few meters away from the Bodhi Tree, there is a banner (same as flag) with a height of 18m, a length of 12m (its leaf roll), and a width of 1.2m. The banner is embroidered the two dragons flanking the sun. The body of flat has three yellow, green, and red stripes. In the middle of the green area, there are the Divine Eye (天眼 Thiên nhãn) and Three Ancient Dharmas and the six Chinese characters: 大道三期普度 (Đại Đạo Tam Kỳ Phổ Độ The Great Way of The Third Amnesty Era).

The brick yard behind the banner and the Bodhi Tree is called the Great Terrace of Universal Fraternity. The name shows the spirit of humanity and the spirit of co-existence as the means to live peacefully.

### ***Size of the Tay Ninh Holy See***

Based on its designation, the platform is 1.8 m high, 27m wide, and 135m long. Hiệp Thiên Đài (協天臺, The Communion Tower) is 27 m long, with a bell tower, and a floor that is 36 m high. Cửu Trùng Đài (九重臺, The Nine Level Tower) is 81m long, with a round tower in the middle called Nghinh Phong Đài (迎封臺, Dome of Canonization) that is 25 m high. Bát Quái Đài (八卦臺, The Octagonal Tower) is a 27m long, 30m high tower. In reality, because believers were poor at the time of establishment, the church faced financial difficulties that hampered it being built as it was designed (Nguyễn 2021). Consequently, the size of church was reduced. Its actual measurements are 22m wide and 97.5 m long. Specifically, Hiệp Thiên Đài is 13.5m long, Cửu Trùng Đài is 63m long, and Bát Quái Đài is 21m long.

## General Description of the Tay Ninh Holy See

Overall, the shape of Cao Dai's Tay Ninh Holy See appears similar to Long Mã Bái Sư (龍馬拜師, the mythical dragon horse bowing to the master). The mythical dragon horse is the legendary spirit that carried Hà Đồ (河圖, the river map) on its leg, which further alludes to Fuxi's drawing of the Eight Trigrams of Prior Heaven (八卦先天圖, Bát Quái Tiên Thiên). Traditionally, Fuxi is considered the originator of the I Ching, and this work is attributed to his reading of the Yellow River Map. According to this tradition, Fuxi had the arrangement of the trigrams of the I Ching revealed to him in the markings on the back of a mythical dragon horse (sometimes said instead to be a tortoise) that emerged from the Luo River. This arrangement precedes the compilation of the I Ching during the Zhou dynasty. This discovery is said to have been the origin of calligraphy. Fuxi is also credited with the invention of the musical instrument known as the Guqin, though this is sometimes instead credited to either Shennong or the Yellow Emperor.

When thought of like this, the dragon horse's head is looking due west. Two bell-towers were built like two sharp horns. Located between the two bell-towers, the building with the ground floor called, 'Tĩnh Tâm Đài' (淨心臺, Palace of pure heart), looks like the Dragon Horse's mouth.

The second floor, Phi Tưởng Đài (飛想臺, Palace of Thoughts in Flight Platform or Thông Thiên Đài, 通天臺, Palace of Direct Access to the Highest Authority), is like the forehead and the two doors are like the Dragon Horse's eyes. The middle point is The Divine Eye. Above this, there is a statue of the Maitreya sitting on a tiger's back and a lotus.

The Dragon Horse's Tail is the Bát Quái Đài, leading to the East. The body of Dragon Horse is located in the middle of the Temple (the Cửu Trùng Đài, Octagonal Divine Palace) and is divided into nine sections gradually rising from the front to the back. This middle structure connects Hiệp Thiên Đài and Bát Quái Đài.

### I. The Front of the Holy See

Overall, the Holy See looks magnificent as it has an impressive length of 97.5 meters and width of 22meters. The main gate is in the west with the bell-tower called Bạch Ngọc Chung Đài (白玉鐘臺, The Tower of the White Jade Bell) on the left, with the other tower called Lôi Âm Cổ Đài (雷音鼓臺, The Tower of the Drum of Thunder) on the right. Both towers are 27m high, having 6 floors of differing heights, with short roofs that divide the floors.

The ground floor (first floor) of the two towers has two large rectangular frames with two Chinese characters: Cao (高, High) on the right tower and Đài (臺, Throne) on the left. Above this frame, there are four circular boxes with Chinese characters that identify each tower by name, Bạch ngọc chung đài (白玉鐘臺) and Lôi âm cổ đài (雷音鼓臺) respectively.

The second floor of the bell is covered with the statue of Đức Quyền Giáo Tông (德權教宗 The Acting Pope), wearing the religious uniform of the Church while standing on a globe and holding a celestial book (天書, Thiên Thư) in his right hand. On the second floor of the right tower, we can see the statue of Đầu Sư Hương Thanh (頭師香青, the Female Cardinal Hương Thanh) in uniform, standing on a globe, and holding a branch of a tree in her right hand and a flower basket in her left hand. These are two great dignitaries who contributed to publicizing the religion as well as building the Holy See.

The third floor has a lower ceiling smaller height, meanwhile the fourth floor has the highest ceiling. There is a large drum called Lô Âm Cổ Đài and a big bell called Bạch Ngọc Chung Đài on the fourth floor.

On the top of the bell, under the lightning rod, there is a statue of a wine gourd. This image represents the law of the Li Tiezhuo (李鐵拐, *Vn*: Thiết Quả Lý), the past life of the Acting Pope.

On the top of the right tower, there is a picture of a blue flower basket symbolizing Longnü (龍女 *Vn*: Long Nữ) (an attendant of the Bodhisattva, 觀世音菩薩 Avalokiteśvara - *Vn*: Quan Thế Âm Bồ Tát). This character was originally the spirit of the Female Cardinal Hương Thanh.

Right at the main door, there are four pillars in the front and each side has two parallel columns: a red dragon and a lotus flower, with highly detailed carvings, and vibrant colors. The statues display the words Hội Long Hoa (The Universal Judgement; also known as the Dragon Flower Assembly- 會龍花) (Hoskins 2010).

The Universal (General) Judgement is a judgement scene after humanity's movement of learning and evolution. This will be held by the Maitreya. Those who pass the judgement via merit examination may become Gods, Saints, Immortals, or Buddha. Those who do not have enough merit for those positions will survive to become Thượng Ngươn Thánh Đức (上元聖德), minor saints in the era of the recurrence of the first cycle (out of the cyclical rotation of the first, middle, and last cycles). And those who do not pass then will have to wait for the beasts to evolve to become newcomers to coexist at the start of a new cycle. That waiting period can last for millions of years. Before the opening of the Universal Judgement, there will be a final judgment. After that intense upheaval, the Earth will return to tranquility.

In order to enter the Holy Temple, one must climb over Five Steps. The Five Steps represent the Five Great Paths and the five evolutionary steps of humanity: Man, God, Holy, Immortal, Buddha. After walking these steps, we can see the Balance of Righteousness as judgement is conferred upon various entities such as each person and each nation.

On the right is the statue of the Good Genius (善神, Thiện Thần) who is clad in armor and a Golden Helmet (金盔, kim khôi). He holds a large sword and has a gentle



expression on his face that symbolizes goodness (a righteous mind). On the left is the statue of the Evil Genius (惡神, Ác Thần) who is also dressed in armor but has a fierce expression. In one hand, he holds a hammer, and in the other hand, he holds a jade seal symbolizing wickedness.

Above the four pillars of the dragon, there is a semicircle built in a half-moon shape, named Lao Động Đài (勞動臺, the Palace of Labor), with an image of the traditional eight professions in society: Officials, Farmers, Laborers, Merchants, Fishermen, Firewood Gatherers, Ploughers, and Scholars (仕農工商漁樵耕讀, Sĩ, Nông, Công, Thương, Ngư, Tiều, Canh, & Độc). This conveys the meaning that whatever one is and wherever one goes, all return to the Church to be blessed.

The religious flag is hung in the middle of the balcony. The Cao Dai flag has three colors: yellow at the top, blue in the middle, and red at the bottom. The yellow part is embroidered with six words in Chinese characters that identify the full name of the Cao Dai order: ĐẠI ĐẠO TAM KỲ PHỔ ĐỘ (大道三期普度). The blue part is embroidered with the Divine Eye and the three ancient dharmas. The bottom is red which represents Confucianism whereas the previous colors, yellow and blue, correspond to Buddhism and Daoism respectively.

In the middle of two bell-towers, there is a statue of the Divine Eye, symbolizing the almighty, eternal God. The two sides of the Divine Eye have two sentences in Chinese characters.

HIỆP NHẬP CAO ĐÀI BẢ TÁNH THẬP PHƯƠNG QUI CHÁNH QUẢ  
THIÊN KHAI HUỲNH ĐẠO NGŨ CHI TAM GIÁO HỘI LONG HOA

協入高臺百姓十方歸正果  
天開黃道五枝三教會龍花

Meaning:

Participating in Cao Dai, all people worship the right religion.  
God opens a great religion, and all religions unite in Long Hoa  
(Universal Judgement).

Above these two sentences, there are two Chinese characters: to the right is Nhân (仁, benevolence), and to the left is Nghĩa (義, righteousness). Together that are a key Cao Dai concept that promotes the following:

NHƠN BỐ TỬ PHƯƠNG ĐẠI ĐẠO DĨ NHƠN HÙNG XÃ TẮC,  
NGHĨA BAN VẠN ĐẠI TAM KỲ TRỌNG NGHĨA CHẤN SƠN HÀ.

仁布四方大道以仁興社稷  
義頒萬代三期重義振山河



### Meaning:

A benevolent heart spreads all over the four directions,  
the Cao Dai religion is heart-warming and flourishes throughout the country.

For the eternal meaning, Đại Đạo Tam Kỳ Phổ Độ considers it important to make the country more prosperous. On the two words Benevolence and Righteousness (仁義, Nhân Nghĩa), there is a row of Chinese characters and a row of Vietnamese words, are all written: Đại Đạo Tam Kỳ Phổ Độ.

Above all this, right in the middle of these words, Three Ancient Dharmas are depicted: a begging bowl representing Buddhism, a feather duster representing Daoism, and the *Spring and Autumn Annals* representing Confucianism.

The inside of the second floor of Hiệp Thiên Đài is Tiêu Diêu Điện (逍遙殿, the Palace of Wandering). Here, the dignitary Đại Thiên Phong (大天封, The Great Dignity) attempted to connect to God by using automatic writing.

On the roof of the Tiêu Diêu Điện, there is a statue of Maitreya sitting on the back of a tiger to celebrate the Year of the Tiger, the year that Caodaism was founded. The Chinese characters commonly used for Maitreya's name (彌勒, Vn: Di lặc) are meant to transliterate (approximate the phonics) the name such that it begins with an M sound<sup>2</sup> and has a L or R sound in the second syllable. Less commonly, his name was also translated for its meaning as Từ Thị (慈氏, 'of the compassionate lineage'), and this is also related to the word, Từ Ái (慈愛), from the Sanskrit word *maitrī*, meaning to 'affectionately love.' In Buddhist scriptures, it is said that Maitreya teaches the dharma in a heavenly realm and will someday incarnate as the future Buddha. Some traditions hold that he has had several incarnations to assist in the development of Buddhism, such as incarnating as the East Asian Yogācāra (唯識宗, Duy Thúc Tông or 唯心宗, Duy Tâm Tông) at the beginning of the fourth century. Chinese paintings of Maitreya often depict him as round, happy, and fat and surrounded by children. These are images of the Monk Budai (布袋和尚, Bồ Đại Hòa Thượng), an incarnation of Maitreya in the 10th century. Paintings in North India and Tibet often draw him with his hand turning the dharma wheel, meaning that when he appears in the world, he will turn the wheel of dharma again to save all sentient beings. On the other hand, according to the Caodaism, the Supreme God (德志尊, Đức Chí Tôn) established the Cao Dai religion and will bring all people to the Universal Judgement where Maitreya-Buddha will act as the chief judge and instruct people on Hòa Đồng (living in harmony), Bác ái (博愛, Universal fraternity), and how to live as Thượng Ngươn Thánh Đức, those who live with all others in great mutualistic tolerance.

Going up five steps, we will enter into Tịnh Tâm Palace, a place for dignitaries and followers to calm down and develop a spirit of purity before entering to observe the ceremony. The mural depicting the Tam Thánh (三聖, The Three Saints) can also be

viewed here. Tam Thánh are the three Saints in Bạch Vân Đông (白雲洞, The White Lodge). The three figures are as follows:

Đức Thanh Sơn Chơn Nhơn (德青山真人), during his incarnation wherein he was born in Vietnam, he was the historical figure Trạng Trình Nguyễn Bình Khiêm (狀程阮秉謙). In Caodaism's depiction of him in the wall mural, he wrote eight Chinese characters as follows:

THIÊN THUỞNG, THIÊN HẠ - BÁC ÁI, CÔNG BÌNH  
天上, 天下 - 博愛, 公平

The next saint is Đức Nguyệt Tâm Chơn Nhơn (德月心真人), who incarnated in France as the great writer Victor Hugo. In the mural, he is shown holding a quill and writing the French words that correspond to the previously written Chinese verse:

DIEU et HUMANITÉ – AMOUR et JUSTICE  
GOD and People - LOVE and JUSTICE

Đức Trung Sơn Chơn Nhân (德中山真人), in his past life in China, was the revolutionary, Sun Yat Sen (孫逸仙) who initially founded a democracy for China. He used the ink of radiance, symbolizing the harmony between Eastern and Western culture based on the ancient philosophy of Confucianism (Hartney 2015).

These three Saints signed on behalf of the gods a peace agreement between God and humanity. This treaty is quite simple and only contains only four characters or three words in French:

BÁC ÁI – CÔNG BÌNH  
博愛 – 公平  
AMOUR et JUSTICE

*Love and Justice*, are two qualities God requires people to embody in order to be blessed. If someone does not embody them and acts contrary to them, they will be punished without any recourse. Those who aim to the agreement, must find ways to serve the people while helping and supporting the poor. This treaty is believed by Caodaists to have been signed from the day God opened Caodaism to extend Great Amnesty to various types of people. The brief Introduction to Cao Dai's Three-Saints is known as a symbol for building a bridge to harmonize the Eastern and Western philosophies.

From the Tịnh Tâm Palace, there is the path leading to the floor of Hiệp Thiên Đài, where the altars of the Hiệp Thiên Đài dignitaries are placed. In front of the altars, there is a place where people celebrate the ceremony. From Hiệp Thiên Đài, there are two

pathways leading to a bell and a drum floor. Each floor has a large window to allow the bell and drum to reverberate loudly in the air.

## II. Inside the Church

### *Hiệp Thiên Đài* (協天臺, Palace of meeting between God and Mankind)

There are two doors going into the Temple from Tịnh Tâm Palace. The inner room is divided into three spaces. In the middle is the main hall, the right side is for the male sorcerer to worship, the left is for the female followers.

