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## Aims and Scope

*The Journal of Daeseon Thought and the Religions of East Asia (JDTREA)* 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 *JDTREA* twice a year. The editorial board of *JDTREA* 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. *JDTREA* is published to promote global studies on Daeseon Thought and East Asia religion by encouraging wide-ranging research on these topics. The scope of *JDTREA* 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 *JDTREA* will include original articles, research notes, and book reviews. Other types of contributions are negotiable but subject to the approval of the editorial board. All unsolicited articles will be subject to peer review, and commissioned articles are reviewed by the Editorial Board.

## About the Journal

*JDTREA* debuted on September 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

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**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)

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# Journal of Daesoon Thought & the Religions of East Asia

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

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# EDITOR'S PREFACE

**Carole M. CUSACK**

The University of Sydney, Australia



This new issue of the *Journal of Daesoon Thought and the Religions of East Asia* is the fourth to date, and it has been a privilege to be associated with this ground-breaking Korean journal and to participate in its growth and academic development. That the focus is equally on the Korean new religion of Daesoon Jinrihoe and the contemporary religious climate of East Asia is a particular strength: the richness and diversity of new religions in Asia is often ignored by Western scholars, and *JDTREA*, as an English-language journal, offers a corrective to that.

The first contribution is by Brian Fehler (Texas Women's University, Denton, USA) and is titled "Rhetorical Relationality and The Four Tenets of Daesoon Jinrihoe." This article chronicles developments in the academic field of rhetoric and applies contemporary rhetorical models to texts about the Four Tenets of Daesoon Jinrihoe, in order to open up previously unexamined aspects of these principles.

The second article is by Zhang Rongkun (University of Shanghai for Science and Technology, China) and Jason Greenberger (Daijin University, Korea), and is called "Fasting of the Mind and Quieting of the Mind: A Comparative Analysis of Apophatic Tendencies in Zhuangzi and Cataphatic Tendencies in Daesoon Thought." This study brings the thought of renowned Daoist thinker Zhuangzi into relationship with the doctrines of Daesoon Jinrihoe, investigating what ideas of self-transformation mean in relation to the categories of apophatic and cataphatic.

Next is Donald A. Westbrook (San Jose State University, San Jose, USA) with "Freedom of Religion, *Sangsaeng*, and Symbiosis in the Post-COVID Study of (New) Religions," which brings Daesoon Jinrihoe into conversation with the typology of the late Roy Wallis (1945–1990) which identifies world-rejecting, world-affirming, and world-accommodating new religious movements. Daesoon Jinrihoe is compared with the Church of Scientology in productive ways.

Next is Nguyen Ngoc Tho (Vietnam National University, Ho Chi Minh, Vietnam) and Phan Thi Thu Hien (Vietnam National University, Ho Chi Minh, Vietnam) with "Molding the East Asian Dragons: The Creation and Transformation of Various Ecological and Political Discourses." This is a fascinating study of a cultural aspect of East Asian religion, the dragon, which has symbolic value for various social groups, and the argument encompasses issues of aggressive dragons versus friendly dragons, and the extent to which Chinese imperialistic narratives still dominate twenty-first interpretations.

The fifth article is Nguyen Trung Hieu (Vietnam National University, Ho Chi Minh, Vietnam) and Nguyen Phuoc Tai (FTP University, Vietnam), "Daoist Thought through Symbols Observed in the Architecture of Tu An Hieu Nghia Pagodas and Temples from the Tri Ton District, An Giang Province." This discusses the Four Debts of Gratitude, a

new religion in Vietnam that was originally a branch of Buu Son Ky Huong movement. The article addresses the question of how architectural structures and built complexes express theological ideas associated with these movements.

The final article is by Dinh Hong Hai (Vietnam National University, Hanoi, Vietnam) and is titled “Otherness and Diversity in Vietnamese Confucianism: The Formation of the Symbol of the Ancestral King Lạc Long Quân Based on the Nguyễn Huy Thiệp Complex.” This is an innovative study that applies psychological models to mythological texts concerning the origin of the Vietnamese people.

The journal issue is completed by three reviews supplied by the Review Editor, Professor Holly Folk (Western Washington University, USA). As ever, gratitude is due to Bae Kyuhan, Lee Gyungwon, Jason Greenberger, and Choi Wonhyuk, from Daejin University, and to the authors and referees who made this issue happen. Three years on from the start of the Covid-19 pandemic the world is beginning to awaken again, and we are happy to be at the forefront of global research in religious studies. I hope that many readers will be attracted to and inspired by the excellent research curated in this issue.

**Carole M. Cusack**

Editor of *JDTREA*  
The University of Sydney, Australia

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## RESEARCH ARTICLES

- Rhetorical Relationality and The Four Tenets of Daesoon Jinrihoe  
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**DINH Hong Hai** (Vietnam National University, Hanoi, Vietnam)



# Rhetorical Relationality and The Four Tenets of Daesoon Jinrihoe

**Brian FEHLER**

Brian Fehler, Ph.D., is a tenured professor of English at Texas Woman's University in Denton. There, he teaches graduate courses in the history of rhetoric and undergraduate courses in rhetoric and writing studies. A Lifetime Member of the Rhetoric Society of America, his articles have appeared in *Rhetoric Review* and *RSQ: Rhetoric Society Quarterly* and he has presented papers throughout the United States and in Germany, India, and the U.K. He is co-editor (with Elizabeth Weiser and Angela Gonzalez) of *Engaging Audience: Writing in an Age of New Literacies* (2009) and editor of the first English edition of *The Canonical Scripture of Daesoon Jinrihoe*.



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## Original Articles

Correspondence to

**Brian FEHLER**

Texas Woman's University, USA

**BFehler@twu.edu**

ORCID

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4350-6277>



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## Abstract

For centuries in the Christian era in the West, rhetoric was considered to be a pagan art, one unnecessary for, and detrimental to, religious propagation. As the Christian era gave way to a scientific one during the Enlightenment, both rhetoric and religion were considered irrational and outside the scope of Cartesian certainty. In recent decades, though, rhetorical studies have regained status in universities and rhetorical studies of religion have proliferated. Much work remains to be done, however. For example, Western rhetorical models do not typically consider religious tenets or creeds in terms of what this article will call rhetorical relationality, because creeds and tenets of Western Christianity tend to be purely exhortative. In the West, then, we lack a framework for such an analysis, but with the Four Tenets of Daesoon Jinrihoe, we are presented with Tenets that can, in fact, be analyzed relationally. In order to analyze them as such, this article draws upon philosophical, legal, and rhetorical frameworks developed by major twentieth-century rhetorician Chaim Perelman to understand the primary concern of mutuality expressed in contemporary rhetorical relationality.

**Keywords:** rhetorical relationality; Chaim Perelman; The Four Tenets



## Introduction

For most of Western religio-philosophical history, scholars and practitioners, following Aristotle, Plato, St Augustine and others, have endorsed linear, positivist, and binary models of thinking and behavior. The discipline of rhetoric has generally followed those intellectual trends. However, in recent years, rhetoricians have begun to embrace concepts of relationality and connectedness. Social scientist Shawn Wilson writes, for example, “knowledge is relational. Knowledge is shared with all of creation” (Wilson 2008, 176). He argues that a rhetor must consider one’s *relationship* with reality, with the natural world, with people.” Likewise, Sidney Dobrin and Christian Weisser point out that rhetoric scholar Kenneth Burke regularly claimed that “intellectual life cannot be removed from ‘life’ itself” (Dobrin and Weisser 2002, 15). This article will extend this trajectory of rhetorical understanding of relationality into a new realm: The Four Tenets of the Korean new religion, Daesoon Jinrihoe. The concepts held by this Korean new religion (and Korean religious thinking in general) remain an unexplored field in rhetorical studies, as Massimo Introvigne recognizes: “The study of Korean new religions is under-developed in the West” (Introvigne 2021, 8). The Four Tenets—virtuous concordance of yin and yang; harmonious union between Divine Beings and human beings; resolution of grievances for mutual beneficence; perfected state of unification with Dao—provide a foundation for Daesoon Jinrihoe, what scholar Don Baker calls “the most prominent of the various Chŭngsan’gyo religions” (Baker 2019, 299). Considering the Four Tenets rhetorically, this article will for the first time demonstrate for Western rhetoricians the applicability of the Tenets to rhetorical relationality which will help us further our understanding of rhetoric as what Michel de Certeau calls “sets of interrelated, dynamic ‘everyday’ practices” (De Certeau 2011, 2). The philosophical, legal, and rhetorical framework established in the twentieth century by Chaim Perelman will serve as our framework for understanding the common concern for mutuality expressed in contemporary rhetorical relationality.