Behind the statues of Tam Thánh, we can see:

The statue of Đức Hộ Pháp Phạm Công Tắc (德護法范公稷, The Maintainer of the Rules and Laws) is in the middle of two senior dignitaries of the Caodaist Judicial Body. Đức Hộ Pháp wears a robe, stands on a lotus, a seven-headed snake is under his legs, and he holds a Kim Tiền (金鞭, Golden whip) in his right hand.

The statue of Đức Thượng Phẩm Cao Quỳnh Cư (德上品高瓊居) appears on the right side of Đức Hộ Pháp. He stands on the lotus in front of the Identification Banner of the Thượng Phẩm (幡上品, Phướn Thượng Phẩm), wears a robe, in his right hand he holds the Dragon-Beard Fan (龍須扇, Long Tu Phiến) with a Feather-Duster of Sanctification (拂塵, phật chủ) on its end, and in his left hand he holds a string of beads called Mercy (慈悲, Từ Bi). The statue of Đức Thượng Sanh Cao Hoài Sang (德上生高懷創) is placed on the left of Đức Hộ Pháp. He stands on the lotus in front of the Identification Banner of the Thượng Sanh (幡上生, Phướn Thượng Sanh). He wears a uniform, and in his right hand he holds a Feather-Duster of Sanctification. In his left hand he holds a string of beads called Mercy, and he has Thử Hùng Kiếm (雌雄劍, a pair of swords) on his back.

Đức Hộ Pháp stands on a lotus flower with two snake heads wrapped around the lotus below his feet. One head has the Chinese character “Nộ” (怒, Anger) and the other has “Ai” (哀, Sorrow). Two other heads, lower and near the base of the raised platform that the lotus is on top of have the characters “Ố” (惡, Hate) and “Dục” (欲, Desire). Altogether, those four heads symbolize the four negative emotions that must be controlled. There are also the snake’s heads that rise upward and indicate the positive emotion that should be fostered: “Hi” (喜, Pleasure), “Ái” (愛, Love), and “Lạc” (樂, Joy) (Nguyễn 2021). The snake’s main head wraps under the statue of Đức Hộ Pháp, the middle of snake wraps under Đức Thượng Phẩm, and the snake’s tail wraps around the pedestal underneath Đức Thượng Sanh.

Đức Hộ Pháp Phạm Công Tắc is the head of the Dharma. Đức Thượng Phẩm Cao Quỳnh Cư is the head of matters in the Dao realm such as assisting spirits in attaining heavenly promotion. Đức Thượng Sanh Cao Hoài Sang is the head of matters in the worldly realm, and helps living beings during their earthly existence.

On the wall behind the statue of Đức Hộ Pháp, there was a somewhat abstract rendering of the Chinese character “KHÍ” (Vapor, breath, internal energy, qì 氣) with the meaning of “THỜ KHÍ SANH QUANG” (祭氣生光, the wielding of qì produce luminosity). KHÍ is held to be the origin of the Dharma that creates all things. All Dharma (natural laws and phenomena) that monitors the universe originated from KHÍ. Wooden plaques on each side of the word KHÍ deliver the following verses:

PHẠM GIÁO TÙY NGƯỜN, CỨU THẾ ĐỘ NHƠN HÀNH CHÁNH PHÁP.  
MÔN QUYỀN ĐỊNH HỘI, TRỪ TÀ DIỆT MỊ HỘI CHƠN TRUYỀN.  
梵教隨緣, 救世度人行正法  
門權定會, 除邪滅魅護真傳

### Meaning

The Buddha taught that us to save the lives of people and to perform  
the righteous dharma.

The power of the Dao eradicates all forms of misconduct and protects  
authentic dharma-transmissions.

Hiệp Thiên Đài is the authority with the aims to communicate with and help people connect to God. Hiệp Thiên Đài is a Dharma agency and a bridge between the world (Cửu Trùng Đài) and God, Holy Entities, Immortals (transcendents)<sup>3</sup>, and the Buddha (Bát Quái Đài).

### *The Nine Level Tower (Cửu Trùng Đài)*

Inside the Temple, there are 28 dragon columns that symbolize the 28 stars (servants of God) of Bạch Ngọc Kinh (白玉京, the White Jade Palace) who worship God. The dragon columns are painted blue, red, and white to symbolize the three periods of universal salvation. The first period, Thanh Dương Đại Hội (青陽大會, the Great Assembly of Blue Yang), was held to judge the virtue and merit of the spiritual practices of human beings. This assembly was chaired by Dipamkara Buddha (燃燈佛, Nhiên Đăng Phật).

The second period, Hồng Dương Đại Hội (紅陽大會, the Great Assembly of Red Yang), was chaired by Amitābha Buddha. The third period, Bạch Dương Đại Hội (白陽大會, the Great Assembly of White Yang), will be managed by the Maitreya.

Therefore, the white dragons under Càn Khôn (乾坤, Heaven and Earth) allude to the time of Bạch Dương, and the golden dragon pillar (黃龍, Huỳnh Long) symbolizes the Buddhas who will attend The Universal Judgement.

Cửu Trùng Đài is in the middle area that connects to Hiệp Thiên Đài and Bát Quái Đài. Cửu Trùng Đài has nine steps each of which is seven meters in length, and each gap between the steps is 18cm. Each step is separated by two blue dragon columns. In total, there are 18 columns that stand in parallel rows.

Nine steps of Cửu Trùng Đài correspond to the following nine hierarchical positions: believers (信徒, Tín-Đồ), minor dignitaries (職事, Chức Sắc), religious village administrators (通事, Thông-Sự), student-priests (禮生, Lễ-Sanh), Priests (教友, Giáo-hữu), Bishops (教師, Giáo-Sư), Cardinals (頭師, Đầu-Sư), Legalist Cardinals (掌法, Chuồng-Pháp), and the Pope (教宗, Giáo-Tổng).

The ceiling is painted in blue to symbolize a blue sky with white clouds and hundreds of stars. In the middle, there are six dragons (two yellow, two blue, and two red), surrounded by blue paint. This image is taken from a verse in the Ngọc Hoàng Kinh (玉皇經, Jade Emperor Scripture): Thời thừa lục long (時乘六龍), du hành bất tức (遊行不息). Meaning: God often dwells on six dragons and traveling around the universe continually without rest. The six dragons are also associated with Yang and Heaven. This symbolizes Daoism ability to unlimitedly spread around the world.

The priests often worship in the middle of the temple. The laity separate into male and female groups and kneel on separate sides. Two sides with flat ceilings feature paintings of the four animals with supernatural powers: the Dragon, the East Asian 'Unicorn,' the Turtle, and the Phoenix. These symbols match the dragons in the colonnade.

From the platform of Bát Quái Đài counting downwards, the sixth step is the place for lay believers. At this level, there are two lecture halls, one for males and one for female followers on separate sides. The sides are structured by a dragon column with six legs holding up the lecture halls. Lay believer are considered to be individuals who have overcome the temptations of the senses (sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, and mental phenomena - 色, 聲, 香, 味, 觸, 法) and understand clearly all of the teachings related to the performance of universal tasks.

Both sides of the Temple are painted with lotus flowers in a rectangular frame, there is a triangular frame painted with the Divine Eye in the middle. This frame has many mystical meanings:

- The Divine Eye symbolizes Thái cực (太極, Supreme Polarity; Tai Ji).
- The triangle symbolizes Tam Giáo Đồng Nguyên (三教同原, the three religions originated from the same source).
- The lotus flowers that appear above and below symbolize the Yin and Yang (陰陽, *Vn*: Âm Dương) as lưỡng nghi (兩儀, the two opposing principles of nature).
- The four lotus fruits on both sides symbolize the Tứ tượng (四象, four divisions of the sky into groups of seven mansions).
- The eight lotus leaves symbolize the Eight Trigrams.
- Twelve branches of the lotuses symbolize the Thập nhị Khai Thiên (十二開天, twelve openings heaven).

The lotus symbolizes human life and also the life of the Great Universe. Occult philosophy teaches that the elements of the lives of both humans and universe are similar and are to be developed in the same direction. By way of analogy, lotus roots sink in mud which is comparable to material life. The body of the lotus come up through the water, and this is like the sensuality of life. Lastly, the flower floats on top of the water and opens toward the sky. This is comparable to the spirituality of life.

The contiguous part of Bát Quái Đài has seven gold-painted thrones placed in the following order:

- The first throne: Giáo Tông painted with a dragon.
- The second throne: Chưởng Pháp with a phoenix.
- The third throne: Đầu Sư with a unicorn.

Seven thrones are blocked by a highly flexible gold-plated dragon vase. Two sides of the throne were designed to feature two rows of Lỗ bộ Bửu Pháp (鹵簿寶法, imperial regalia and dharmic treasures) of Bát Tiên (八仙, the Eight Immortals).

### ***The Octagonal Tower (Bát Quái Đài)***

The Bát Quái (八卦, Chn: bagua) are eight trigrams that can be combined to represent all things through combination of yin and yang. This is a simple symbolic system meant to represent all phenomena in the universe, nature, and human life via sixty-four (8x8) dual hexagrams made from combinations of trigrams. Building a Bát Quái space to worship God emphasizes the meaning of God as the Creator who utilized cosmic wisdom during Creation.

Bát Quái Đài has 12 steps, each with a height of 10cm and each containing eight edges. These are stacked to form a pyramidal shape. The twelve steps represent the twelve heavens. According to the Cao Dai doctrine, God is the Thập Nhị Khai Thiên (the One who opened Heaven into twelve; twelve being a number that demarcates Heaven). The first step is 2.4m above the ground and the top step is 3.6m above the ground (it increases in multiples of twelve).

The level adjacent to the Cửu Trùng Đài is called the Cung Đạo (宮道 - The Seance<sup>4</sup> Spot). The roof of Cung Đạo decorated with a sky and a white ovular clouds surrounded by twelve long auric rays that alternate with twenty-four short auric rays. Inside, there is a picture of the Divine Eye, a male statue symbolizing humanity, and the Đại Ngọc Cơ & Tiểu Ngọc Cơ (大玉機 小玉機, The Great Apparatus and the Small Apparatus)<sup>5</sup> with the letters from the latin alphabet, a three-legged table, and a sortilege tube. All of the aforementioned are the means of enabling communication between the humans and divine entities in the invisible realm. In the beginning, it is held that God used these means to teach new doctrines.

Aside from the above pictures, there is a book, and a black board showing the three lines written in Chữ Nôm (𣪠喃, a combination of Chinese characters and native

Vietnamese characters that appear similar to Chinese but are used to represent native Vietnamese words). Those three lines are as follows:

Muôn kiếp có ta nắm chủ quyền  
 Vui lòng tu niệm hưởng ân Thiên  
 Đạo mầu rưới khắp...  
 萬劫有些握主權  
 樂心修念得享恩天  
 道牟灑處...

We have sovereignty over time.  
 Please meditate to be blessed by Heaven.  
 Our religion will become ubiquitous.

There is also a stack of papers written in the Chữ Nôm:

Viết thử Thiên Thơ với nét trần  
 Hầu sau bền giữ nghiệp Hồng Quân  
 Chuyển luân thế sự...  
 寫些天書眾涅槃  
 侯婁紆佇業鴻君  
 轉輪世事...

Writing Heaven's Notice with the pen of life.  
 Keeping strongly Hong Quan (a deified version of Lao Zi)<sup>6</sup>  
 To turn the wheel of dharma even in mundane matters...

A hand holding a brush is coming out from a cloud :

Ký thành một cuốn gọi Thiên-thơ.  
 Khai Đạo muôn năm trước định giờ,  
 Mau bước phải gìn...  
 記成又卷噲天書  
 開道開年前定時  
 毛腳沛塵

Writing a book called *Thiên thơ* (Heaven's Notice).  
 Opening a new religion  
 for the preservation of the Dao...

The front and upper sides of the Cung Đạo have an M-shaped diaphragm casting, statues of the Masters of Tam Giáo, Tam Trấn (三鎮, The Three Governors), and the Ngũ Chi Đại Đạo (五支大道, five religious branches of the Great Way). The top row has the three Patriarchs: Lao Zi, Śākyamuni Buddha, and Confucius.



The middle row is the Tam Trấn: Avalokiteśvara, Li Bai (李太白, Vn: Lý Thái Bạch), Guan Yu (關聖帝君, Vn: Quan Thánh Đế Quân). These three masters represent the three types of Bi (悲, compassion), Trí (智, wisdom), Dũng (勇, Courage) of Tam Giáo. The bottom row includes Jésus Christ and Jiang Ziya (薑尚子牙, Vn: Khương Thượng Tử Nha).

The placing of these masters does not indicate a hierarchy. From Śākyamuni upwards, the representatives of the Five Great Paths are: Buddhism (Śākyamuni), Daoism (Li Bai), Catholicism (Jesus Christ), Geniism (Jiang Ziya), the Religion of Sages (Giáo Tông-Caodaism's Pope) (Hoskins 2010).

The left diaphragm worships Bát Tiên. The diaphragm on the right of the church worships Thất Thánh (七聖, Seven Saints).

The back part of the Bát Quái Đài enshrines Quả Càn Khôn (果乾坤, The Celestial Sphere), in the east of the Temple. On the Celestial Sphere are two hexagrams from the Yi Jing (易經<sup>7</sup> – Vn: Kinh Dịch, *The Book of Changes*), symbolizing Heaven and Earth. The Celestial Sphere symbolizes the universe of Ngọc Hoàng (玉皇, The Jade Emperor, God).

The Celestial Sphere is a blue structure with a diameter of 3.3m and features 3,072 stars that symbolize the Tam Thiên Thế giới (三千世界, Three thousand worlds) and the Thất Thập Nhị Địa (七十二地, The seventy-two Earths). In this cosmology, the Earth that humanity currently resides on is the 68th Earth. The Divine Eye was painted on the Bắc Đẩu (北門, the polar star) Constellation. The lamp is placed at the heart of the globe symbolizing the crown of the Taiji (太極, Vn: Thái Cực, Yin and Yang).

In front of the Celestial Sphere is the altar where 12 objects are placed:

- The Divine Eye.
- One Thái Cực Đăng (太極燈, The Monad lamp) (the lamp always burns, symbolizing the cosmic soul).
- Two lights on each side that symbolize Yin and Yang (negative - positive).
- One flower vase (symbolizing TINH - 精 - Essence) and one fruit plate.
- three glasses of wine (symbolizing KHÍ - 氣 - Vitality).
- One cup of tea (symbolizing THẦN - 神 - Spirit) and one cup of cold water (Yin and Yang water).
- One incense burner.

During worshiping, five incense sticks are burned and put into two rows: the inside row contains three sticks, as does the outside two. The five incense sticks symbolize the movement of the five phases to allow the universe to be conditioned and flourish. During cultivation practice, cultivators must go through five stages of practice: Giới (戒, the Observance of Prohibitions), Định (定, Meditative Contemplation), Huệ (慧, Wisdom), Tri kiến (知見, Seeing and Knowing) and Giải thoát (解脫, Extrication).