## Perelman, Rhetorical Relationality, and Eastern Mutuality

Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca’s *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation* (1969) remains one of the seminal works on rhetoric in the twentieth century. However, Perelman’s adoption by rhetoricians, particularly American rhetoricians, as one of their own, has resulted in something of a mixed blessing for the Perelman legacy. Certainly, any course on contemporary rhetoric would appear incomplete without *The New Rhetoric* or its more accessible version, *The Realm of Rhetoric* (1982). Unfortunately, scholars of rhetoric often read one of these two works, then suppose that they have a broad enough understanding of Perelman.

Indeed, reading *The New Rhetoric*, much more studying it at some length, is no small achievement, and most disciplinary debates regarding Perelman begin and end with that text. But we must remember that Perelman considered himself primarily a philosopher, which makes his work particularly applicable to religious discourse, and he received degrees in philosophy and law. Perelman's interests extend beyond those touched upon in *The New Rhetoric*, and his body of scholarship, on the whole, reveals a paramount concern for justice, law, equity, and mutuality. Thus, his work provides a particularly valuable lens for examining the Tenets of Daesoon Jinrihoe, as they share those concerns as well, particularly the value of mutuality. That mutual concern for mutuality should come as no surprise, as both Perelman's New Rhetoric project and Daesoon Jinrihoe emerged in response to conflict. We saw that Perelman was responding to the violence of World War II, and Don Baker writes:

In the scriptures of the most prominent of the various Chŭngsan'gyo denominations, Daesoon Jinrihoe (Taesun Chilliho 大巡眞理會), we are told he taught that the world has descended into a state of constant competition rather than cooperation, creating injustice and resentment. The build-up of resentment had finally reached a point where it has become a dangerous negative force. This negative energy, the result of a cosmic order based on mutual conflict (sanggŭk 相剋), has grown strong enough to disturb order in the cosmos. (Baker 2019, 299)

That disordered cosmos, and the ways to remedy it, call for a continual response, continual action, the character of the response encapsulated, for Daesoon Jinrihoe, in the Four Tenets and, for Perelman, in the terminology we will apply to the Tenets.

The Belgian Perelman was first introduced to American scholars in the late 1960s and early 1970s, after the appearance of the English translation of *The New Rhetoric*. Perelman was introduced to the United States largely through the influence of Henry Johnstone, professor of speech communication at Pennsylvania State University, and editor of *Philosophy and Rhetoric*. Another scholar, Ray D. Dearin, joined the early philosophical advocates. In an article which appeared in the October 1969 publication of *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, Dearin ends his comments in no uncertain terms, insisting that “[i]t is in the light of Perelman's entire philosophic enterprise, then, that one should approach his theory of rhetoric” (Dearin 1969, 224). Dearin, himself, in the article provides a broad and useful overview of Perelman's philosophy, particularly his conception of epistemology. Not all (or even most) Western rhetoricians are as thoroughly invested in philosophical concerns or traditions as Perelman was, and thus we can find in his work, through the philosophical realm, affinities with Eastern and Daesoon Thought, and, thereby, strengthen our intercultural understanding of both topics.

## The Historical Emergence of a New Rhetoric

Additionally, Perelman was actively involved in putting his philosophy into action (he was dedicated to not being “a mere pursuer of prose” as *The Canonical Scripture* put it). In *Contemporary Perspectives on Rhetoric*, Foss, Foss, and Trapp note that Perelman “was an individual of action as well as ideas” (Foss, Foss and Trapp 1991, 120). The action to which Foss, Foss, and Trapp refer involves Perelman's work, as a young man, in the Belgian resistance movement during World War II. Most students of Perelman know that he participated in the movement, but—because he did not often discuss his involvement—few details have emerged regarding this important, formative period in Perelman's life. Indeed, when Perelman was offered a medal of valor following the war, he refused the honor, insisting: “My heart was on fire. I simply picked up a pail of water to douse the flames. I want no medals” (Foss, Foss and Trapp 1991, 120). It would be useful for intercultural communication, I think, to study the reorganization of European universities following the war and to see how such a momentous historical event affected the Ivory Towers. I have found no such study, but when Perelman returned to the University of Brussels to teach law, ethics, and metaphysics—still a young man at thirty-three—we can surely imagine that his lectures, and those of his colleagues, responded to the changed world.

Perelman's reluctance to discuss his resistance work is not an uncommon silence; some resistance workers came forward in the post-war years to make their stories public. Many others simply returned to their pre-war lives, in attempts to regain normalcy. We cannot begrudge these workers their privacy, but fortunately historians have made increasing efforts to record these important stories.<sup>3</sup> In any event, the role of Jews in the resistance movement has received, in particular, little attention. Rab Bennett writes that “[t]he subject of Jewish resistance is relegated to a footnote in many standard general works, and ignored altogether in others: in Henri Michel's *The Shadow War* Jewish resistance merits a mere four pages in a 360-page book” (Bennett 1999, 9). Throughout Perelman's work, including *The New Rhetoric*, his concern for unconstrained dialogue is apparent; in the works here considered, these issues come to the forefront. Those issues also inspired Perelman's desire to shift rhetoric's focus from persuasion (with its undertones of compulsion) to communion (with its value of cooperation).

This historical reconstruction allows us to understand Perelman's mistrust of Cartesianism, which he famously addresses in *The New Rhetoric*, a mistrust that will become more apparent as we consider Daesoon's Four Tenets in light of Perelman's work. His mistrust of Cartesian scientism will provide a primary affinity with Eastern thought. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca define their project as “a break with the concept of reason and reasoning due to Descartes which has set its mark on Western philosophy for the last three centuries” (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, 1). It

is no accident that *The New Rhetoric* addresses Cartesianism in forceful, battle-ready language. If the forces of “good” triumphed on the battlefields of Europe, the forces of “justice” were still estranged from Western philosophy and universities. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca write: “it is the idea of self-evidence as characteristic of reason, which we must assail, if we are to make place for a theory of argumentation that will acknowledge the use of reason in directing our own actions and influencing those of others” (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, 3). “Self-evidence,” as Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca believe, has grown since the time of Descartes into an intellectual tyrant, one which is seen as a “force to which every normal mind must yield,” and one which “imposes itself” (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, 3).

Reading *The New Rhetoric* in its post-war context, we cannot ignore the connotations of such terms. For Perelman, the individual action was necessary to contribute to cooperation and mutuality in a world of tensions. His path, thus, for bringing to rhetoric a rich understanding of philosophy for helping to heal a community and the world has a long history in the West, of course; one thinks famously of Boethius and his *Consolation of Philosophy*. In the Eastern tradition, too, as exemplified in *The Canonical Scripture* of Daesoon Jinrihoe, Sangje reads works of human wisdom in order to help him heal the world. We read there:

At that time, Sangje read through the books on Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism; in addition, He read through books on the yin-yang school of thought, prophecy, and other books related to philosophy. He thought these could be helpful to save the world by rectifying faults (*Acts* 2:1)

In *The New Rhetoric and the Humanities*, Perelman writes that “[i]n 1945, when I published my first study of justice, I was completely ignorant of the importance of rhetoric” (Perelman 1979, 7-8). Perelman decided in that work that the “idea of value is, in effect, incompatible both with formal necessity and with experiential universality. There is no value which is not logically arbitrary” (Perelman 1979, 8). For Perelman, values must be conceived of philosophically, but such values cannot remain the object of philosophical inquiry. However, in this schema, Perelman found something missing. He writes: “I was deeply dissatisfied with this conclusion, however interesting the analysis, since the philosophical inquiry, carried on within the limits of logical empiricism, could not provide [. . .] the establishment of rules and models for reasonable action” (Perelman 1979, 8). Perelman searched for a model that could analyze behavior that was reasonable rather than logical. Perelman's immediate historical context, no matter how much he attempted to downplay this motivation, fueled his quest. This question lingered: “Is it possible for us to reason about values instead of making them depend solely on irrational choices, based on interest, passion, prejudice, and myth? Recent history has shown

abundantly the sad excesses to which such an attitude can lead” (Perelman 1979, 8).

This search led Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca to “recover” the Aristotelian tradition of dialectical reasoning, a system which is “devoted to the analysis of human reasoning” (Perelman 1979, 9). One cannot have justice at all, Perelman seems to have discovered, without arguing one’s way to a specific notion of justice. That justice, as Perelman wrote, is an expression of values, and is best understood in terms of a community and mutuality. It is from that starting point that we will embark on the joint exploration of Daesoon Thought within a Perelmanian framework. There is, of course, a great deal of relatedness among the Four Tenets of Daesoon Jinrihoe themselves, and thus the tenets serve as an excellent illustration of the ways rhetorics of relatedness operate. Central to each of the tenets are the characteristics of communication, balance, and mutuality, characteristics which are also central to rhetorics of relatedness. We will take each of the tenets in turn, as well as one principal of Perelmanian rhetoric, also in turn, as each illuminates the other mutually, and demonstrates the complete system of rhetorical relatedness expressed in these principles of Daesoon Thought.

## Self-Evidence and the First Tenet

Among the most important projects that Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca take up in *The New Rhetoric* is one that is central to relational rhetorics: the dismantling of supposed “self-evidence.” Self-evidence is problematic in *The New Rhetoric* and relational rhetorics generally because the concept is one that brooks no debate, no discussion, no invitation to dialogue. It simply stands, uncontested, indivisible. Throughout *The New Rhetoric*, “[s]elf-evidence is conceived both as a force to which every normal mind must yield and as a sign of the truth of that which imposes itself because it is self-evident” (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, 3). In some ways, Parts Two and Three of *The New Rhetoric*, the large majority of that book, become a textbook for dismantling the mystery of self-evidence—for making explicit that which claims to be—or merely takes advantage of its status as—implicit, to expose the constructedness of most truth claims. It is in connection to the charges against self-evidence that the first tenet of Daesoon Jinrihoe—“Virtuous Concordance of Yin and Yang”—can be productively considered in this rhetorical context. Unlike the forceful, imposing nature of self-evidence, yin and yang is a literal give and take—not all one, but not all the other. It is, by its nature, dependent, and thus exists in a state of mutuality. We read in *The Canonical Scripture*:

When yin vanishes, yang comes into being; When yang vanishes, yin comes into being. The Dao of birth and vanishing lies in yin and yang. Thus, after a man can use yin and yang, his life can be called authentic. (*Saving Lives* 43).

In its state of give and take, a full spectrum of being, yin and yang provides a means of authenticity, whereas claims of self-evidence require compulsion. In her article on yin and yang in Eastern forms of rhetoric, Hui Wu writes:

“In studies of rhetoric and communication, yin-yang perspectives have prompted scholars to question established dichotomies grounded on a Western analytical framework, such as direct and indirect, deductive and inductive, logical and analogical, individualistic and collectivistic, or classified and holistic, as well as male and female, culture and nurturing, and reasoning and caring in gender studies” (Wu 2018, 46).

We see evidence for this claim in the Daesoon understanding of yin and yang, for we read in *The Canonical Scripture*:

As gods come to be and humans come next, the former is yin and the latter yang. As males come to be and females come next, the former is yang and the latter yin. As there is inside and outside, the former is yin and the latter yang. As there is the right and the left, the former is yang and the latter yin. As there is that which is hidden and that which is revealed, the former is yin and the latter yang. As there is the front and the rear, the former is yang and the latter yin. Every affair in Heaven and Earth is accomplished amid yin and yang; the order of all things is achieved amid yin and yang. (*The Scripture of Yin and Yang, Progress of the Order* 2:42)

Even more specifically rhetorical, the notion of concordance in relation to yin and yang refers to agreement. Rhetorically, agreement is a starting point. In relation to the tenet, concordance must also be seen not merely as a static state but as a process that requires continual attention and work. There is a normative and corrective function to this first Tenet that we see expressed in the others as well. For example, we read in *The Canonical Scripture* that: “Once, after writing and posting the words, ‘yin (陰)’ and ‘yang (陽)’ on the wall of the clinic, Sangje attached one sheet of blank paper on it and said, ‘See who will be caught.’ Much later, He said, ‘A weak man has been caught’” (Acts 4:33). This normative and corrective function of yin and yang is a characteristic of justice, and in the discussions of the following tenets we will turn greater attention to that issue.

## Monism and the Second Tenet

Related to the notion of self-evidence is monism, another obstacle to and issue for rhetorical relatedness. Monism can well be understood, as we shall see, and even

countered by, the example of the second tenet of Daesoon Jinrihoe: “Harmonious Union Between Divine and Human Beings.” Monism is defined and discussed by Perelman, and it serves as something of a villain in Perelman’s thought, for monism is the opponent not only of pluralism, but by association, of freedom itself. The threat of monism can be seen beneath the surface and between the lines in *The New Rhetoric*, but there is a more detailed, direct discussion of monism in other works, including *The New Rhetoric and the Humanities*, “The Foundation and Limits of Tolerance” (Perelman 1963), and *Justice, Law, and Argument* (Perelman 1980). Indeed, Perelman, himself, approaches this topic almost surreptitiously in Chapter 1 of *The New Rhetoric and the Humanities*, when, after a rather extended discussion of the relationship of rhetoric and reason, he writes:

Now if one is not prepared to accept such a limitation to a monism of values in the world of action and would reject such a reduction on the ground that the irreducibility of many values is the basis of our freedom and of our spiritual life [...] it seems obvious that our intellectual tools cannot be all reduced to formal logic. (Perelman 1979, 30)

The limitation and reduction to which Perelman refers is the concept of monism itself. For this pluralist philosopher, monism must necessarily prove reductive, limiting. In such a view, the development of formal logic as the “one true way” in academic demonstration is unsatisfactory. But Perelman only teases the reader here with his thoughts regarding monism; one must read a bit more before receiving a fuller explication.

This explication Perelman provides in Chapter 4, the beginning lines of which read: “Like most philosophical notions the notion of ‘pluralism’ as opposed to ‘monism’ is confused, since when used in different contexts its meaning and scope change” (Perelman 1969, 62). In Chapter Four of *The New Rhetoric*, Perelman discusses three broad types of monism; he hints that there are more, but he discusses only three. The first, with which any elementary student of religion would be familiar, is “Ontological monism.” Ontological monism is a term interchangeable with monotheism, “which states that there is but one true God, who pervades the whole universe, or who is the Creator of all that exists” (Perelman 1969, 62). The second form, “Axiological” monism is closely related to the first, and results from “[t]he idea that God knows the solution of all moral problems,” and that, therefore, “in any conflict of values there is a way of reconciling all differences of opinion by reducing all values with their infinite diversity to one single value” (Perelman 1969, 62). This distinction, though not a sharp one, is important. For in Perelman’s thought, ontological monism, at times, serves as a respected value, yet axiological monism, the adherence to “the one true way,” distorts



and corrupts ontological monism. Philosophically, or theologically, academic debates may concern themselves with ontological questions. These philosophies are eventually enacted axiologically, however. Perelman is always concerned with practical reasoning, in how philosophy plays itself out in the “real world.” Axiological monism is real world monism; therefore, it remains dangerous. Finally, the third type of monism, “sociological monism,” extends from axiological monism and is the most pernicious form in Perelman’s view because it suggests in social situations and problems there can be only one solution.