TINH, KHÍ, THẦN are the three treasures for humankind:

- TINH is the body birthed to us by our parents. As such, it is also called the first body.
- KHÍ is our mind, and is also known as the second body or the spiritual body.

This body is given by the Buddha-Mother.



- THẦN is a sacred element that is undeniable. It is also known as the third body, and it is given by the Supreme God, Đức Chí Tôn. Thanks to the Chơn Linh (真靈, The Soul), humans are wiser and more knowledgeable than all other beings.

In the same way that God has the three treasures of NHẬT (日, the sun), NGUYỆT (月, moon), and TINH (星, stars) and land has the three treasures of THỦY (水, Water), HỎA (火, Fire), and PHONG (風, Wind), humans have TINH, KHÍ, and THẦN (精, 氣, 神).

There are four designated times for daily worship:

TÝ (子, The Hours of the Rat), NGỌ (午, The Hours of the Horse), MỆO (卯, The Hours of the Cat; elsewhere in East Asia, this is known as the Hours of the Rabbit), DẬU (酉, The Hours of the Rooster). At these times, believers will wear long white robes, while dignitaries have uniforms that comply with the provisions of the PHÁP CHÁNH TRUYỀN (法正傳, The religious constitutional laws of Caodaism).

The wine offering ceremony must start at TÝ (at 12 PM) because that is believed to be the time when the atmosphere of the Heaven and Earth is prosperous and when peoples' minds are clear. The Tea offering ceremony must be at MỆO (6 AM) and DẬU (6 PM) because that is held to be the time of prosperity. During those hours, the spirit of worshippers is said to be easy to keep calm. Under the Celestial Sphere are the grouping of gods mentioned previously in the sub-section **Palace of Nine Divine Planes** in Section B. Below the Celestial Sphere, there is a cellar containing the ashes of the great dignitaries.

### III. Outside of the Temple

Each side of the Holy See has six doors. The steps up to those doors were built like stairs with the statue of KIM MAO HẦU (金毛獅, The holy yellow lion) on two sides. The roof of the Cửu Trùng Đài has red tiles where Nghinh Phong Đài is located. Cửu Trùng Đài was built to a height 17m. The lower part is a square, and the upper part is a dome reminiscent of Islamic architecture (Hoskins 2010). The Dragon-Horse statue is placed on a globe, and that image depicts Hà Đồ coming to the West and turning to the East. This is because Asia was the birth place of many religions. As it is said, “Đạo phát ư Đông, di ư Tây, phản hồi ư Đông” (道出於東, 移於西, 返回於東, New religion comes from the East, moves to the West, and then returns back to the East).

The eaves of Cửu Trùng Đài are decorated with vines of grapes. On those vines, the pictures of double birds flying on the sea at dawn are painted. Jesus once preached: “I am the vine; you are the branches (*John* 15).” He gives life and fertility to us. Grape vines and the fruit they bear symbolize the Chơn Thân (真身, The real body). Grape juice symbolizes the Spirit, and the wine represents the Soul.

The roof of Bát Quái Đài is 30m high with yellow tiles, and has a statue of Tam Thế Phật (三世佛, The Trinity of Brahmanism but as Buddhas) built atop it. Brahma

Buddha looks to the West, stands on the back of a Swan, has one hand pressed, and his left hand holds a precious pearl. Chrisna Buddha (Krishna), an incarnation of Vishnu Buddha, faces south, stands on flood dragon (蛟龍, giao long), has a hand on one hip, and hold a sword in the other. Buddha Civa (Siva) looks to the North, stands on a seven-headed snake, and plays a flute.

The Trinity of Brahmanism symbolizes three aspects of God: creation, preservation, and destruction. This can also be seen as the universe's circulatory wheel. According to Caodaism, humankind is in the era of Hạ Ngươn Tam Chuyển (下元三轉, The Last Cycle of the Third Manvantara), the time of the Dharma. Caodaism was founded with the aim of enlightening people, opening an era of harmony, and creating synergies and universal fraternity (大同, Đại đồng). The Church considers it as Thượng Ngươn Thánh Đức, a return to the lives of great holiness. Behind the Holy See, there are rows of houses harmoniously arranged in the figuration of the Chinese character for mountain, "SƠN" (山).

## Other Architectural Works in the Inner Quarter of Cao Dai's Holy See

In the inner quarter of Cao Đài Tây Ninh, there are many other architectural works such as Hạnh Đường (行堂, School for Training Dignitaries, where the meetings and openings of the monastic training courses are held), the Giáo Tông Đường (教宗堂, The Office of the Pope), Hộ Pháp Đường (護法堂, The Office of Hộ Pháp), Nữ Đầu Sư Đường (女頭師堂, The Office of the Female Cardinal), the working house of agency of Hiệp Thiên Đài (The Communion Tower), Cửu Trùng Đài, All Souls House (萬靈, Vạn Linh), the North Division (北宗, Bắc Tông), The Central Division (中宗, Trung Tông), Cambodian Hall (秦人, Tân Nhơn), hospitals, schools, guest houses, Prajna house (般若, Bát Nhã), and workshop rooms. The Temple of Buddha Mother, the worshipping place of the Mother of humankind and Bá Huê Viên (百花園, The hundred flowers garden) on the opposite side of the Temple are especially spectacular. The Temple of Buddha Mother is the place where the Holy Mother Goddess Grand Festival (會宴瑤池宮, Hội Yến Diêu Trì Cung) is held on the eighth month of the lunar month. The primitive forest called "Nature Forest" is nearly a hundred years old and was created to feature architecture that maintains harmony with the natural landscape.

## The Historical and Cultural Value of Cao Dai's Holy See

Henri Regnault, at a conference on Spiritology in Lausanne, Switzerland in 1948 said: "In Cao Dai religion, art plays a very important position. The architecture inside and outside the Holy Temple has an artistic beauty that deserves special attention." Indeed, the Cao Dai church has a style of architecture that combines European and

Asian features. With two bell-towers as high as the Holy See of Rome in the Vatican, but the Temple also has a slightly curved roof known as “trùng thiêm điệp ốc” (重簷疊屋 or 重梁重簷), the double-roof common in East Asia. In the middle of the façade and on the roof, there is a statue of Maitreya sitting on a lotus. This shows that the Cao Dai philosophy has its roots in ancient Buddhism and now serves as a universal duty in the era of Hạ Nguyên (下元, The Last Cycle). The dragon and lotus columns at the main gate are meant to inform visitors that the Universal Judgement (會龍花, Hội Long Hoa) will be held by Maitreya in Vietnam someday in the future.

On the top of Nghinh Phong Đài, we can see a curved arch that can be also seen in the architecture of Indian and Middle Eastern churches. Although combining different European and Asian architectural forms, the Holy Temple still highlights Vietnamese culture with lotus images and the four animals with supernatural powers (Dragon, East Asian ‘unicorn’, Turtle, and Phoenix). When visitors enter the Temple of Saints, their first impression is that of a harmonious and beautiful setting that highlights both architecture and the site’s surrounding nature.

This architectural work has the marks of physical science and religious philosophy hidden inside, including both harmonious beauty and sustainable structure. Though built in the 1930s and 1940s of the twentieth century, the builders using bamboo concrete, knew how to use fake concrete roof with three-story curved roof. The compartments have dragon images that create a serene appearance.

The columns are covered with dragon and lotus shapes, making the structure varied. Wind and light are easy to go through to ensure the coolness, not worrying about humidity.

## Conclusion

As a parting thought, at the time when this auspicious land was identified (the land is classified as ‘six dragons supporting a seal’ Lục long phò ấn - 六龍扶印), there were no machines and no architects or construction engineers. Despite these deficits, a group of poor, uneducated, but faithful builders completed an architectural masterpiece that contains many mysteries. Their claim was that their success was due to guidance from spiritual forces. This is yet another reason why the Tay Ninh Holy See is treasured as a wonder and source of global cultural heritage.

## Conflict of Interest

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

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> ‘Đức (德)’ here is an honorific prefix in Vietnamese that is somewhat comparable to the honorific suffixes ‘sama’ in Japanese or ‘nim’ in Korean. This honorific use of Đức will also occur elsewhere throughout this article such as the cases of Đức Quyền Giáo Tông (德權教宗, The Acting Pope) and Đức Hộ Pháp (德護法, The Maintainer of the Rules and Laws).

<sup>2</sup> The Vietnamese pronunciation of 彌 as Di (D having a Z sound in the North and Y sound in the South) is an exception. For instance, both Korean and Japanese pronounce 彌 as Mi.

<sup>3</sup> 仙 Tiên, Daoist immortals. In older Caodaist (and other) translations this term will appear as ‘fairies’, but this term has fallen out of favor in recent decades.

<sup>4</sup> Seances were banned by the Communist government in 1975, and that ban is still in effect.

<sup>5</sup> These are the writing implements for automatic writing and receiving spiritist messages.

<sup>6</sup> This would usually be written as 鴻鈞 rather than 鴻君 as appears in the poem.

<sup>7</sup> Usually this would appear as 經易 but here it honors Vietnamese word order.

## References

- An, Ninh Thế Giới  
2014 “Kiến trúc Bí Ẩn Tòa Thánh Tây Ninh”, <https://zingnews.vn/kien-truc-bi-an-cua-toa-thanh-tay-ninh-post408060.html>, Accessed 21 Jun 2017.
- Duc, Nguyen  
2000 “The apparatus in a spiritual seance: The “Corbeille à bec”, *Caodaism Dictionary* Vol I. <http://www.caodai-online.com/pageDisDesc.php?id=14939>.
- Hartney, Christopher  
2015 ““Traditional” Modernity: A Vietnamese Response to French Colonialism as Revealed in the Great Mural of Đạo Cao Đài” in *Religious Transformation in Modern Asia: A Transnational Movement* , edited by David.W.Kim. Boston: Brill
- Hoskins, Janet  
2010 “Seeing syncretism as visual blasphemy: Critical eyes on Caodai religious architecture.” *Material Religion*, 6:1, 30-58, <https://doi.org/10.2752/174322010X12663379393332>
- Nguyễn, Thái Bảo  
2021 “Symbolic meanings of Holy Temple in Cao Dai Tay Ninh Holy See,” *The Dau Mot University Journal of Science* 3 (3). <https://doi.org/10.37550/tdmu.EJS/2021.03.218>
- Nguyễn, Long Thành  
1974 “Nhìn lại 50 năm lịch sử Đạo Cao Đài, Tây Ninh”, <https://www.daotam.info/booksv/pdf/NguyenLongThanh/nhinlai-50nam-lichsu-caodai.pdf>.
- Túy, Ngọc Trịnh  
2014 “A Brief Introduction to Caodaism”. <http://www.daotam.info/booksv/abitcaodaism/caodaism.html>.
- Wikipedia  
2019 “Fuxi”, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fuxi>, Accessed 29 April 2019.

# Teaism in the Sinophone World and Beyond: Spiritual, Political and Material Explorations

**Kai SHMUSHKO**

Kai Shmushko is a researcher in the fields of religion and philosophy in Chinese societies. She is a lecturer in the Center for Intercultural Philosophy in Leiden University and completing her doctoral degree in the East Asian Department of Tel Aviv University. Her research covers the critical study of religion and state, digital religion, material culture and dynamics of religious groups, with a particular focus on Buddhism in contemporary societies.



JDTEA 2022,2(1): 133-155

## Original Articles

Correspondence to

**Kai SHMUSHKO**

TTel Aviv University, Israel  
Leiden University, Netherlands

**k.shmushko@hum.leidenuniv.nl**

ORCID

0000-0002-9832-8156



*Journal of Daesoon Thought and the Religions of East Asia* Vol. 2, Issue1 (September 2022): 133–155

© 2022 by the Daesoon Academy of Sciences, Daejin University, Korea

<https://doi.org/10.25050/JDTREA.2022.1.2.133>

**Day of submission:** 2022. 08. 08.

**Completion of review:** 2022. 08. 15.

**Final decision for acceptance:** 2022. 08. 31.

P-ISSN: 2799-3949

E-ISSN: 2799-4252

## Abstract

Throughout the Chinese sphere, that is, in the People's Republic of China and Taiwan, tea houses, tea stores, and tea meditation groups often without a particular religious orientation have appeared in the past decades. Tea lovers groups with various philosophical discussions appear throughout cyberspace, where people show their appreciation for tea as a drinkable delicious product and a spiritual tool. The question to be asked here is whether it should be recognized as a religious or spiritual practice agent in and of itself? Should we then talk about the present-day movement of teaism? If we do recognize this as a spiritual phenomenon, should it then be labeled as a New Religious Movement? The trajectory of tea in China is intrinsically connected to religious traditions. This connection is historical, yet it plays a part in the contemporary religious and spiritual sphere. The article explores the continuation and developments of tea culture in the context of the religious sphere of China, looking at practices connected to tea of communities, religious organizations, and individuals. The author explores how tea drinking, commercializing and tea related practices intersect with politics, materiality, and spirituality in contemporary society. In this context it is then argued that tea is a cultural element, religious self-refinement tool, and an active material agent with social-political capacities. The study includes historical narratives, ethnographic data, and literary sources about tea, making up a genealogy of tea which encompasses ritualistic aspects, economic aspects, and power relations related to tea in Chinese society.

**Keywords:** tea, religion, religious movements, theory of religion, Chinese religion

## Introduction

Tea today is a common consumable product in many areas of the world. Its history has been studied from many perspectives, geographic areas, and disciplines. As a consumable and tradable material, tea is observed through the modern study of culture, diplomacy, and economics through prisms such as globalization, capitalism, colonialism, agriculture, and culinary trends. In Asia, asserts Uri Kaplan, there is a phenomenon of “fetishizing” tea (Kaplan 2017). A century earlier, Kakuzu Ukakura had claimed that the fetishization of tea drinking was shared globally as early as a century ago (meaning, from the nineteenth century). “Humanity has so far met in the teacup. It is the only Asiatic ceremonial that commands universal esteem” (Okakura 1964, 9).

South China is the historical birthplace of tea, which is a plant’s leaves with the scientific name *Camellia Sinensis* (or *Asamica Sinensis*). In early imperial China, tea was first ritually embedded as a medicinal and religious drink. In the eighteenth century, Chinese merchants helped popularize it as a global commodity, enabling it to become the most consumed commercial beverage today (Liu 2020). In China today, tea might first and foremost be associated with everyday Chinese as a popular drink. It is served and drunk throughout the day in homes, restaurants, work gatherings, and social and family events. It is common in various regions in China to carry a thermos of hot water and tea leaves throughout the day, as a basic drink, for some people even instead of water.