The problem of monism is far less of a concern, if one at all, in Daesoon Thought. As David W. Kim writes in the Introduction to *Daesoon Jinrihoe in Modern Korea*:

The traditional religions of Asia not only prospered among the local people during ancient and medieval centuries but also played a significant role within each society of the continent by sustaining Asia’s unique regional culture within the history of humanity. The social order was influenced by the teachings of each religion and by plural religions (Kim 2020, 1).

That ancient experience of plurality of religions itself is a fortunate obstacle to the development of monistic thought. As in our discussion of self-evidence and Tenet One above, and as we shall further see in the discussions to follow, mutuality is of utmost importance here. In the philosophical and religious traditions of the West (Catholicism, Protestantism, Cartesianism, etc.) of which Perelman’s milieu was of course a product, mutuality was secondary to the primarily monistic modes of thinking. In Daesoon Jinrihoe’s *Canonical Scripture*, we read that:

Gods without humans behind them have no one to supplicate them and rely on them.

Humans without gods before them, have no one to guide them and no one to rely on.

When gods and humans are in concord, every affair is accomplished; When gods and humans are in unity, all kinds of enterprises are fulfilled.

Gods are waiting for humans; Humans are waiting for gods.

If yin and yang are in unity with each other and gods and humans are unified with each other, the Dao of Heaven is accomplished and so is the Dao of Earth.

Therefore, when the affairs of gods are accomplished, the affairs of humans are accomplished; when the affairs of humans are accomplished, the affairs of gods are accomplished. Gods, gods, all gods of Heaven and Earth! Please look down on me, who follows the mandate. Great One of holiness and sagacity! Please make my wish come true. (*The Scripture of Yin and Yang, Progress of the Order* 2:42)



The mutuality of human-divine relations is there expressed in every line, and, crucially, the divine dimension is expanded considerably over monotheism; in fact, we can say that the logical and philosophical end-result of monotheism, for Perelman, is philosophical monism. The end-result of philosophical monism, in turn, is the primacy of demonstration over argumentative reasoning. Demonstration, in a scientistic sense, accepts only one right way, one right answer, as does, of course, monotheism. (Again, we can see in Perelman's rejection of "the one way" of scientistic demonstration, the haunted specter of fascism looming over 1930s and 1940s Europe, as Perelman worked in the resistance against Hitler and National Socialism).

As an alternative to reductive demonstration, Perelman proposes a relational rhetoric approach of epideictic. Epideictic was not new to Perelman; the ancients in the West had written of it, principally Aristotle. But for those ancients, epideictic was solely a speech of praise or blame, such as a eulogy or denunciation. In Perelman's schema, epideictic was broadened to include all forms of practical reasoning and persuasion that sought to strengthen an audience's adherence to a value or set of values. The values were, themselves, not absolutes but generalities, and the audience's degree of adherence to them might vary considerably; all that was well and good, as Perelman was not seeking absolute adherence. Epideictic differs from demonstration primarily in the experience of mutuality. In scientistic demonstration, the result or the "answer" cares nothing (does not, in fact, "care" at all) for its own beneficial attributes: it simply is. (An example would be the atomic bomb, a scientifically demonstrable fact, but not a beneficial one).

In *The New Rhetoric*, Perelman explicitly discusses the relationship between epideictic discourse and mutuality, writing:

The purpose of an epideictic [*sic*, etc.] speech is to increase the intensity of adherence to values held in common by the audience and the speaker. The epideictic speech has an important part to play, for without such common values upon what foundation could deliberative and legal speeches rest? Whereas these two kinds of speeches make use of dispositions already present in the audience [...] in epideictic speech, on the other hand, the sharing of values is an end pursued independently of the precise circumstances in which this communion will be put to the test. (Perelman 1979, 52-3)

In this passage, Perelman emphasizes the importance, in any system of thought, of a community of mutuality—indeed, a community of minds—and his new rhetoric is no exception. Monism, in such a system, will not do, for epideictic rhetoric's dependence on the community of minds will serve to advance mutuality. The rhetor must bear in mind the values of the audience, for the audience in a sage discourse community will accept nothing less. Similarly, monism will not do in Daesoon Thought, as expressed

by Tenet Two, based as it is on the harmonious mutuality between divine and human beings. *The Canonical Scripture* put the matter this way, in one such instance:

The success of work undertaken depends on Heaven and Earth, not on humans alone. But in case of the absence of humans, Heaven and Earth might not exist. Hence, Heaven and Earth gives birth to humans to make use of them. If you, who have come into being as a human, do not participate in the work when Heaven and Earth tries to use humans, how can you say that you are living a true life? (*Dharma* 3:47).

Here, the idea of mutuality between Heaven and Earth is beautifully described in terms of the good life, an authentic life. For only through living in mutuality can one achieve such a life of authenticity. Monism provides no true avenues for mutuality and thus, in the rhetorical relatedness system of Perelman and in the theological system of *The Canonical Scripture*, is not of value. In this respect, we see the connectedness between Daesoon's first and second tenets, for *The Canonical Scripture* also tell us: "Human beings are yang and divine beings are yin. After yin and yang combine, the Dao of change comes into existence" (*Saving Lives* 43).

A final comment on monism, epideictic, and the second tenet; Perelman recognized that monism could lead easily to despair, and that despair could result in inaction, a dangerous mix. In *The New Rhetoric and the Humanities*, Perelman writes: "The orator's aim in epideictic genre ... is to awaken a disposition so to act. This is achieved by forming a community of minds, which Kenneth Burke...calls *identification*" (Perelman 1979, 320). Action is one way, perhaps the primary way, of providing mutuality in a community, and thus epideictic rhetoric values the importance of action. The mutuality of action is also recognized in non-monistic Daesoon Thought. *The Canonical Scripture* tell us that "There is an opportunity for human affairs, and there is a time for heavenly affairs" (*Reordering Works* 2:24). Action need not be constant in either system—there is a time for each—but it is vital in a system of mutuality.

## **Relatedness, Tolerance, and the Third Tenet**

In light of Perelman's views of monistic thought, it should not be surprising that his ideal state is a tolerant, pluralistic one. Perelman considers pluralism, as he defines the concept, to have arisen from the Protestant Reformation. This is interesting in light of Perelman's mistrust of monism, that he realized that even among monotheistic religions, certain events, conditions, and rhetorics could lead to a more or less peaceful coexistence. Perelman finds this historical example in the age of reform, and in an article, "The Foundations and Limits of Tolerance" (Perelman 1963), he defines his

understanding of the historical development of the concept pluralism. Perelman, in good philosophical fashion, situates the origin of this dialectical concept. He suggests that “[t]he problem became important in Europe during the 16th century, when ideas that were prohibited by the social order, and by the law, were nevertheless tolerated” (Perelman 1963, 21). Surprisingly, given Perelman’s rhetorical bent, and the New Rhetoric’s optimistic inquiry into “good reasons,” Perelman does not much concern himself with the specifics of the historical situation. He writes that Reform agendas were “tolerated for various reasons: in some cases because the government or Church were not strong enough to suppress expression of those ideas. It is, however, not the situation, but its philosophical consequences that interest the philosopher and created tolerance as a principle” (Perelman 1963, 21).

Eventually, Perelman believes, tolerance becomes something more than a mere compromise position; existing simply because neither of two opposing sides has sufficient power to overthrow the other. Specifically, Perelman writes:

We speak of tolerance in relation to those expressions of ideas or those actions which are prohibited by law, or go against public opinion. (Perelman 1963, 21).