However, the habit of tea drinking as a regular practice seems to have begun in medieval China with Buddhist monasteries, later spreading to the literati and then, probably quite rapidly, to the broader population, as I will explore further hereafter (Benn 2005; Hinsch 2016). Moreover, in this article, I wish to explore further dimensions of tea culture, drinking, and commodification related to China’s religious, contemporary, religious, and political sphere. For that aim, I will trace the development of tea as a ritualistic, social, and political material, presenting new turns in contemporary tea culture. I will argue that the genealogy of tea had enabled it to play a crucial part in the constructions of religious and spiritual life in Chinese societies. Furthermore, in present day tea continues to act not only as a ritual commodity but also as a political material, an active agent within the dynamic of religion and state and self expression in the Communist state of People’s Republic of China (hereafter PRC).

## Tea and Religious Systems in China

In the domain of Buddha ancestors, drinking tea and eating rice is every-day activity. This having tea and rice has been transmitted over many years and is present right now. Thus, the Buddha ancestors’ vital activity of having tea and rice comes to us (Dogen 1984, 124).<sup>1</sup>



Late medieval China (Tang dynasty, 618-907) witnessed a relatively rapid change in drinking habits as alcohol was replaced by tea in all levels of society. Whereas tea was a marginal (southern) drink at that time, it became the locus of China's most important cultural practices (Hinsch 2016). During the Tang and Song dynasties' pivotal age, Buddhist culture had flourished and impacted society in various aspects. Within this atmosphere, Buddhists were responsible for changing people's minds regarding consuming intoxicating substances such as alcohol, which is forbidden according to Buddhist ethical rules, and spread tea drinking throughout the empire (Benn 2005, 213).

Beyond a replacement for alcohol due to the Buddhist restriction, monks saw it as a potential self-refinement tool. They pioneered tea culture and initiated tea-drinking promotion as a lofty pursuit. There is evidence that Chinese Buddhist monastics used tea for wakefulness in meditation as a medicinal herb and a sacrificial offering as early as the eighth century (Hinsch 2016, 55-56, 91; Ludwig 1981). Additionally, as tea is best cultivated in the same mountainous areas where monasteries were usually found, both Buddhist and Daoist monks soon realized the economic benefits of growing and selling this invigorating herb (Benn 2005, 68). In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, right before tea production in China was at its peak, monasteries were still in charge of a large part of the production (Liu 2020).

More distinctively, there is a correlation between tea and Chan Buddhism (Li 2012, 13-15). According to the legend, tea, the drink of wakefulness, sprang from the sleepy eyelids of the Buddhist holy man Bodhidharma (Erling and Hoh 2009: 75).<sup>2</sup> Moreover, texts about tea, like the most famous *The Classic of Tea* (茶经, *chajing*) written by Lu Yu (陆羽) echoed the frugal simplicity (简朴, *jianpu*) central to Chan Buddhism (Hinsch 2016: 66). This, modest simplicity was a spiritual ideal influenced by the Buddhist aspiration for renunciation.

Apart from Buddhism, early references to tea in Chinese literature highlight the interaction between tea and various religious systems. The first allusion to tea describes when Laozi, the six century B.C. philosopher associated with Daoism, was offered a bowl of tea of a drink that is likely to be like tea. As Laozi was perceived as a master of esoteric long-life techniques, tea was later unidentified as an "elixir of immortality", tea joined the list of almost magically powerful substances that were lauded on account of their strength and efficacy (Anderson 1991, 14).

As well as being integrated into Buddhist temple rituals and metaphysical machinations of the Taoists, the practice of tea drinking became widespread in the capital Chang'an by the middle of the Tang Dynasty. As a result of its popularity among literati, Confucian elements were beginning to influence tea preparation and consumption, such as the notion of ritual antiquate- li (理) central to Confucian (儒家, *rujia*) thought. According to this social and philosophical system, li is a component of sincere respect. By behaving correctly in social situations and performing traditional

rites properly, a gentleman (君子, *jūnzi*) cultivates his spirit and promotes the functioning of society (Anderson 1991, 16). Li originally meant “a religious sacrifice, but has come to mean ceremony, ritual, decorum, rules of propriety, good form, good custom, and has even been equated with natural law” (Chan 1963, 790). Confucian rules of conduct and elements have spread beyond China to Japan and Korea, where they have continued to influence the tea ritual, aside to Buddhist elements and local esthetics.

James Benn suggested that Buddhist monks were involved in disseminating tea from the south towards central China in the first centuries CE to popularize a common beverage they could share with the literati in formal political banquets (Benn 2005, 214). Tea, therefore, became a significant cultural, ritualistic, and artistic material. Most visibly, emperors employed tea in religious rituals such as sacrifices to the gods and ancestors, replacing Alcohol, the former mark for the sacred (since distant antiquity). Considering the political importance, this substitution had profound implications, elevating the new drink into an essential tool for sanctifying the highest reaches of political power. This gradually became the drink to different courtly festivities, occasions, and celebrations (Hinsch 2016, 35-36).

## Trade, Trends, Geopolitics and Buddhism

While tea had become almost synonymous with Chinese culture, tea production and export levels and popularity trends within China have fluctuated and varied throughout the modern age. For example, tea production and export from China was at its peak in the middle of the nineteenth century when it was traded with the English and the Dutch. However, over the course of the next century the Indian tea industry, operated by British colonial planters and based in the northeast territory of Assam, suddenly overtook China as the world’s top exporter (Liu 2020, 2). The economic systems around tea have gone through a series of changes in the past century, with China going into the Communist era, which included forms of a centered and closed economy. In recent decades, economic reforms allowed Chinese tea to play a significant part in global tea consumption. Consumerist trends have also varied within China and globally in the past century. One example is the popularity of Yunnan tea, especially Pu’er, which had become extremely popular only in past decades (Hung 2015, 5).

Strikingly, the connection described here above between Buddhism and tea remains strong in contemporary China, as in the rest of Asia, where tea became strongly associated with Buddhist identities and memories (Kaplan 2017). However, this article suggests that the relationship between tea and Buddhism in China in the twenty first century is taking new turns. As Li describes it, the Buddhist cultural sphere *fojiao wenhua* (佛教文化) is merging into the Buddhist industry (佛教产业, *fojiao chanye*),

creating what Li refers to as a “Buddhist Tea Culture industry” (佛教茶文化产业, *fojiao chawen chanye*). This development of the cultural industry but also a reflection of social development (Li 2012). This Buddhist Tea Cultural Industry entails various forms, which I argue are related (though not exclusively) to the social and personal aspects of Chinese people’s religious life. Some of these forms will be explored hereafter.

In a degree of continuity, one field of influence the tea industry reaches is present-day monasteries. Today various Buddhist monasteries contain spacious tea halls. Some monasteries in the Chinese sphere still include tea as a valuable tool for self-cultivation. This is very visible in the Buddhist Monastic worlds in Taiwan. Dharma Drum Mountain Monastery (法鼓山, *Fagu Shan*), in northern Taiwan, hosts Tea Meditation sessions (茶禪, *chachan*) operated by monastics which specializes in tea (茶主人, *cha zhuren*) guiding the meditations. In influential monasteries such as Dharma Drum Mountain Monastery and Fo-Guang Shan (佛光山) monastery, which have centers in different locations worldwide, tea ceremonies, and meditations are offered to monastics and laypeople alike. In 2013 Fo-Guang Shan International Translation Center (佛光山國際翻譯中心, *Foguang Shan guoji fanyi zhangxin*) issued a short book written by master Hsing Yun explaining laypeople the relationship between Buddhism and the tea ceremony.<sup>3</sup> Evidently, in contemporary times, tea is also used by these monasteries as proselytizing the religion, making it approachable to a wider audience to enter the world of Buddhist self-cultivation.

In mainland China (PRC), tea increasingly plays a significant part among lay practitioners of Buddhism outside temple spaces. In recent decades, we have seen that lay Buddhist believers have found it rather inconvenient to attend religious activities in temples due to the demands of their modern daily lives. According to Gary Fisher, there are various “push and pull factors” for activities outside temple spaces (Fisher 2020). Buddhism in its lay form has become an active social movement today, as seen in the range of activities, associations, and networks in which laypersons take part, both within and outside of Buddhist temple space (Ji and Zhang 2018). Notably, the different modalities of lay Buddhism lack a unified framework, and significant diversity in Buddhist practice is evident, making room for flexibility and development.

## Lay Buddhist Groups

One of the modalities we are witnessing in the past decade is Buddhist study groups, Buddhist cultivation groups, and communities of lay Buddhist practitioners centered around tea houses and tea-related businesses and spaces. Fisher explored this phenomenon throughout Beijing, pointing at tea houses that serve as places for lay Buddhists. I have studied this phenomenon in Shanghai and Shenzhen, where I have documented several groups based in tea businesses and houses, varying in organizational forms. Some are loosely associated with monasteries, and some are

independent (Fisher 2020; Shmushko 2021; Shmushko 2022a; Shmushko 2022b). Generally, these spaces allow the practitioners a more structural form for their Buddhist cultivation (修行, *xiuxing*), which includes chanting and reading groups, meditation, organization of pilgrimage trips, children's Buddhist education, and devotional retreats.

In my fieldwork in the past years, I have been exposed to community-based Buddhist groups, a formation in which tea plays a central role. The first location I incorporate in this study is the village Wutong where I conducted fieldwork in 2019. Wutong is an urban village on the outskirts of Shenzhen.<sup>4</sup> Within the framework of the local government to re-develop this urban village, Wutong had become known as an artist village, attracting floating Chinese people interested in a spiritual, artistic lifestyle (Malcolm 2018). Within this atmosphere, the village also became rich soil for religious and spiritual traditions of individuals and groups, without relation to formal temple spaces.

One case study from the village is The Ru couple tea house. The tea house and guest house owned by the Ru family are located at the village's end. Apart from being a tea house serving both the locals and visitors who hike and measure around the Wutong mountain scenic area, the tea house is also a gathering place for lay Buddhists. It is particularly associated with Chan Buddhist tradition. The tea house hosts meditation and study sessions for local laypeople and is visited by monks from the area. Although the tea house is not officially associated with the nearby Hongfa temple (弘法寺, *Hongfa si*), monks from the temple often come to sit in the tea house, advise and casually talk with the guests.

Situating this group in general lines in the modern development of lay Chan Buddhism, I draw on Ji Zhe's extensive research on the modern changes in Chan Buddhism. Ji shows different types of Chan communities that place Lay Buddhist worship. He argues that Chan Buddhist lay communities are confronted with a challenge: managing the multiplicity and alterability of lay Buddhist individuals' identity. They must develop strategies to facilitate the alternation between community life of a religious character and social life under a secular world (Ji 2016).

The relatively new development (roughly beginning 2010) of private spaces, which also encompass a section of lay Chan Buddhists, is, in my opinion, one strategy employed by lay Buddhists to tackle this challenge. The grassroots modality of Chan groups meeting for practice in private spaces is a modality many lay Buddhists currently explore. While these groups vary in constellation and characteristics, my observation is that they are largely not entirely disconnected from temple activity and the monastic authority. The laypeople in the teahouse at Wutong village visit the Hongfa temple regularly and are interested in the guidance of the monks there. Nevertheless, they find it essential to create a space for their practice independent of the temple.

Another group I would include in my examples associated with the tea industry is "Pure Light Valley Retreat," which I recognize as an urban Buddhist community. The community is based in Shanghai.<sup>5</sup> Importantly, I note that this name represents the

community and a registered legal business. In this case study, the community facilitates their Buddhist cultivation, taking advantage of both the physical and financial resources of the business and the spiritual and social assistance of the community structure. Starting from a tiny studio in an alley in the Jinshan neighborhood in 2011, “Pure Light Valley Retreat” have gradually expanded their business activities and the community's size. The community currently spans over five locations, some used only for Buddhist gatherings and practices, and some used for visitors and customers. These include two small studio shops in the Jinshan neighborhood, another shop in Tian Shan Tea City (天山茶城, *Tianshan chacheng*), two larger spaces used for gatherings such as group practice (共修, *gongxiu*), and retreats.

As a community, “Pure Light Valley Retreat” comprises a group of Han Chinese practitioners who base their Buddhist practice on The Great Perfection (Tib. Dzogchen). This group is also associated with a master from the Nyingmapa lineage. Their master resides some three thousand kilometers from Shanghai in, Garzê Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, and trained at the Larung Gar Five Sciences Buddhist Academy (喇荣五明佛教学院, *Larong Wuming Fojiao xueyuan*). The commodities produced and sold by the group are tea, tea-ware, silk and linen clothing, and handmade prayer beads. There are not many Tibetan temples that offer official seminars for lay people around Shanghai for Tibetan Buddhism. So, many Han devotees conduct their practice at home.

An essential product in the assortment of the community is tea grown in Wuyi Mountain county in Fujian province. Customers at a shop are invited to sit and try the tea and organized tea workshops are occasionally offered as well. The practitioners in the community also treat tea not only as a tasty beverage but as one more means to a meditative state of awareness.

The shop spaces of “The Valley Retreat” offer Buddhist-related activities and commodities related to Buddhist soteriologies and Tibetan Buddhist symbols. The tea-ware features prints and engravings of the eight Tibetan auspicious symbols of good fortune, such as the parasol and the treasure vase. Other products feature verses or phrases with connotations of Buddhist principles or philosophy, for example, “My last name is emptiness” (我姓空, *woxing kong*) or “All is illusory” (一切虚幻, *yiqie xuhuan*) (Shmushko 2022a).

The appearance of tea-related private spaces as modalities for Buddhist practice is connected rooted in various factors. One reason is that these spaces appear more in urban areas where with less access to monastic communities which facilitate practice for laypeople (Fisher 2020). Another factor is the overgrowing use of social media, through which laypeople organize independent groups and communities and therefore do not strictly need the structural form of a temple and can adjust the practice according to their own schedule (Shmushko 2022a).<sup>6</sup>

## Political Dimensions

Furthermore, there is a political aspect to these independent groups and communities connected to the state of religious freedom in the People's Republic of the PRC. Throughout the 20th century, the sphere of religion in China had gone through a series of tremendous challenges; The widely known is the rise of the Chinese Communist Party (hereafter CCP) to rule in 1949 and the establishment of the PRC, which included promoting a restrictive atheist policy for decades. After various periods of bans and prosecution of religious practices and institutions under the communist leader Mao Zedong, religious traditions have gone through a period of revival throughout the past decades following the social and economic reforms of Deng Xiaoping. As a point of departure to understand the tea houses modalities of lay Buddhists, it is essential to note the relatively recent “comeback” of Buddhism to the Chinese social and public sphere.

Within this process of religious revival, Buddhist institutions, temples, and monasteries have re-opened their gates throughout the past decades. Monastic communities have recovered from the persecution during the cultural revolution, and laypeople returned to public worship in Buddhist temples (Ji, Fisher and Laliberté 2020, 1-20). But as the religious revival has developed rapidly from the reform era onwards, the PRC has maintained its mobilization of state apparatuses and resources to monitor, control, and selectively suppress types of religious groups or ideologies that seem to threaten the party-state's authority. While the Regulation on Religious Affairs (宗教事务条例, *Zongjiao shiwu tiaoli*) of the PRC includes freedom of belief (中国信仰的自由, *Zhongguo xinyang de ziyou*), as articulated in Article 2 of the regulation, all religious traditions in the PRC today are in fact subjected to a series of restrictions. Regarding freedom of belief and the practice of religion, the difficulty generally begins with the practice of religion in the public and social sphere. The regime's approach includes changing regulations and limitations on religious activities and gatherings. For example, is a regulation restricting religious activity to officially registered religious sites and a ban on religious figures from outside of China teaching or proselytizing (Leung 2018; DuBois 2017).

The current regime under Xi Jinping (习近平, born 1953) has presided over a significant regression in religious freedom (Leung 2018). In recent years, the PRC has increasingly integrated its supervision of religion into the national system of state governance and party building (Cao 2018). Along the same lines, more specific measures have been taken recently regarding religious groups. As of 2020, new administrative measures were established for Chinese religious groups (宗教团体管理办法, *Zongjiao tuanti guanli banfa*). These measures consist of six chapters and forty-one articles dealing with the organization, functions, offices, supervision, projects, and economical administration of communities and groups at both the national and local level. Every



aspect of the life of religious communities, from formation and gatherings to annual and daily projects, is subject to approval by the government's religious affairs department, the State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA) (Leung 2018).

These regulations and restrictions make it quite difficult for independent lay communities to form officially. Registration entails a complicated process that would also subject them to further regulations on their practice. Therefore, gathering in private, office, or commercial spaces such as tea houses offers them some resilience when they practice Buddhism "under the radar." This phenomenon does occur in other private facilities. However, I argue that it is not incidental that a significant part of the case studies shows gatherings around tea but connected to tea's long history with Buddhism.

Both in the case of monasteries and in the case of Buddhist lay groups, the presence, and importance of tea is twofold. It is functional and organizational- either in promoting and spreading Buddhist values or as a 'cover story' for the gathering of lay people to practice the religion. Secondly, as in late medieval China, it is also a tool for the Buddhist practice itself. For the two groups mentioned above, tea drinking is a practice connected to their individual cultivation and their community practice. As a ritualistic practice done within the group, tea drinking is grasped by various participants I have discussed as a shared space where they can reflect on Buddhist philosophy chant sutras and discuss their individual practice. At the same time, they sit together, concentrating meditatively on the flavor of tea, the actions needed to prepare the tea. Communities are in fact structures around commercializing the tea, but also its philosophical attributes. These case studies show that tea drinking is a meditative and concentration practice which is today promoted by laypeople and monastics throughout the Chinese Buddhist world, *de facto* re-enacting, and reconfiguring the centrality of tea in the social and material sphere.

## Teaism?

I have so far discussed the historical bond between tea to Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucian traditions and the contemporary predicament of tea within the Buddhist lay and monastic sphere. On top of these aspects, I hold that an inquiry can be made regarding tea as a center of a contemporary religious, spiritual practice. Throughout the Chinese sphere, that is, in the PRC and Taiwan, tea houses, tea stores, tea meditation groups without a particular religious orientation are popping out in the past decades. Tea lovers' groups with various philosophical discussions appear throughout social media, where people show their appreciation for tea as a drinkable delicious product and a spiritual tool.

The question to be asked here is whether it should be recognized as a religious or spiritual practice agent in and of itself? Should then we talk about the present-day movement of teaism? If we do recognize this as a spiritual phenomenon, should it then be labeled as New Religious Movement (NRM)?<sup>7</sup>

Treating tea as a center for an aesthetic, ritualistic practice is not new, and tea ceremonies are common around Asia, particularly in Japanese, Korean and Chinese societies. According to Jennifer Anderson, in contrast to many rituals studied by anthropologists, the evolution of the tea ceremony had been carefully chronicled by an unusually sophisticated body of observers for hundreds of years.<sup>8</sup> These circumstances give modern scholars an opportunity to see the evolution of these ceremonies throughout ages (Anderson 1991, 13). Therefore, we can explore their modern manifestation, considering the interweaving of personalities, artifacts, and ideas that enhance every tea ritual performed today.

Maybe the most popular well-known today is the Japanese tea ceremony known as “The Way of Tea” (茶道, ch. *Chadao*; 茶の湯, jp. cha-no-yu). It is a traditional form of the tea ceremony and cultural activity involving the ceremonial preparation and presentation of Matcha (抹茶, Jp. macca), powdered green tea.

According to Kakuzo Okakura in his famous *The Book of Tea*:

Teaism is a cult founded on the adoration of the beautiful among the sordid facts of everyday existence. It inculcates purity and harmony the mystery of mutual charity, the romanticism of the social order. It is essentially a worship of the imperfect, as it is a tender attempt to accomplish something possible in this impossible thing we have known as life (Okakura 1964, 3).

Okakura wrote this book directed to a Western audience, describing Japanese tea culture right at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. His agenda was to show the strength of eastern culture at the dawn of western colonialism and judgment of Asian cultures. Nevertheless, the observation that tea is in and of itself deserving an “ism” is what I suggest should be explored also within the context of current day Chinese urban sphere.

Going back further in History, Lu Yu’s *Classic of Tea*, also can enlighten us regarding tea as a religion in and of itself. Lu Yu’s contribution to Chinese tea culture resulted in a posthumous deification of him as the Chinese “God of Tea” (Anderson 1991, 18). The classic of tea was in fact the first definitive work on cultivating, making, and drinking tea. By treating tea as a serious subject, the tea connoisseur Lu Yu convinced legions of readers to regard it with respect. The book subjected every aspect of tea to detailed analysis, proving it worthy of sustained study and reflection. In presenting tea drinking as an elegant pursuit, Lu imbued it with intellectual and spiritual depth. And in addition to writing the most important book about tea, Lu Yu also built up a network of connections with courtiers, literati, erudite Buddhist monks, and other tastemakers, convincing them to venerate this drink as a token of high culture (Hinsch 2016, 55).

The text and its author were significant because they represented a discourse about tea beyond the bifurcation of religious and secular tea rituals. Nevertheless, Lu Yu



synthesized diverse religious philosophies in the text and related them to tea. He employed Daoist symbolism to highlight the individual's relationship to an ordered cosmos. However, He was also expressing concern for proper antiquate in the Confucian way of the vision of the social order (Anderson 1991, 16).

This hybridity of cultural and religious influences is also apparent around tea practices, commodification, and groups today, both in Chinese societies and beyond, East and West. Tea, in that sense, had become a material of worship, spiritual and ritualistic commodity that transcends dichotomies of specific religious sects, cultural contexts or linguistic fields.

## Drinking Tea to Fill a Spiritual Void

We can articulate an independent sociological capacity to the tea-house group modality in its Chinese context, which concerns the place of tea and its effect on the individual. In *The Rise of Tea Culture in China and the Invention of the Individual*, Bert Hinsch argues that the adoption of tea drinking and connoisseurship is connected to a shift to individualism in Chinese society that accrued in the Tang-Song dynasties. The general mentality underwent profound changes, making individualism an essential and valuable cultural trait. Intelligent drinkers quickly realized that drinking tea is a sophisticated style that offered them novel opportunities to express their accomplishments, cultivations, ideas, and emotions—tea culture unfinished individualistic expression (Hinsch 2016, 66).

Relating the place of tea to modern Chinese discourse on individuality, I see tea as a spiritual commodity that enters a discussed “spiritual void” or a “moral crisis” widely acknowledged in popular discourses concerning Chinese society (Palmer and Winiger 2019). While this crisis has its specific trajectory, it can also be helpful to view it in light of young people's global search for a spiritual path to respond to Western modernity (Taylor 2007, 506).

One of the many simplistic explanations of the religious boom in reform-era China is that, disenchanted with the bankruptcy of Communist ideologies, the Chinese people feel “spiritually empty” and therefore want to return to traditional religious practices or to seek new spiritual solace (Chau 2020, 2). The past decades of re-establishing the spiritual and religious sphere in Chinese society (after the damages of the cultural revolution) can be correlated to the third stage in Charles Taylor's *Nova Effect*. The *Nova Effect* described an explosion of secularity, which reached its culmination in the latter half of the twentieth century. The third stage, “the age of authenticity,” describes a generalized culture of expressive individualism, in which people are encouraged to find their own way, discover their fulfillment, “do their own thing” (Taylor 2007, 299). Tea-

related activities do, I argue, resonate with Taylor's notion of "spiritual individualisms," which had been around for a long time (Taylor, 2007, 473). This case study argues that tea in contemporary society enables the individual to distinguish themselves by relating to a product associated with both a long deep tradition and a mystical, spiritual affinity. Furthermore, tea allows Chinese spiritual seekers to "do their own thing" in the sphere of belief, in a state which highly regulates religious practice.

In defining the state of individual freedom in the PRC, Palmer and Winiger argue that the "Neo-socialist governmentality" constructed in the past decades "is not the decentralized and contingent rationality of neo-liberalism, nor is it simply the direct imprinting of the will of the state onto passive, cynical and foot-dragging individual subjects. It operates through the opening of spaces of public discourse and collective action within which neo-socialist rationalities enter into productive tension with popular desires and cultural movements." Drawing on this analysis, I suggest that tea and other spiritual and cultural objects of consumption are currently part of the assortment explored by Chinese subjects. They are negotiating subjectivity, individuality, and religiosity, within the state-defined discourse about religion.

The discussed subjectivity and individuality are, though they seem to negate the core notion of detachment from distinct Self, are attributed in many of the cases to Buddhist practice. From an emic perspective, they are considered a tool, a skillful mean (方便, *fāngbiàn*). Buddhist practice is individualistic in its methods but not in its goal or ultimate orientation. Therefore, the focus of the Buddhist path is precise to work on the problem of the individual Self by exposing its contradictions and porous boundaries (Van der Braak 2020, 163). After all, as noted through some of these case studies, the phenomenon of teahouses shows a strive for communal religious practice, which is aimed not at the Self, but at the other, through cultivating compassion. On the surface in any case, these are examples of materiality which is shared.

## Tea: A Vibrant, Political Matter

In the earlier sections, I have described a recognized spiritual void and the revival of religion in Chinese society. As a material, I have shown how tea is consumed, used, applied, and even worshiped within these trajectories. Both trajectories can account for the re-surfing or continuing popularity of tea-related practices in Chinese society about other religious traditions and as a spiritual practice in and of itself.

However, can we also open a space for discussion on the possibility of treating tea not only as a material that humans consume and employ but as an active agent in and of itself? Bruno Latour's critique on the social sciences generated a material category of "quasi-agents" situated on a spectrum between nature and society. According to Latour:

Objects are not the shapeless receptacles of social categories... Quasi-objects are much more social, much more fabricated, much more collective than the 'hard' parts of nature, but they are in no way the arbitrary receptacles of a full-fledged society (Latour 1991, 55).

Viewing the examples mentioned above, which show a profound impact on social processes and configurations related to tea, it is helpful to consider Latour's approach as a viable theoretical scheme for tea as a material. Tea, as a quasi-object, is as social as it is natural, as active as passive, and as critically efficient in the human world as in the plant or still world of objects.

In *Vibrant Matter*, Jane Bennett argues that political theory needs better to recognize the active participation of nonhuman forces in events. This philosophical standpoint is based on a line of thinkers, Spinoza's concept of *Conatus*, which speaks of power present in every body. Consequently, she speaks of materials as possessing a "thing power," as playing an active role in public life (Bennett 2010, 57). "Even a falling stone", writes Spinoza, "is endeavoring, as far as in it lies, to continue in its motion." (Spinoza 1995, 283). Tea has been cultivated, processed, harvested, and drunk by human beings for a couple of millenniums, but it has performed a social role that can be seen as vibrant and not passive. Of boiling water, they are a part of an assemblage of occurrences, exchanges of materials, and transformation of energies, which comprises our precepted social and cultural reality. Tea is, therefore, a mediator, another actor involved in transitions, processes, and political evolutions. Therefore, we can explore the possibility of tea holding its trajectory, potential, and effectiveness and possessing its trajectory, (not in the sense that tea leaves jump into a cup), but as active mediators, in the Deleuzian sense:

Mediators are fundamental. Creation is all about mediators. Without them nothing happens. They can be people but things too, even plants or animals. If you're not in some series, even a completely imaginary one, you are lost. You are always working in a group, even when you seem to be on your own. (Deleuze 1995, 125).

In this passage, Deleuze points to the perception of events as creations of multiple actors. I suggest that tea, within this framework, should also be observed as a player next to religious actors, spiritual individuals, and regimes. In the case of Buddhism and the PRC, I propose that it is a mediator in creating a certain equilibrium, dynamics between religion and state which is constantly being negotiated.

As discussed above, Xi Jinping's treatment of religion contains harsh restrictions, but the strategy is attacking and prohibiting the religion directly when it comes to

Buddhism. The CCP had not opposed the expansion of Buddhism and even formed what Laliberté calls a 'passive form of support' to control the influence of Buddhism and use it for the state's objectives (Laliberté 2016). One element in the CCP's redefining of Buddhism is Xi's ongoing emphasis on the aspect of "Buddhism as culture" that the CCP now considers a core element of Chinese civilization. In recent years, Xi has expressed the idea that Buddhism is a tradition, not a religion (Ashiwa and Wank 2020; Dubois 2018; Shmushko 2022b). His speeches, writings, and media statements contain rhetoric aimed to fuse religious teachings with Chinese culture (Xi 2014). In response, prominent clerics, using variations on the theme of "Buddhism as culture," show people appropriate ways to combine a belief in Buddhism with loyalty to the CCP. Aligning themselves with the state's policy, these clerics have shifted from broadcasting Buddhism as "religion" (宗教, *zongjiao*, i.e., dharma talks, chanting) to relate to it as "culture" (文化, *wenhua*). Ashiwa and Wank have observed that large Buddhist websites, which feature global coverage of Chinese Buddhist temples and events, as well as articles on "Buddhism as culture" (focusing on architecture, music, and the tea ceremony), have turned Buddhist clerics into media stars (Ashiwa and Wank 2020). Within this discourse about Buddhism, I believe that even religious actors who are not officially registered are also affected by this "Buddhism as culture" narrative. Concerning lay practitioners, I have already described here above how tea can act as a shield for religious and spiritual practices by establishing tea houses for Buddhist practice.

I wish to stress that this dynamic in the PRC comprises various actors. It includes the CCP actively deciding their agenda towards religion, creating policy, and informing it. It, of course, includes Buddhist institutions, groups, and individuals who react to these policies, whether by implementing them fully or partially. These actors, agents of social reality, are manifestations of the political reality of religion in the PRC.