Such practices are especially important when particular people or groups are harmed by a certain legalistic system—often an ill-treated minority in a majority system not of their making. Tolerance eventually develops as a philosophic position in its own right, when advocates of tolerance place this condition above any other—when, for instance, a Catholic or a Protestant places the “ideal” of tolerance above the teachings of his or her own church. In such cases, virtuous behavior is to be honored over the letter of the law. In *The Canonical Scripture*, this notion is taken a step further: virtuous behavior is honored but also rewarded, in a system of mutuality. There, we read:

As the era of the grievance resolution comes in, cultivate virtue and treat people well. A felicitous star gives off light upon the deed, which is a way to shelter from disaster (*Dharma* 2:14).

The tolerant, generous deed is itself, here, rewarded, further reinforcing the system of mutuality. Tolerance, then, serves as the necessary philosophical underpinning for pluralistic societies, and in these societies, tolerance also serves as a practical, pragmatic concern, for “individuals are simultaneously part of several groups which sometimes cooperate and at other times oppose each other” (Perelman 1979, 65). Naturally, whenever people are part of a group, especially when people are simultaneously a part of multiple groups—as we today inevitably are—incidents of grievances multiply. Thus,

the values expressed by Daesoon Jinrihoe's Third Tenet—Resolution of Grievances for Mutual Benefit—play an important part here. *The Canonical Scripture* remind us time and again of the essential act of resolving grievances that is developed in any community. For example, “Resolve the grievances against your foe and love your foe as your benefactor. Doing so will become a virtue and bring you bliss. Not only will bliss, though, be individually enjoyed” (*Dharma* 1:56). As in any syncretic system, the resolved grievance is a path forward. For Perelman, the path forward would be, say, a healthy democracy. In Daesoon Thought, the benefits too are manifold, and have even greater potential. For we read in *The Canonical Scripture* that: “The energy-flow of Heaven and Earth could even be blocked by the grievance of a single person” (*Dharma* 1:31). What's more, though, happily: “As the grievances are resolved, there shall not be any obstacles in the Later World” (*Reordering Works* 2:19). The resolution of grievances, expressed in the third tenet, contribute to individual, and to future, happiness, just as in a system of rhetorical relatedness.

## Regressive Philosophies and the Fourth Tenet

The Fourth Tenet of Daesoon Jinrihoe, “Perfected State of Unification with the Dao”, will bring us to a final Perelmanian concept of relational rhetorics, and that is a regressive philosophy of correctable truths. In a classic 1969 article, Ray Dearin explicates the concepts of primary and regressive philosophy, suggesting that—at least in Perelman's view—most philosophy has been of the primary type; that is, “[e]ach has attempted to construct an edifice of universal, immutable truths. No provision has been made for future modifications” (Dearin 1969, 216). A better model, one Perelman would advocate, would be a regressive philosophy which recognizes “[p]hilosophizing [as] a human endeavor” an endeavor in which “the philosopher will choose from among the alternative possibilities the modifications he deems best” (Dearin 1969, 216). Regressive philosophies, in short, are those which allow the philosopher to admit mistakes and offer modifications. These modifications result in “correctable truths”; such “truths” are tenuous and welcome modification, yet they remain, for the time being, sufficient starting points for philosophical argument. In modifying a “correctable truth,” moreover, the philosopher must *argue* that a proposed alternation will benefit the system. In Perelman, we find no change-for-change's sake, for the role of argument must present reasonable warrants, even in debates concerning truths that are not tyrannously absolute but openly malleable.

As Dearin writes, “the philosopher must justify his choice by presenting reasons why it seems preferable to him, if he wishes to obtain the agreement of his peers” (Dearin 1969, 216). The concept of regressive philosophy is enormously important in rhetorics of relatedness because they recognize the importance of growth, new information,

change. That which changes and grows is healthy; that which remains static (like a monistic edict) ossifies. The Fourth, and final, Tenet of Daesoon Jinrihoe, recognizes the ongoing nature of this growth, that moving toward a more perfected state. Is an ongoing process and not necessarily one of a straight line? For example, we read in *The Canonical Scripture*, “The Dao unification and creation of Heaven and Earth are transcendent and constant, and there is a law in advancing or retreating” (The Incantation of Re-creation). This movement of advancing and retreating, in motion, perfecting but not yet perfect, shares with rhetorical relatedness the importance of dynamism in communication, whether it be human or divine.

The Canonical Scripture recognizes that that movement is not always free; there are sometimes agents who wish to arrest the process. Sangje shared with his followers this lesson: “One day, to solidify the progress of the order, Sangje spoke about unification with Dao (*dotong*, 道通): ‘People did not get to that state in the past. Although Dao cultivators tried to be unified with Dao, they failed it because they were unable to overcome saboteurs’ (*Progress of the Order* 1:40). In a theological system such as Daesoon, of course, such saboteurs are treated with divine justice. On Earth, rhetorical systems establish justice-related arguments. Perelman, a legal scholar as well as a rhetorician, believed that the legal system “should be as close as possible to a formal system” (Perelman 1980, 137). The reason for that is simple: a formal system would prevent caprice and favoritism from entering decisions of justice. Perelman’s basic test of justice and equity can be reduced to the simple concept that two like things must be treated in a like manner: rich treated like the poor; the old treated like the young, etc. As a nation moved toward a fairer system of justice and as the world moved toward a Dao unification, such treatment would be vital. We read, too, in *The Canonical Scripture* that “Dao-unification is done to reciprocate the virtue of Heaven and Earth,” thus emphasizing, yet again, the importance of mutuality in the Tenets; mutuality, too, is the *sine qua non* of rhetorics of relatedness (*Prophetic Elucidations* 88).

## Conclusion

We will conclude this article by looking at a short but important Perelman work, “Rhetoric and Politics” and a statement from *The Canonical Scripture* called “The Charter for Realizing Dao.” Perelman submitted that essay of his to *Philosophy and Rhetoric* shortly before his death, and it received posthumous publication. In the article, Perelman summarizes the primary concerns of his intellectual career: values, law, rhetoric, justice. In the beginning of the article, Perelman recounts the reasons, as so many rhetoricians have done, that rhetoric fell into disrepute in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and why it is important that the rhetoric be again elevated to a prestigious position. Perelman’s urgency is clear; it is his unshakeable belief that “free

society” cannot function without a fair judicial and political system, and that, in order for insidious regimes to be countered, free argument—detailed, explicit argument—must be practiced. Rhetoric and justice, in Perelman’s schema, go hand-in-hand, for there is no such thing as a justice which can be both practical and ideal. A philosopher can envision, must envision, an idealized justice, but the form that must be at work in society is just that, a workaday justice, one which must be negotiated and argued. The role of the rhetor, then, is an exalted one, for he or she must “contribute to the enhancement of values, to create a spiritual communion around common values” (Perelman 1984, 131). That is, rhetoric must take on a relational, reciprocal, mutual character if it is to remain relevant—a rhetoric of relatedness. And this process of argument must be explicit because “[w]e know with what haste totalitarian regimes initiated the pomp, ceremony, processions, and canticles of the church” (Perelman 1984, 132).

The ceremonies of the church draw their grandeur, of course, from “mystery.” For Perelman, a government must not do so. Citizens must come to expect the opposite of mystery; they must expect explicit argumentation. Once citizens expect such explicitness, the task of the “totalitarian regime” becomes more difficult, perhaps impossibly so. Rhetoric helps establish the free society, but it is at every moment, in Perelman’s conception, a rhetoric at the service of philosophy; the two are inseparable in Perelman’s thought. Therefore, Perelman writes: “That is why I am opposed to the idea of a philosopher-king [. . .] because there is no philosophy without freedom of thought, opposed to all forms of constraint” (Perelman 1984, 134). For Perelman, philosophy and rhetoric must work reciprocally in order to encourage mutually beneficial relationships among people and their governments.