## Conclusion

This article attempted to broaden the discussion about tea in Chinese society, building on the religious attributes of tea and by looking at the materiality of tea in the contemporary social and religious sphere. While I relied on literary sources and historical details, the article was contextualized to shift to the material. As a field of academic inquiry, religious studies have begun to be marked by this material turn. This emphasizes the importance of objects, sensation, and commodification in religious subjects and societies. A growing body of scholarship within this movement focuses on materiality in the study of religions which "signals the need to pay urgent attention to a real, material world of objects and a texture of lived, embodied experience." (Pintchman 2016, 4). Material culture is a fruitful way to understand how religion works. Many scholars have come to regard belief as shifting practices, as what people do rather than

only or primarily the doctrines or texts they observe. Even when some religious actors destroy or change the use of objects such as images and larger objects such as spaces of worship, we can see material culture at work (Morgan 2008, 228–229). This means that as a researcher I let myself be led in the trajectory of the material - tea - to ask question regarding social and cultural and religious spheres, themes and actors.

I have shown that tea is a spiritual or religious practice in distinct religious traditions such as Buddhism or Daoism and in hybrid or diverse forms of religiosity. Within this inquiry, I have explored the growing need for redefinition and articulation of religious and spiritual individual and communal realms within Chinese society, currently also filled with tea-related practices. This is visible in various levels of religiously and building of spiritual worlds; from monastic communities in Buddhist to lay people as well as secular people. I have also explored the possibility of tea standing as a tradition, practice, and maybe even religion in and of itself. Finally, within this material inquiry of tea, I have gone further to inquire into the new-material philosophical perspective and how it can contribute to our understanding of the materiality of tea in China. Within this exploration is a call to view critically and particularly the material components constructing our contemporary realities, putting them at the center of the stage of inquiry into cultural and religious phenomena. In the case of tea, it is evident that in China, it is a vital component of social, political and spiritual matter, contextualized deeply in the workings of social conceptions, ethical values, ritual traditions, and religious-political power dynamics.

## **Conflict of Interest**

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

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The thirteenth century Japanese Zen master Dōgen Zenji writes (Dōgen 1985, 124). The Chan School (禪宗, *Chan zong*) is an indigenous form of Chinese Buddhism that developed from the sixth century CE and subsequently spread to the rest of East Asia. In Japan, as well as in Western societies, it is referred to as Zen.
- <sup>2</sup> A semi mythological figure in the early history of Chinese Buddhism.
- <sup>3</sup> For more about these two major monasteries in Taiwan see: Jens Reinke (2017); Richard Madsen (2008).
- <sup>4</sup> The rapid urbanization of the PRC since the mid-1980s has led to the development of a new spatial category, which describes rural villages that have been absorbed by urban spatial or administrative growth. In the Shenzhen area, these are informal urban developments constructed by indigenous villagers outside of the regulatory planning apparatus of the state. They are typified by their appearance; dense clusters of poor-quality buildings and a degraded environment. They are home to those on the fringe of city life and are increasingly seen as informal, transitional, and flexible spaces. See Zhan Yang (2021); Wang Y., Y. Wang and J. Wu. (2009); Wu, F., F. Zhang and C. Webster (2013); Mary Ann O'Donnell (2017). References should be consistent in presentation.
- <sup>5</sup> To maintain the anonymity of my informants, I have assigned pseudonyms to the community itself as well as to the master and all lay actors.
- <sup>6</sup> See Zhang Yanshuang (2017) and Stefania Travagnin (2018).
- <sup>7</sup> New Religious movements are religious and spiritual groups which appear in the modern era as peripheral to society's dominant religious culture (that is, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam). There are various criteria to what this category entails, with various controversies among scholars. More on NRM see for example Michael W. Ashcraft (2018).
- <sup>8</sup> Tea drinking and ceremonies appear in a wide spectrum of sources in China and Japan, from poems and prose to imperial historical documents.

## References

- Anderson, Jennifer Lea  
1991 *An Introduction to Japanese Tea Ritual*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Ashcraft, W. Michael.  
2018 *A Historical Introduction to the Study of New Religious Movements*. New York: Routledge.
- Ashiwa, Yoshiko and  
Wank, David.  
2020 “Special Report: COVID-19 Impacts Chinese Buddhism, State Control, and Soft Power, Religion and Diplomacy.” Luce.org April 20, 2020. <https://www.hluce.org/news/articles/covid-19-impacts-chinese-buddhism-state-control-and-soft-power/>.
- Benn, James.  
2005. “Buddhism, Alcohol, and Tea in Medieval China.” In *Of Tripod and Palate: Food, Politics, and Religion in Traditional China*, edited by Roel Stercks, 213–236. New York: Macmillan.
- 2015 *Tea In China: A Religious and Cultural History*. Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press.
- Bennett, Jane.  
2010 *Vibrant Matter: a Political Ecology of Things*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Cao, Nanlai.  
2018 “Chinese Religions on the Edge: Shifting Religion-State Dynamics.” *China Review* 18 (4): 1–10.
- Chan, Wing-tsit.  
1963 *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Chau, Adam Y.  
2020. *Miraculous Response: Doing Popular Religion in Contemporary China*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Deleuze, Giles  
1995 *Negotiations, 1972–1990*, trans. M. Joughin, New York: Columbia University Press.
- Dōgen, and Kazuaki  
Tanahashi (trans) 1985 *Moon In A Dewdrop*. San Francisco: North Point Press.

- DuBois, Thomas D.  
2017 "China's Religion Law and the Perils of Counting Consciousness." In *Disturbances in Heaven*, edited by Ivan Franceschini, Kevin Lin, and Nicholas Loubere, 92–98. Acton: Anu Press.
- 2018 "Religious Freedom in East Asia: Historical Norms and the Limits of Advocacy." *Journal of Religious and Political Practice: The Politics of Religious Freedom in the Asia-Pacific* 4 (1): 46–60. <https://doi.org/10.1080/20566093.2017.1390655>
- Fisher, Gareth.  
2020 "From Temples to Teahouses: Exploring the Evolution of Lay Buddhism in Post-Mao China." *Review of Religion in Chinese Society* 7.: 34–61. <https://doi.org/10.1163/22143955-00701003>
- Houtman, Dick and Birgit Meyer.  
2012 *Things: Religion and the Question of Materiality*. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Hinsch, Bret.  
2016 *The Rise of Tea Culture in China: the Invention of The Individual*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Hung, Po-yi.  
2015 *Tea production, land use politics, and ethnic minorities struggling over dilemmas on China's Southwest frontier*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Ji, Zhe.  
2008 "Secularization as religious restructuring statist institutionalization of Chinese Buddhism and Its Paradoxes". In M. M. Yang (ed.), *Chinese religiosities: Afflictions of Modernity and State formation*, 236–237. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- 2016 *Religion, Modernité et Temporalité: une Sociologie Du Bouddhisme Chan Contemporain*. [Religion, Modernity and Temporality: a Sociology of Contemporary Chan Buddhism], Paris: CNRS.
- Ji Zhe and Zhang Jia.  
2018 "Lay Buddhism in Contemporary China: Social Engagements and Political Regulations". *The China Review*, 18 (4): 11–39.



- Ji Zhe, Gareth Fisher and Andre Laliberté. 2020 "Introduction: Exploring Buddhism in Post-Mao China" In *Buddhism After Mao: Negotiations, Continuities, and Reinventions*, eds. Ji zhe, Gareth Fisher and Andre Laliberté. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press. 1-20.
- Kaplan, Uri. 2017 "From the Tea to the Coffee Ceremony: Modernizing Buddhist Material Culture in Contemporary Korea", *Material Religion* 13: 1-22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17432200.2016.1271969>
- Katz, Paul. 2014 *Religion in China and its Modern Fate*. Waltham: Brandeis University Press.
- Laliberté, André. 2016 "Engaging with a Post-Totalitarian State: Buddhism Online in China." In *Religion and the Media in China: Insights and Case Studies from the Mainland, Taiwan and Hong Kong*, edited by Stefania Travagnin, 129-150. New York and London: Routledge.
- Latour, Bruno. 1991 *We Have Never Been Modern*. Cambridge: Harvard University University Press.
- Leung, Beatrice. 2005 "Chinas Religious Freedom Policy: The Art of Managing Religious Activity." *China Quarterly* 184: 894–913. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S030574100500055X>
- Li, Wen Jie 2012 "On Buddhism and Tea Culture Industry", *Nanning zhiye jishu xueyuan xuebao* [Chinese Language Text] 李文杰, 「论佛教茶文化产业」, 『南宁职业技术学院学报』 17 (3), 2012: 13-16.
- Liu, Andrew B. 2020 *Tea War: A History of Capitalism in China and India*. New Haven: Yale.
- Lu Yü. 1974 *The Classic of Tea: Origins & Rituals*, translated by Francis Ross Carpenter. Hopewell, NJ: Ecco.
- Ludwig, Theodore M. 1981 "Before Rikyu. Religious and Aesthetic Influences in the Early History of the Tea Ceremony." *Monumenta Nipponica* 36 (4) 1981: 367–390. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2384225>

- 2018 "Xi Jinping's Religious Freedom Policy vs. Human Rights." *Contemporary Chinese Political Economy and Strategic Relations: An International Journal* 4(2): 369–392.
- Madsen, Richard. 2008. *Democracy's Dharma: Religious Renaissance and Political Development in Taiwan*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Mair, Victor H., and Erling Hoh. 2009. *The True History of Tea*. New York and London: Thames & Hudson.
- Malcolm, Annie. 2018. "Why is China Creating Utopian "Art Cities" in its Former Wastelands?" *QUARTZ*, January 6, 2018, <https://qz.com/1172433/why-is-china-creating-utopian-art-cities-in-its-former-wastelands/>.
- Morgan, David. 2008. "The Materiality of Cultural Construction." *Material Religion*, 4 (2): 228–229. <https://doi.org/10.2752/175183408X328334>
- O'Donnell, Mary Ann. 2017. "Laying Siege to the Villages: The Vernacular Geography of Shenzhen" In *Learning from Shenzhen: China's Post Mao Experiment from Special Zone to Model City*. Edited by M. A. O'Donnell, W. Wong, and J. Bach. 107 – 123. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 2017.
- Okakura, Kakuzo. 1964. *The Book of Tea*. New York: Dover Publications.
- Palmer, David. A., and Winiger, F. 2019. "Neo-socialist Governmentality: Managing Freedom in the People's Republic of China." *Economy and Society*, 48(4): 554–578. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03085147.2019.1672424>
- Pinchman, Tracy. 2016. *Sacred Matters: Material Religion in South Asian Traditions*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Reinke, Jens. 2017. "Innovation and Continuity in the Pure Lands: Pure Land Discourses and Practices at the Taiwanese Buddhist Order Dharma Drum Mountain." *Journal of Chinese Buddhist Studies* 30: 169–210.

- Shmushko, Kai.  
2021 “On Face Masks as Buddhist Merit: Buddhist Responses to Covid- 19. A Case Study of Tibetan Buddhism in Shanghai.” *Journal of Global Buddhism* 22. <http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4727565>
- 2022a “Religious “Commodities or Cultural Elements? Lay Han Practitioners of Tibetan Buddhism and the ‘Living Hall’ (Shenghuo guan 生活馆) Model”, *Review of Religion in Chinese Society* 9. <https://doi.org/10.1163/22143955-08020015>
- 2022b “Buddhism, Urban Village, and Cultural Soft Power – An Ethnography of Buddhist Practitioners in Wutong” *Entangled Religions*, 13(1) <https://doi.org/10.46586/er.13.2022.9709>
- Spinoza, Benedict, and Samuel Shirley.  
1995 *Spinoza: The Letters*. IN: Hacket.
- Taylor, Charles.  
2007 *A Secular Age*. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Travagnin, Stefania. ed.  
2018 *Religion and Media in China: Insights and Case Studies from the Mainland, Taiwan and Hong Kong*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Van der Braak, Andre.  
2020 *Reimagining Zen in a Secular Age. Charls Taylor and Zen Buddhism in the West*. Leiden and Boston: Brill
- Wang, Y., Y. Wang and J. Wu.  
2009 “Urbanization and Informal Development in China: Urban Villages in Shenzhen.” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 33(4): 957–73. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2427.2009.00891.x>
- Wu, F., F. Zhang and C. Webster.  
2013 “Informality and Development and Demolition of Urban Villages in the Chinese Peri-urban Area.” *Urban Studies*, 50(1), 2013: 19–34. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098012466600>

- Xi, Jinping.  
2014 "Speech by Xi Jinping President of the People's Republic of China at UNESCO Headquarters." *Xinhua.net*, March 2014. [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjdt\\_665385/zyjh\\_665391/201403/t20140331\\_678150.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjdt_665385/zyjh_665391/201403/t20140331_678150.html)
- 2016 "Quanmian tigao xinxing shixia zongjiao gongzuo shuiping (全面提高新形势下宗教工作水平)." [Comprehensively Improving the Level of Religious Work According to the New Situation] April 23, 2016, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2016-04/23/c\\_1118716540.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2016-04/23/c_1118716540.htm)
- Zhan, Yang.  
2021 "Beyond neo-liberal urbanism: Assembling fluid gentrification through informal housing upgrading programs in Shenzhen", *China Cities* 112: 103-111.
- Zhang, Yanshuang.  
2017 "Digital Religion in China: A Comparative Perspective on Buddhism and Christianity's Online Publics in Sina Weibo." *Journal of Religion, Media and Digital Culture* 6 (1) 2017: 44-67. <https://doi.org/10.1163/21659214-90000095>



---

## B O O K   R E V I E W S

- Liora Sarfati, *Contemporary Korean Shamanism: From Ritual to Digital*

**Don BAKER** (University of British Columbia, Canada)

- Irene Eber and Kathryn Hellerstein, *Jews in China: Cultural Conversations, Changing Perceptions*

**Josh DANIELS** (Institute for Curriculum Services, USA)

- Ron Geaves, *Prem Rawat and Counterculture: Glastonbury and New Spiritualities*

**Donald A. WESTBROOK** (San Jose State University, USA)



<https://doi.org/10.25050/JDTREA.2022.2.1.159>

**Liora Sarfati, *Contemporary Korean Shamanism: From Ritual to Digital*.  
Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2021. Pp.228. ISBN: 978-0-253-05717-  
4, \$23.01(pbk)**

**Don BAKER**

University of British Columbia, CANADA

Shamanism poses a conundrum for scholars of religion in Korea. It does not meet the usual criteria for a religion. It does not have a well-defined body of sacred writings or a well-articulated theology. Nor does it have the sort of clear moral code usually associated with organized religions. Those may be the reasons religious studies departments at universities in Korea usually confine themselves to teaching about Buddhism, Confucianism, Daoism, Christianity, and Korea's organized home-grown religions. Courses on Korea's shamanic tradition are more likely to be found in anthropology or folklore departments.

Nevertheless, it is impossible to understand the religious culture of Korea without taking into account the role shamanism has played in the past and continues to play today. Liora Sarfati's study of contemporary Korean shamanism reminds us that shamanism remains a conspicuous feature of Korea's religious landscape in the twenty-first century. She also reminds us that we have to take shamanism seriously as a religion, and not dismiss it as nothing more than folk tradition. After all, as she shows us, shamanism is based on a belief in the existence and powers of supernatural beings. It also has rituals for interacting with those spirits. If that is not religious, what is?