A rhetoric of relatedness and mutuality, such as that kind advocated for and developed by Perelman, replaced older form of rhetoric, which depended on lauded orators and grand oratory to with great forcefulness persuade an audience. In that older system, style, flair (and even, too often, deception) counted highly; in a relational system, those characteristics matter far less. *The Canonical Scripture* has something to say about that old style of rhetoric, which existed in the East as well as in the West. In the “Charter for Realizing Dao”, we read: “A saint’s scripture does not pursue magnificent rhetorical flair but truth. A perfected man’s heart seeks authenticity, not superficiality. Therefore, seeking the underlying principle of objects is to seek nature, not artificiality. In this regard, enlightening his mind, a saint reaches Dao, and does not seek fame. When writing, a saint does not seek florid style, and when clothing himself, he does not seek brocades. A mere pursuer of prose cannot attain the mind-dharma of saints, and a man who pursues superficiality cannot attain the truth of saints.” The achievement of rhetorical magnificence by the pursuer of prose is here presented as the opponent of the good and the authentic who stands in the way of perfection. Similarly,

for Perelman, the older forms of too-frequently deceptive, grand rhetoric stood in the way of a democratic mutuality. In an untitled essay, known as “Essay XXIV” (Perelman 1951) which is a chapter in a collection called *Democracy in A World of Tensions*, a collection produced as the result of a United Nations sponsored symposium, Perelman emphasizes the relationship among rhetoric, authenticity, and justice. Because concepts such as justice and democracy are themselves dialectical in nature, their meanings must be constantly negotiated and argued. Perelman writes:

A concept like democracy has no clear meaning in itself. Before agreeing on the use of a term, agreement must be reached on the system of thought within which this concept should be used. The absence of such a common reference system is the main reason why conflicts about words such like ‘democracy’ are possible and why it is apparently so difficult to agree on the subject. (Perelman 1951, 301)

But the difficulty of the search for the meanings of such words should not dissuade the seekers of the good and the authentic. Just as the “Charter for Realizing Dao” expresses, the mere pursuit of prose leads to inauthenticity, but, therefore, the opposite must be true. The pursuer of careful, accurate words, of an honest rhetoric, helps lead to both, in Daesoon Thought, Dao perfection, and, in rhetorical practice, a just, democratic system. Both systems rely on mutuality, and thus much can be learned by a comparative study of the principles of rhetorics of relatedness, such as Perelman, and the Four Tenets of Daesoon Thought.

## **Conflict of Interest**

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



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# Fasting of the Mind and Quieting of the Mind: A Comparative Analysis of Apophatic Tendencies in Zhuangzi and Cataphatic Tendencies in Daesoon Thought

**ZHANG Rongkun and  
Jason GREENBERGER**

Zhang Rongkun is an Associate Professor in Hujiang Department at the University of Shanghai for Science and Technology. Her current research focus is on the philosophy of Zhuangzi.

Jason Greenberger is a Ph.D. candidate at Daejin University and a member of the International Affairs Team in the Religious Research and Edification Department at Daesoon Jinrihoe Headquarters. His current research focus today is on East Asian New Religious Movements.



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## Original Articles

Correspondence to

**ZHANG Rongkun**

University of Shanghai for Science and  
Technology, China

**rongkun166@usst.edu.cn**

ORCID

**ZHANG Rongkun**

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1194-0730>

**Jason GREENBERGER**

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4120-5646>



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## Abstract

‘Fasting of the Mind (心齋, *ch. xīn zhāi*)’ is arguably the most important concept within the practical approach to the spiritual cultivation formulated by the Daoist philosopher, Zhuangzi (莊子). Most scholars have interpreted ‘Fasting of the Mind’ as an apophatic practice centered around the aim of the ‘Dissolution of the Self (喪我, *ch. sàng wǒ*).’ The Korean new religious movement, Daesoon Jinrihoe (大巡眞理會), can be shown to instead consistently utilize cataphatic descriptions of spiritual cultivation based on the ‘quieting of the mind (安心, *kr. anshim*)’ and ‘quieting of the body (安身, *kr. anshin*)’ with the highest attainable state referred to as the ‘Perfected State of Unification with the Dao (道通眞境, *kr. Dotong-jingyeong*).’ While the language used by Zhuangzi and Daesoon Jinrihoe appears quite different on a superficial level, a deeper examination shows that these rhetorical framings are likely negativistic and positivistic descriptions of the same, or at least reasonably similar, phenomena.

Zhuangzi, who focused primarily on the body, mind, and internal energy, cautioned practitioners that ‘mere listening stops with the ears (聽止於耳, *ch. tīng zhǐ yú ěr*)’ and ‘mere recognition stops with the mind (心止於符, *ch. xīn zhǐ yú fú*).’ He therefore encouraged cultivators of the Dao to ‘listen with the spirit (聽之以氣, *ch. tīng zhī yǐ qì*).’ The main scripture of Daesoon Jinrihoe states that “The mind is a pivot, gate, and gateway for gods; They, who turn the pivot, open, and close the gate, and go back and forth through the gateway, can be either good or evil (心也者, 鬼神之樞機也, 門戶也, 道路也),” and the Supreme God of the Ninth Heaven (九天上帝, *kr. Gucheon Sangje*) even promises to visit anyone who possesses a ‘singularly-focused mind (一心, *kr. il-shim*).’ In both these approaches, there is a sense of what must be kept out of the mind (e.g., external disturbances, strong emotions, malevolent entities) and what the mind should connect with to attain spiritual progress (e.g., spirit, singular focus, the Supreme God).

The observations above serve as the main basis for a comparison between the apophatic descriptions of cultivation found in Zhuangzi and their cataphatic counterparts in Daesoon Thought. However, the culmination of this nuanced comparative exploration reveals that while the leanings of Zhuangzi and Daesoon Thought generally hold true, ultimately, both systems of cultivation transcend the categories of apophatic and cataphatic.

**Keywords:** Zhuangzi; Daesoon Jinrihoe; apophatic; cataphatic; fasting of the mind; quieting of the mind

## Introduction

Zhuangzi (莊子, 369–286 BCE) is widely regarded as being among the most significant and influential classical Chinese philosophers, and for Daoism especially, his texts are considered foundational. Zhuangzi's practical approach to spiritual cultivation is perhaps best characterized by his idea of 'Fasting of the Mind' (心齋, *ch. xīn zhāi*).<sup>1</sup> In previous research, many scholars have described 'Fasting of the Mind' as an apophatic practice. By way of contrast, the general tendency of the Korean new religious movement, Daesoon Jinrihoe (大巡眞理會), founded via a schism in 1969 with the pre-schism entity having been founded in 1921, is to articulate spiritual cultivation as a cataphatic practice based on the 'quieting of the mind' (安心, *kr. anshim*)<sup>2</sup> and 'quieting of the body' (安身, *kr. anshin*).<sup>3</sup> It is not easy to weigh in on the highest attainable spiritual state described by Zhuangzi, but at least some descriptions of high spiritual states in Zhuangzi are described negativistically, whereas in Daesoon Jinrihoe, most aspects of cultivation appear positivistically such as the 'Perfected State of Unification with the Dao' (道通眞境, *kr. Dotong-jingyeong*).<sup>4</sup> This article explores the idea that Zhuangzi and Daesoon Jinrihoe are describing similar spiritual phenomena albeit from different rhetorical perspectives; namely apophatic versus cataphatic.

Shedding new light on the historicity of the figure Zhuangzi or speculating on how much of the classic, *Zhuangzi*, can be attributed to him or others, lies beyond the scope of this article. For present purposes, a brief summary of Zhuangzi, the figure and *Zhuangzi*, the classic can be provided as follows.

Based on early sources such as *Records of the Grand Historian* (史記, *ch. shǐjì*) tradition, which lamentably relies on *Zhuangzi*, itself, for biographical details, summarizes Zhuangzi as having been "... a person from Meng (a place within the state of Song) whose secular name was Zhou. At one point, he served as a minor official who oversaw the growing of lacquer trees. He was a contemporary of both King Hui of Wei and King Xuan of Qi" (Sima Qian 108–91 BCE, 63). Beyond the brief sketch provided above, the Grand Historian, Sima Qian, mostly speaks about the classic, *Zhuangzi*, rather than the figure Zhuangzi. As for the classic, *Zhuangzi*, it should be noted that in literary and historical circles, there has been discussion about the extent to which the chapters of the text are authentic or apocryphal from as long ago as circa 300 CE when the compiler and editor of the most widely-read version of the manuscript, Guo Xiang (郭象, *ch. Guō Xiàng* 252–312 CE), minted his edition. In religious circles, the full text is considered canonical (numinous and profoundly valuable), but the title is changed from *Zhuangzi* to *The Perfected Scripture of Nanhua* (南華眞經, *ch. Nánhuá zhēnjīng*).