Though Sarfati clearly deems shamanism to be a religion, for her the precise identity of Korean shamanism, which she usually refers to as *musok*, is less important than what actual Korean shamans do in modern Korea and how their practices are understood and portrayed. In particular, she is interested in how the image and practices of shamans have changed as Korea has embraced the latest technology and media, particularly television and the internet. Her focus is on *mansin*, those shamans who enter a trance-like state and claim to be possessed by spirits, rather than on the hereditary shamans who confine themselves to performing rituals believed to influence the behavior of spirits, since it is generally *mansin* who have taken advantage of, and adapted to, modern technology.

She begins her study of the place of shamans in contemporary Korea by examining how shaman rituals have been transformed into cultural performances. She focuses on a ritual performance, sponsored by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, at the



Traditional Performing Arts Festival held at the World Cup Stadium Park in Seoul --- a very different setting from the rural villages in which such rituals were traditionally held. She points out, however, that traditional-style paintings of the gods and traditional musical instruments were used to give the performance a traditional look. And, of course, the shaman performing the ritual wore the same sorts of traditional costumes shamans wore in past centuries. As Sarfati explains, shamans on a stage, therefore, are no less real shamans than those shamans engaged in ritual interactions with various spirits at rural mountain shrines.

In the following chapter, she looks at how shaman rituals are portrayed in cinema, arguing that changes in portrayals of shamans and their rituals on the silver screen are a reflection of changes in how society in general has changed its attitude toward *musok* over recent decades. At first shamans were depicted as relics of the past, representing ignorance and superstition. That changed after the turn of the century. *Musok* has come to be presented in recent years as a beautiful feature of Korea's indigenous culture, though actual shamans are still often portrayed as practicing a somewhat less than respectable profession unless they are among the few fortunate enough to be designated a cultural treasure by the government. Nevertheless, recently there have even been documentaries about shamans which are popular enough to be shown to paying audiences in theaters. However, those documentaries tend to focus more on the lives of shamans than on their actual religious beliefs, blurring the argument Sarfati makes that shamanism is still a religious force in Korea today.

That same distancing of shamanism from religious beliefs can be seen when Sarfati takes us into museums to show us how *musok* is portrayed within their walls. Here the focus is on the material objects used in *musok* rituals rather than on those rituals themselves. The religious side of *musok* is downplayed in favor of displaying it as an example of traditional folkways. Moreover, *musok* is usually presented as a feature of Korea's rural past, often giving the mistaken impression that it has disappeared in the modern world. Objects wielded by shamans to actively interact with various spirits become, in museum display cases, mere objects of passive human curiosity. There are exceptions, however. The Cheju Folk Village often has a resident shaman who will, for a fee, divine the future for those who seek her counsel. Another exception is the new Museum of Shamanism in Seoul, which sometimes hosts rituals on its premises.

Like the Cheju Folk Village does, television also helps support the image of shamans as people who can play a constructive role in society with their religious practices. Television tends to show shamans helping their fellow Koreans cope with the stresses of modern life. Over the last decade or so, such depictions have improved how the general public thinks of shamans. Television is expanding the range of people who are able to see shamans as real people who contribute to society rather than as charlatans or mere entertainers. However, it may also have stirred up others, such as conservative

Christians, to oppose *musok* as an instrument of the devil. Nevertheless, shamans themselves appear mostly pleased with how televised presentations of their lives and occupation have enhanced their public image.

The final medium Safati examines to understand the place and image of *musok* in contemporary Korea is the internet. A major advantage of the internet is that it allows clients to consult with shamans in the privacy of their own home, so that neighbors or co-workers will not know that they patronize practitioners of *musok*, which maintains a residual negative image in some circles. The internet also makes it possible for highly educated shamans who are skilled in the use of modern technology to attract a much wider clientele. Moreover, on the internet, they – not TV or documentary directors, nor museum curators – are usually in charge of how they are presented to the public, ensuring that they are presented in a more positive light.

The overall theme of Safati's study is the tension between the different ways we can encounter shamanism, either via the actual religious practices of shamans or through the dry presentation of those practices as more cultural and even aesthetic than religious. Another theme running throughout this book is the improvement in the public image of shamans over the last couple of decades. She credits the internet as the main force behind this change. Though many in Korea still see them as relics of Korea's superstitious rural past, there are others, even among the young modern and more highly educated generation, who see shamans not just as symbols of Korea's distinctive culture but also as possible advisors to help them navigate the complications they encounter in modern urban life.

Even though Safati makes it clear that she views *musok* as a religion, we do not get much information from this book about what shamans in Korea actually believe, other than that they believe that their gods are real and can intervene in human affairs for better or for worse. Nor do we learn much about what their clients believe, though we are informed that some clients patronize shamans with a “just in case their rituals are effective” attitude rather than a full acceptance of the beliefs underlying *musok* practice. That may be because, in *musok*, beliefs are less important than practice. *Musok* is more about what shamans do than what shamans and their clients actually believe. It can still be considered a religion, but one that falls outside the Western paradigm of religion, which prioritizes scriptures, theology, and belief over practice. Safati's labeling *musok* a “vernacular religion” is, therefore, appropriate, even though there appears to be some uncertainty in Korean academia over whether shamanism is truly a religion or not.

Safati reinforces her emphasis on shamanism as primarily religious practice by inserting (on p. vii) links to five short videos of shamans in action. These videos make it easier for readers to visualize the various shamanic rituals Safati describes. This work is already a useful guide to the place of shamanism in Korea today. By making these videos available, Safati has made her book even more valuable. I recommend this book not only

to professors looking for material to assigned in undergraduate classes but also for anyone who wants to gain a broader understanding of contemporary Korean religious practice, or of the role of media in shaping how Koreans understand their traditional culture.

<https://doi.org/10.25050/JDTREA.2022.2.1.163>

**Irene Eber, *Jews in China: Cultural Conversations, Changing Perceptions*.  
Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2020, Pp. 276, ISBN: 978-0-  
271-09214-0, \$32.95(pbk)**

**Josh DANIELS**

Institute for Curriculum Services, USA

In her over five decades of academic activity, Irene Eber established herself as one of the preeminent scholars of East Asian studies, and an unmatched expert in the relationship between Jewish and Chinese civilization. This excellent collection of many of Eber's articles and papers paints a picture of the history of Jews and Judaism in China. The essays span discussions of the historical presence of Jews in China, as well as different kinds of exchange which resulted from the encounter between their respective cultures.

Eber divides Jewish settlement in China into two general waves. The earliest Jews in China arrived in the late eighth or early ninth century, most likely as traders who came to take advantage of the mercantile opportunities in the Song Dynasty capital of Chang'an. The first permanent community, however, was established centuries later in the city of Kaifeng. Working from three stelae whose inscriptions record the histories of the Kaifeng community, Eber surmises that the claim that these Jews originally came as cotton traders from India seems likely, dating their arrival to the twelfth or thirteenth century. They had an extant presence in the city up until the past century, which was documented largely by Christian missionaries. We are unfortunately left with little textual evidence, she says, given that the Kaifeng community over the course of centuries lost their mastery of the Hebrew language as well as any Torah scrolls which may have accompanied the earliest traders.

The second wave of Jews began to arrive after the Opium Wars opened up several cities in China to Western trade. Jews, first largely from Baghdad, came to cities like Shanghai via India to engage in the lucrative cotton trade after the city had been opened up to British commerce. As the nineteenth century wore on and persecution of Jews increased in Eastern Europe and Russia, Jews from those nations also found themselves fleeing as refugees to Shanghai to augment the new community. Unlike their medieval predecessors, whose transformation of Jewish identity is deeply explored by Eber in several of the essays, these Jews established communal organizations and had a continuous presence which lasted about 150 years.

Eber describes the difference between these two waves of arrivals in terms of what she calls the difference between "Chinese Jews" and "Jews in China." One dimension of this

difference has to do with changes in ritual practice. For instance, while certain dietary laws were kept by the first wave - evidenced by their being referred to as *tianjin jao*, “the sect that extracts the sinews” - there is no mention of a kosher slaughterer in the stela inscriptions. It is also unlikely, despite records indicating festival observances including Rosh Chodesh, Purim, and the Ninth of Av, that the calendar was kept accurately, as periodic adjustments need to be made to account for variances in the lunar year.

These changes in practice accompanied a gradual change in the nature of the Chinese Jews’ means of expressing their Jewish identity. Sometime around the fifteenth century, the Jewish identity of the early wave came to be expressed mainly as familial affiliation, as opposed to participation in a worldwide community of coreligionists. Part of a process of what Eber calls “sinification,” Chinese Jews adopted Chinese surnames and family structure. As was the case for their non-Jewish Chinese counterparts, extended family networks provided Jews with a Jewish identity rooted in the identity of a paternal progenitor of their particular lineage. If the paternal ancestor was Jewish, so was the whole lineage. This runs contrary to the traditional view, in which Jewish identity is exclusively passed along matrilineally. They also fulfilled the role that communal organizations did for the later Jewish communities in China, and indeed Jewish communities elsewhere in the world – they provided financial aid, maintained their own individual cemeteries, and largely determined where members lived.

By morphing Jewish identity into a manner of identifying with the patrilineal line, the early community became “Chinese Jews” to the extent that they began to identify as Jews in a distinctly Chinese manner. The “Jews in China” – those who came to China from the nineteenth century onwards – instead continued to express their identities in the ways that were familiar to them back in Europe, that is, through communal ritual participation.

Eber’s collection is aptly placed in the series *Dmityonot: Jews and the Cultural Imagination*. She skillfully shows that much of the impetus for the decades of translation work she surveys which rendered the modern and traditional literatures of Jewish and Chinese culture accessible by readers from the other arises from the perception, sometimes distorted, of each culture by the other. Her first example draws on the translations of classical Chinese literature into modern Hebrew at the end of the twentieth century. Eber surmises that the increased demand for Chinese literature in general, and philosophical texts in particular, stemmed from the increased exposure to depictions of China in Israeli media. An interest in topics perceived as “mystical” or “spiritual” – concepts commonly associated with Eastern religions – of Jews worldwide and Israel in particular over the past 30 years or so is well-documented, helping explain the demand for translations of works like the *Daode Jing*, the *Zhuangzi*, and the *Liezi* found their way into modern Hebrew in the 1980’s and 1990’s. As Eber notes, however, some of these works only exist partially in translation and, with few exceptions, suffer from the drawback of being translated from intermediate languages.

One of the most striking examples of perception driving translation work which Eber discusses is the burgeoning interest in Yiddish literature by Chinese revolutionary thinkers in the early twentieth century. Eber notes that Chinese interest in Jewish literature began in earnest after 1917, when China's literary revolution took off and attempted a revaluation of vernacular literature over the older, written literary language. The emergence of Yiddish literature was seen as a similar trend in the Jewish world by Chinese readers, and as such it was felt that this could be a guiding example for how the same could be achieved in Chinese. In addition to a change in the form of Chinese literature, the revolutionaries advocated for a change in the content. They attempted to create a literature which reflected universal human concerns, common across international borders, and thus they argued that the new Chinese literature should turn to themes which were being expressed in foreign writings. The revolutionaries focused on depictions and critique of social oppression, which was advanced in revolutionary literature magazines. Eber notes that an entire issue of one of the major such periodicals, *Short Story Magazine*, was devoted to showcasing "the literature of oppressed peoples," and included the work of figures from Poland and Hungary.

Even given the openness of Chinese literary revolutionaries to oppressed peoples generally, Yiddish literature was of particular interest to them. Unlike the Polish or Hungarian struggles for national identity and independence, Yiddish authors lamented a "society oppressed by its own tradition and a hostile environment," as well as one "faced with the necessity for change and modernization in order to survive." This, together with the perception of Yiddish as the new vernacular language ascendant over outdated and ossified Hebrew, led to the translation of myriad works of Yiddish social criticism, poetry, and drama. Figures as well-known as Sholem Aleichem were featured among Chinese translators' work. Eber points out however, that despite all this interest, that most if not all of the translations of these works were from an intermediate language, usually English or Esperanto. The most important detail about the Chinese revolutionary authors' attitudes towards Yiddish is that it is largely mistaken. While modern Yiddish literature did flourish from the middle of the nineteenth century through the first half of the twentieth, it by no means replaced Hebrew as a literary language. This underscores the role that Jewish literature played in the cultural imagination of the Chinese authors and how it helped to drive their own goals of revolutionizing the Chinese language.

The rest of Eber's essays elaborate on this theme in different contexts of translation, ranging from the translation of the Hebrew Bible into Chinese by the Peking Translating Committee, Martin Buber's translation of the *Daode Jing* and the influence of Chinese thought on many of his major works, to the travelog of the Jewish poet Meylekh Ravitch as he traveled across China, to Chinese translations of Kafka's *The Castle*. In each of these contexts, Eber unpacks how the changing perceptions of Chinese and Jewish cultures by each other motivated the work of translation and produced translated works whose ideological and intellectual purposes brought out different aspects of the

original work, or even distorted them entirely. Despite the difficulty posed for readers who lack the Chinese knowledge to fully appreciate the brilliance (or lack thereof) of the many translation choices she highlights, Eber's collection of essays is an excellent addition to the *Dmityonot* series, contributing a trove of work detailing how changing representations of Judaism determined the relationship between Jewish and Chinese literature in translation.

<https://doi.org/10.25050/JDTREA.2022.2.1.167>

**Ron Geaves, *Prem Rawat and Counterculture: Glastonbury and New Spiritualities*. London: Bloomsbury, 2020; xiii, Pp. 233, ISBN: 978-1-350-26544-8, \$35.95(Pbk)**

**Donald A. WESTBROOK**

San Jose State University, USA

Ron Geaves, Honorary Visiting Professor at Cardiff University's Centre for the Study of Islam, is a top academic authority on Prem Rawat (known formerly as Guru Maharaj Ji), the Divine Light Mission (DLM), and subsequent organizational iterations such as Elan Vital, Words of Peace International, and the Prem Rawat Foundation. His latest work, *Prem Rawat and Counterculture*, examines the circumstances that brought 13-year-old Prem Rawat, then leader of the DLM, to the 1971 Glastonbury Fayre, where on June 21 he spoke from the famous pyramid stage at an event similar to Woodstock in the US, marked more by music, revelry, free love, and drug use than spiritual exploration. Geaves ably demonstrates the connections between Prem Rawat's short but ultimately serendipitous visit to Glastonbury ("for little more than an hour" p. 1) and the surrounding counterculture within which New Age and Eastern spiritual movements found their footings.