With regards to the contents of the classic, it is immediately apparent that Zhuangzi teaches through parables that often contain dialogues between characters rather than through aphorisms or other rhetorical means. His philosophical thought could

be described in brief as mysticism without metaphysics. Further nuance reveals that Zhuangzi's mysticism deviates from traditional forms of Chinese mysticism which is typically proposed metaphysically merging with the Dao to achieve superior and higher spirituality. Instead of this, Zhuangzi advocated a psychological experience of oneness by releasing one's mind into Empty Openness without depending on metaphysical speculation. He likewise promoted the surrendering of oneself into the flow of life as a mystery. By revealing and inquiring into the limitations and the paradoxes of reasoning and language, he made the argument that neither reason nor knowledge could be used to compel a person into a sense of oneness. Instead, mystical life 'experience' as the 'uncarved block' enables the elimination of all distinctions, resulting in the sense that nothing has been lost despite its inclusion in a larger context and that every arrangement has found affirmation. This represents a thankful surrender into mystery which settles one into a sense of belonging within oneness.

The origins of Daesoon Jinrihoe are often approached from the perspective of sociology of religion, wherein it would logically be said to have first originated upon the founding of the religious body that bears the Daesoon Jinrihoe in 1969. As an ecclesiastical view; however, Daesoon Jinrihoe can be shown to trace its lineage of orthodox religious authority back prior to the year of the movement's founding or even the founding of Mugeukdo in 1921. According to this view of lineage, the first figure in the 'fountainhead (淵源 *kr.* yeonwon),' is Kang Jeungsan (姜甌山, secular name Kang Il-Sun: 姜一淳 1871–1909), whom Daesoon Jinrihoe devotees worship as the human avatar of the Supreme God. In Daesoon Jinrihoe and its pre-schismatic predecessor, Taegeukdo (previously known as Mugeukdo), the Supreme God of the Ninth Heaven, Celestial Worthy of Universal Creation through His Thunderbolt, the Originator with Whom All Beings Resonate (九天應元雷聲普化天尊姜聖上帝, *gucheon eungwon noeseong bohwa cheonjon gangseong sangje*). Given its considerable length, this divine title is often shortened to either 'Kangseong Sangje' (姜聖上帝, His Holiness the Supreme God Kang) or 'Gucheon Sangje' (九天上帝, the Supreme God of the Ninth Heaven). Born in 1871 and living until 1909, Kang is the earliest and most venerated among the three figures in the fountainhead.

Aside from Kang Jeungsan, the orthodox religious lineage in Daesoon Jinrihoe also includes Doju (道主, 'the Lord of Dao'), Jo Jeongsan (趙鼎山, secular name: Jo Cheolje 趙哲濟, 1895–1958) who is deified as Okhwang Sangje (玉皇上帝, 'the Jade Thearch'), and Dojeon (都典, 'Leader of Principle'), Park Wudang (朴牛堂, secular name: Park Hangeong, 朴漢慶 1917–1996) who, although deeply significant, was neither deified nor enshrined at Daesoon Jinrihoe's Yeosu Headquarters Temple Complex.

In Daesoon Jinrihoe, the impetus for the Supreme God of the Ninth Heaven's decision to take human form is rhetorically likened to a king taking an itineration of his kingdom. In fact, this is the origin of the order's namesake which literally means "The Fellowship of the Truth of the Great Itineration (大巡眞理會 *kr.* daesoon jinrihoe)."

The itineration, itself, is presented as a cosmic act of statecraft wherein the Supreme God, as Kang Jeungsan, was said to used his travels throughout the earth as a means of gauging ‘public sentiment and the situations of the commoners’ (人心 & 俗情 *kr.* Inshim and sokjeong). Kang was also known for ritual activities such as the Reordering Works of Heaven and Earth (天地公事, *kr.* Cheonji gongsa) and the recalibration of Degree Numbers (度數, *kr.* dosu). All of these rituals and interventions were as aspect of his goal to transform the Three Realms (三界, *kr.* sangye) of Heaven, Earth, and Humanity from a state of Mutual Contention (相克, *kr.* sanggeuk) into one of Mutual Beneficence (相生, *kr.* sangsaeng) as this would enable the emergence of an earthly paradise (地上天國建設, *kr.* jisang cheonguk geonseol)(DIRC 2014, 1-7).

To summarize the major contributions of each figure within Daesoon Jinrihoe’s fountainhead, it could be said that Kang Jeungsan was the originator of the teachings, performer of miracles, and the transmitter (and in some cases, composer) of many of the incantations still in use today. His successor, Jo Jeongsan, apotheosized Kang as Gucheon Sangje,<sup>1</sup> determined the fifteen divine positions for the shrine in the main sanctuary, systematized the teachings of Kang Jeungsan, founded the religious order, Mugeukdo (無極道, later renamed 太極道 Taegeukdo), and organized the majority of ritual procedures still in use today. As for the last figure, Park Wudang, he founded Daesoon Jinrihoe, contributed to the compiling of the scriptures, designed the organization of Daesoon Jinrihoe’s religious order, was the main composer of the *Dao Constitution* (道憲, *kr.* doheon), established religious sites (temple complexes and fellowship buildings), and crafted original teachings which were recorded in sources such as The Guiding Compass of Daesoon (大巡指針, *kr.* daesoon jichim) and *Hunshi* (訓示, literally ‘Instructions’).

## Comparative Analysis

With the above background information on Zhuangzi and Daesoon Jinrihoe in mind, the comparison between the two can begin by examining Zhuangzi’s concept of ‘Fasting of the heart,’ which is often regarded as the most important account of Zhuangzi’s practical approach to the cultivation of virtue. Consider the following passage wherein this term first appears:

Make your will one! Don’t listen with your ears, listen with your mind. No, don’t listen with your mind, but listen with your spirit. Listening stops with the ears, the mind stops with recognition, but spirit is empty and waits for all things. The Way gathers in emptiness alone. Emptiness is the fasting of the mind. (Watson 2013, 25)

The ‘ears’ and ‘mind’ are functions of the will, but the ‘spirit’ is the function of the

unified will (一志, *ch. yī zhì*). The ears play a role in listening, yet Zhuangzi proposes “Don’t listen with your ears.” The usage of the word ‘stop’ in the above passage shows the limitation of the first two functions: the ears go no further than listening and the mind goes no further than recognizing. The spirit is shown to be free of those limitations because the spirit is characterized by emptiness and awaiting. That is why the spirit is an appropriate abode in which the Way can gather. This is the reason why Zhuangzi calls upon cultivators to cultivators of the Dao to ‘listen with the spirit (聽之以氣, *ch. tīng zhī yǐ qì*).’

Daesoon Jinrihoe also places high emphasis on the unified will; however, it is spoken of as the ‘singularly-focused mind (一心, *kr. il-shim*).’ Just as the ‘spirit (氣, *ch. qì*)’ in Zhuangzi can be an abode wherein the Dao can gather, in Daesoon Thought, the mind can be an abode for gods, and if cultivated to a high enough degree, a person’s mind can even be visited by the cultivated Supreme God of the Ninth Heaven (九天上帝, *kr. Gucheon Sangje*). This is shown in Chapter 2, verse 13 of Dharma in *The Canonical Scripture* when Sangje<sup>2</sup> remarks, “Even though I stay in a place as remote and secluded as West Shu (Seochok), I will, without exception, visit anyone who possesses a singularly-focused mind.” Throughout that chapter, Sangje is shown enticing followers with the many fruits of attaining a singularly-focused mind while also lamenting the difficulty of its attainment and the overwhelming absence of those who have mastered it (*Dharma* 2:4-6).