Geaves is perhaps more qualified to do so than anyone else by virtue of the fact that, as a disciple, he accompanied Prem Rawat (Guru Maharaj Ji) that day to Glastonbury (also a pilgrimage site for Anglicans, pagans, and New Age believers), stood by his side on the stage, and witnessed the growth and decline of DLM in the years to come. On the other hand, as Geaves acknowledges, his status as an insider carries with it the obvious potential for bias in playing the part of "both interviewer and interviewed" (p. 6). With these considerations in mind, writing fifty years later about the events in question, Geaves has pieced together a balanced, engaging, and rigorous account that makes use of his own ethnographic perspective, available primary and secondary sources, and conversations with friends and colleagues who were also part of the DLM during this period. Along the way, he capably engages with theoretical concerns and the religious studies academic literature, such as the work of Steven Sutcliffe and in particular Stephen A. Kent's *From Slogans to Mantras: Social Protest and Religious Conversion in the Late Vietnam War Era* (2001).

Geaves' monograph certainly contributes to the academic study of Prem Rawat, but also to understanding the Glastonbury Fayre and Glastonbury as a sacred site. His volume will be of particular interest to new religious movement (NRM) researchers studying the history of the DLM in the UK, even though the focus is on the "case study



of Prem Rawat and his changing relationship with the counterculture throughout the decade of the 1970s" (p. 151), especially in relation to contested concepts such as "New Age," "Easternization," and "occulture" (cultural appropriation of the occult, engaging in particular with Christopher Partridge's work). It is also appreciated that the author includes the full text of the guru's speech (p. 126-28).

It is clear that the 1971 visit is now significant to Prem Rawat, his followers, and even Glastonbury itself, despite the guru's initial "ambivalence" (p. 124) about making the trip. In June 2022, the Council of the City of Glastonbury honored Rawat with a presentation of the "Key of Avalon," similar to a key to the city ceremony (see "Glastonbury Historic Award Ceremony," YouTube, Prem Rawat Official Channel, June 17, 2022). Prem Rawat continues to spread a message, though now in more secularized ways that might be classified as self help or motivational speaking, and long ago traded in Indian robes for western suits. In September 2022, he was interviewed on CNN, quite favorably, and earlier in the same year gave a virtual talk at Google ("Hear Yourself: How to Find Peace in a Noisy World," also available on YouTube).

Now that this former guru has transformed into a motivational speaker and peace promoter with a larger secular audience and emphasis, it is all the more important for DLM historians and NRM researchers to document and analyze these earlier years in the way that Geaves has admirably and carefully done. Doing so may allow us to discern a consistent theme in Prem Rawat's messaging and self-consciousness. To borrow lines from his Glastonbury speech: "I am not a religious man. I am only saying that I am a spiritual man. I never believe in religions, because I believe religions divide men and men's ideas into separate sects" (p. 127). Or, as Geaves puts it in his critique of Easternization and essentialism, Prem Rawat "does not see himself as 'Hindu' or 'Buddhist' and refuses most definitions of where he fits in the religious/spiritual spectrum, usually denying that he belongs to either" (p. 175).

In the end, Geaves offers an account of this moment of cultural and religious history that is both scholarly and personal, maintaining an academic distance but never hesitating to offer his own recollections alongside that of other perspectives. This book is recommended to historians, religious studies scholars, sociologists, and of course Glastonbury fans. It helps fill a lacuna in UK NRM history in the 1970s and should encourage others to more fully examine the legacy of the 1971 Glastonbury Fayre (now known as the Glastonbury Festival).



# Call for Papers

The Journal of  
Daesoon  
Thought and  
the Religions of  
East Asia

**JDTREA**  
JOURNAL OF DAESOO THOUGHT & THE RELIGIONS OF EAST ASIA

Daesoon Academy of Sciences (DAOS) was established at Daejin University in 1992. DAOS publishes research papers on Daesoon Thought multiple times each year. The Journal of Daesoon Thought and the Religions of East Asia (JDTREA) is an international collaboration, supported by the Daesoon Academy of Sciences, but with a global outlook. The journal has an international advisory board of senior scholars, who have different academic backgrounds but share a research focus on religions. JDTREA publishes research on the philosophical thought within Daesoon Jinrihoe and other Korean religions, and more generally, the journal also examines the religions of East Asia from various academic perspectives. The type of papers sought by our call for papers is listed below. We look forward to your interest and participation.

---

## PAPER TOPICS

All topics related to Daesoon Thought are potentially eligible, and this is also true of all topics related to East Asian philosophies and religions.

---

---

## CALL FOR PAPERS AND ACADEMIC SCHEDULE

Publication Releases:  
Late March and Late September

For a more detailed schedule, please refer to our website.

---

---

## CONTACT INFORMATION

82-31-539-2523  
idaos@daejin.ac.kr  
[www.jdre.org](http://www.jdre.org)

---

**DAOS**  
DAESOO ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

## Introducing WWW.JDRE.ORG

*The Journal of Daesoon Thought & the Religions of East Asia (JD TRE A)* launched on September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2021 with volume 1, issue 1. JD TRE A is set to be published twice annually and special editions may also be released in the future. Naturally, the Open Access website for JD TRE A has also opened. Some site features include:

**Homepage** [www.jdre.org](http://www.jdre.org)

**JD TRE A**  
JOURNAL OF DAESOON THOUGHT & THE RELIGIONS OF EAST ASIA

OPEN ACCESS  
eISSN : 2799-4252  
pISSN : 2799-3949

Home About Browse Articles Current Issue For Authors and Reviewers Full Text Search 언어 선택 ▼

**About The Journal of Daesoon Thought and the Religions of East Asia**

*Journal of Daesoon Thought and the Religions of East Asia* is a peer-reviewed, academic journal published in English by the Daesoon Academy of Sciences. In 1992, Daesoon Academy of Sciences was established at Daejin University. The goal of the academy is to stimulate dialogue and exchange ideas, theories, and perspectives among scholars in both Asia and the West, by publishing cutting-edge articles in all subfields of Daesoon Studies and the Religions of East Asia. *JD TRE A* was first published in 2021. *JD TRE A* is widely recognized by scholars as one of the leading English-language journals in the field of Daesoon Studies.

**Call for Paper**

**E-Submission**

News and Notice  
Research and Publication  
Author Guidelines  
Journal Archive  
Full Text Search  
Free Email Alerts

**DAOS**  
JOURNAL OF THE DAESOON ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

**DAESOONJINRIHOE**

CURRENT ISSUE MOST READ ARTICLES MOST CITED ARTICLES

CURRENT ISSUE: Mar 2022, Vol. 1, Issue 2

**EDITOR'S PREFACE**  
Carole M. CUSACK  
J. Daesoon Thought Relig. East Asia 2022;1(2):9-10.  
<https://doi.org/10.25050/JDTREA.2022.1.2.9>

TML PDF PubReader

- Full text searches of whole articles
- XML archives
- Free PDF downloads
- Advanced searches of articles by keywords, titles, or authors
- E-submission
- Up-to-date announcements

**Subscriptions:** Daesoon Academy of Science (DAOS) will send *Journal of Daesoon Thought and the Religions of East Asia (JDTREA)* for free to a selection of relevant individuals and institutions. Full-text PDF files are also available at the official website ([www.jdre.org](http://www.jdre.org)). The circulation number of print copies is 500. To order a subscription to JDTREA, please contact our editorial office.

**Contact Information:** Daesoon Academy of Sciences Department of Administrative, Room 403, Daejin Education Building, Daejin University, 1007, Hoguk-ro, Pocheon-si, Gyeonggi-do, 11159, South Korea. E-mail: [idaos@daejin.ac.kr](mailto:idaos@daejin.ac.kr). Tel: +82-31-539-2523

**Method of Payment:** Bank transfer (Contact us for banking details)

**Postal Information:** *Journal of Daesoon Thought and the Religions of East Asia* (eISSN: 2799-4252, pISSN: 2799-3949) is published in English twice a year on March 30 and September 30 by Daesoon Academy of Science (DAOS), Room 403, Daejin Education Building, Daejin University, 1007, Hoguk-ro, Pocheon-si, Gyeonggi-do, 11159, South Korea

**Postmaster:** Daesoon Academy of Sciences Department of Administrative, Room 403, Daejin Education Building, Daejin University, 1007, Hoguk-ro, Pocheon-si, Gyeonggi-do, 11159, South Korea

**Digital Object Identifiers:** For information on doi, please visit [www.doi.org](http://www.doi.org)

**Permissions:** For information on how to request permissions co-reproduce articles or information from this journal, please contact us at [idaos@daejin.ac.kr](mailto:idaos@daejin.ac.kr)

**Advertising:** JDTREA does not currently accept any commercial product advertisements.

**Disclaimer:** Articles published in *Journal of Daesoon Thought and the Religions of East Asia* do not represent the views of JDTREA or those of its editorial board. Individual authors are solely responsible for opinions expressed and the accuracy of facts published in the articles and reviews.

Daesoon Academy of Sciences (DAOS, Chairman: Bae Kyuhan; [www.daos.or.kr/en/](http://www.daos.or.kr/en/)) is the research institute that best exemplifies the founding principles of Daejin University. DAOS has supervised numerous research activities for the purpose of promoting and developing studies on Daesoon Thought for the past 30 years. JDTREA ([www.jdre.org](http://www.jdre.org)) is the official English language journal of the Daesoon Academy of Sciences.

JDTREA is an open access journal distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution license ([www.creative-commons.org/licenses/by/4.0/](http://www.creative-commons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)), which permits unrestricted non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Part of articles, metadata, or full text in *Journal of Daesoon Thought and the Religions of East Asia* is available from CrossRef metadata (2021-), Google Scholar (2021-).

Its website and XML files are produced and maintained by Guhmok, the Republic of Korea ([www.guhmok.com](http://www.guhmok.com)). This paper meets the requirement of KS X ISO 9706, ISO 9706-1994 & ANSI/NISOZ39.48\_1992 (Permanence of Paper)

## Submission Guidelines for *Journal of Daesoon Thought and the Religions of East Asia*

*Journal of Daesoon Thought and the Religions of East Asia (JD TRE A)* is a peer-reviewed, academic journal published in English by the Daesoon Academy of Sciences. In 1992, The Daesoon Academy of Sciences was established at Daejin University. The goal of the academy is to stimulate dialogue and exchange ideas, theories, and perspectives among scholars in both Asia and the West, by publishing cutting-edge articles in all subfields of Daesoon Studies and the Religions of East Asia. *JD TRE A* was first published in 2021. *JD TRE A* is widely recognized by scholars as one of the leading English-language journals in the field of Daesoon Studies.

### CALL FOR PAPERS

All topics related to Daesoon Thought are potentially eligible, and this is also true of all topics related to East Asian philosophies and religions. The journal's call for papers is on-going, and the journal is published on March 30 and September 30 each year.

### MANUSCRIPT SUBMISSION

The Daesoon Academy of Sciences welcomes the submission of papers in any field of Daesoon Thought and/or East Asian philosophies and religions. The paper should be an unpublished original work and not under consideration to be published elsewhere. All manuscripts will be reviewed by at least two [2] blind reviewers. Book reviews and research notes relevant to Daesoon Thought and East Asian philosophies and religions may also be submitted. In the preparation of manuscripts, authors are requested to observe the standards specified below.

In general, the style guidelines that authors are expected to follow consist of *JD TRE A*'s own style guideline, and in the case of issues not covered in *JD TRE A*'s style guideline, the 17<sup>th</sup> Edition of the Chicago Manual of Style can be referred to as a supplement. The length of manuscripts should be no more than 8,000 words, with references up to no more than 10,000 words. Endnotes should be used in manuscripts. In the case of book reviews or research notes, the length should be up to 1,000 words. For the transliteration of Korean words, follow the new romanization conventions put forth by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism in 2000 ([www.mcct.go.kr](http://www.mcct.go.kr)).

Additional instructions for authors can be obtained via our website ([www.jdre.org](http://www.jdre.org)). Manuscripts should be submitted via e-mail as MS Word documents accompanied by an abstract of 200 words with five to ten keywords and a 100-word introduction to the author(s). In case the manuscript is written by more than one author, all of the names have to be clearly indicated: the order of the names depends on the degree of the individual's contribution to the article.

Articles will be edited to conform to the style of *JD TRE A* in terms of layout and the romanization of Korean names and words. Other changes may be made in the interest of clarity. The editors are the final arbiters of length, grammar, and format. Submissions can be sent in either through the following link: [www.jdre.org/author/submission](http://www.jdre.org/author/submission) or the following email address: [idaos@daejin.ac.kr](mailto:idaos@daejin.ac.kr)

**Article Processing Charges:** No page charge or article processing charge applies. There is also no submission fee. *JD TRE A* is a platinum open access journal which means there are no author-side fees.

**Copyright:** The copyrights of all published materials are owned by the Daesoon Academy of Sciences (DAOS). All authors must sign a Transfer of Copyright Agreement when submitting their manuscripts.

**Contact Point:** Jason GREENBERGER, Managing Editor. Further information can be obtained via our website ([www.jdre.org](http://www.jdre.org)), e-mail ([idaos@daejin.ac.kr](mailto:idaos@daejin.ac.kr)) or via telephone (+82-31-539-2523). Books for review should also be sent to the same address. *JD TRE A* does not guarantee review of unsolicited books. All papers featured in *JD TRE A* are also accessible in PDF format at: [www.jdre.org](http://www.jdre.org)



## **Journal of Daesoon Thought & the Religions of East Asia**

### **RESEARCH ARTICLES**

<b>DON BAKER</b>	<b>INTRODUCING DAESOON PHILOSOPHY TO THE WEST</b>
<b>ZHIHE WANG</b>	<b>HAEWON-SANGSAENG, CHINESE HARMONISM AND ECOLOGICAL CIVILIZATION</b>
<b>LIVIA KOHN</b>	<b>ACTIVATING TWENTY-FOUR: TIME, SPACE, AND BODY</b>
<b>EDWARD IRONS &amp; LEE GYUNGWON</b>	<b>YIGUANDAO IN KOREA: INTERNATIONAL GROWTH OF A CHINESE NEW RELIGION</b>
<b>NGUYEN PHUOC TAI ET AL.</b>	<b>AN ANALYSIS OF THE MEANING ENSHRINED IN THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE TAY NINH HOLY SEE OF CAO DAI</b>
<b>KAI SHMUSHKO</b>	<b>TEAISM IN THE SINOPHONE WORLD AND BEYOND: SPIRITUAL, POLITICAL AND MATERIAL EXPLORATIONS</b>

### **BOOK REVIEWS**

<b>DON BAKER</b>	<b>LIORA SARFATI, CONTEMPORARY KOREAN SHAMANISM: FROM RITUAL TO DIGITAL</b>
<b>JOSH DANIELS</b>	<b>IRENE EBER AND KATHRYN HELLERSTEIN, JEWS IN CHINA: CULTURAL CONVERSATIONS, CHANGING PERCEPTIONS</b>
<b>DONALD A. WESTBROOK</b>	<b>RON GEAVES, PREM RAWAT AND COUNTERCULTURE: GLASTONBURY AND NEW SPIRITUALITIES</b>



**THE DAESOON ACADEMY OF SCIENCES, DAEJIN UNIVERSITY**