As for the mind itself, it is explained in Daesoon Jinrihoe’s main scripture, *The Canonical Scripture* (典經 *kr. jeon-gyeong*), “The mind is a pivot, gate, and gateway for gods; They, who turn the pivot, open, and close the gate, and go back and forth through the gateway, can be either good or evil (心也者, 鬼神之樞機也, 門戶也, 道路也)” (*Acts* 3:44). This is a key passage that, when compared with the earlier ‘fasting of the mind’ passage from Zhuangzi, highlights Zhuangzi’s rhetorical tendency to the apophatic in contrast to Daesoon Jinrihoe’s penchant for cataphatic wording. In *Zhuangzi*, the spirit accommodates the gathering of the Dao due to its ‘emptiness’ (untapped potential to be filled), whereas in Daesoon Thought, the mind is likened to a gateway (in various aspects) for gods. This passage is crucial for understanding spiritual cultivation in Daesoon Jinrihoe wherein incantations are used to call divine beings into the practitioner’s mind and body to achieve the tenets of the Virtuous Concordance of Yin and Yang (陰陽合德, *kr. eumyanghapdeok*) and the Harmonious Union between Divine Beings and Human Beings (神人調化, *kr. shininjohwa*). Both humans and divine beings are seen as having something to gain from this arrangement. For humans, the divine beings that come to enter their bodies can optimize or repair their bodies and mind, as well as aid humans in the elimination of negative karma. This view of the mind as a point of a potential direct connection to divine beings is a key feature of Daesoon Thought, and it is one of the main foundations for the devotional and panentheistic thinking which is so ubiquitous and distinctive within Daesoon Jinrihoe.



In *Zhuangzi*, when allowed to act as the ‘listener,’ the spirit ‘waits for all things (待物, *ch. dài wù*).’ By ‘waiting’ or simply receiving things as they are, the spirit avoids being disturbed by the outside world or giving rise to passions such as love and hate. It is through embracing and peacefully confronting things as they are that the spirit proves capable of a form of ‘listening’ superior to those performed by either the ‘ears’ or ‘mind.’ In an earlier chapter in *Zhuangzi*, the author teaches his readers about the ‘established mind (成心, *ch. chéng xīn*)’ which leads people into assumptions, reactivity, and reliance on habitual thoughts and preconceived ideas.

In Daesoon Thought, the concept of an ‘established mind’ goes by various names, but most commonly it is spoken of as ‘self-deception (自欺, *kr. jagi*)’ which is further connected to ‘selfishness (私心, *kr. sasim*).’ The remedy for ‘self-deception’ is proposed to be ‘quieting the mind’ to enable a return to ‘conscientiousness (良心, *kr. yangsim*),’ a characteristic of one’s innate mind which is endowed by heaven. Similar to Zhuangzi’s ‘established mind,’ ‘self-deception’ can be found in subtle, reflexive, but ultimately detrimental assumptions. For instance, devotees of Daesoon Jinrihoe are instructed to “... not manipulate, change, or fall into inconsistency due to gain or loss, right or wrong, prejudice or leniency. Do not say “two” if there is “one,” and do not say “three” based upon the mere appearance of “three.” Do not say “this” when referring to “that,” or “back” when referring to “front”” (DIRC 2020c, VII.2.3). The core of this teaching is to both carefully consider the nature of things as they are, and also to be aware of how easy it is to intentionally or even accidentally misrepresent those things through behavior, words, and actions.

Zhuangzi touches upon the nuances of the ‘established mind’ leading people astray through a story that he tells in Chapter 7 of *The Inner Chapters*. In this story, there are two emperors, Shu and Hu, who go together for a meeting in the territory of Hundun. Hundun treats them with great generosity. In return, they try to repay his kindness. They reason that all people have seven openings to enable them to see, hear, eat, and breathe, but Hundun has no such openings. Thereupon, they try to bore some holes into him each day. Unfortunately, after seven openings were bored out, Hundun died (Watson 2013, 51). This case sets a good example to illustrate the importance of respecting the nature of things and behaving in accordance with that nature. Hundun, whose innate nature lies in vagueness, could not withstand the contrived behavior of having openings carved into him. This behavioral act performed by Shu and Hu originated from their good will; however, they were misled by their established minds. The outcome was destined to be harmful. This is why Zhuangzi suggests “don’t listen with the mind” and avoid taking the ‘established mind’ as an authority.

In this sense, Zhuangzi suggests that people respond to outer things in full conformity with their nature (“the mind stops with recognition”). In other words, the Heavenly Way of things is neither a determinate pattern, nor an objective order innate in Nature that can be observed via a rational subject-object dichotomy. Nor is it

an ultimate and permanent entity in a religious sense. If it was, this would contradict Zhuangzi's cosmology on 'transformation' and his non-metaphysical theory about the Way. Instead, what should be observed is a value that guides behavior. Also, in the course of such an observation, there should be emotional identification, trust, and veneration of Heaven. If what Zhuangzi had been advocating was to consciously and passively obey orders from Heaven rather than embrace it in awe, then he would have kept a rational and impersonal attitude towards everything. However, the latter would contradict the sentiment conveyed by Zhuangzi's saying, "That hugest of clumps of soil loads me with a body, has me toiling through a life, eases me with old age, rests me with death; therefore that I can find it good to live is the very reason why I find it good to die" (Graham 1981, 86). The serene and confident manner of that contemplation upon death is not indicative of passive obedience. And there is no impersonality in Zhuangzi's blissful equanimity and acceptance of whatever destiny throws at him. Take for instance the passages, "maintain our store in joy, and let none of it be lost through the senses though the channels to them are cleared" and "ensure that day and night there are no fissures and it makes a springtime it shares with everything" (Graham 1981, 80). To summarize, the feeling of 'joy' in springtime would probably not be possible without affection for and commitment to 'Heaven.'

With regards to Daesoon Jinrihoe, what is spoken of as 'Reverence for Heaven (敬天 *kr. gyeongcheon*)' is likewise not a matter of passive obedience. Scholars of religious studies combing through the doctrines of Daesoon Jinrihoe will not find itemized lists of divinely-issued 'dos and don'ts' reminiscent of the hundreds of commandments in Judaism's Torah. Nor will they discover anything resembling the Buddha-issued rules and procedures recorded in the Vinaya of Buddhism. The doctrines of Daesoon Jinrihoe are overwhelmingly a short series of broadly interpretable guideposts; most of which are positive (e.g., Promote the betterment of others) and only a handful of which are negative (e.g., Do not disregard the beneficence bestowed upon you). As such, Reverence for Heaven in Daesoon Thought, is also a matter of living a life of being in awe of Heaven, but it is additionally a matter of serving the Supreme God with utmost sincerity. Sincerity, after all, is one of the Three Essential Attitudes in the doctrine of Daesoon Jinrihoe.

Moving back to Zhuangzi, "The mind stops with recognition" indicates a common attitude of guarding 'Heavenly order' in awe, which was actually held by most of the prominent ancient Chinese philosophers. Once again though, this does not mean that Zhuangzi invites readers to eagerly strive to unite themselves with an ultimate transcendental entity. Instead, what Zhuangzi proposes is to follow the specific 'Heavenly way' of things as they are. Genuine faith in Heaven may have certain merits, but consciously aiming at union with the 'ultimate' is inadvisable since the ultimate well-cultivated spiritual state only arises naturally from a heart totally fasted through

practice. Given that we live in a society with complicated structures that require us to play roles in various social networks, the suggestion of following the Heavenly Way should be practiced in our day to day lives rather than somewhere else in order to avoid the world. Such practice should be seen as an outgrowth of increasingly harmonious interactions between an individual and their environment, rather than as an outcome of consciously attempting to unite with an ultimate transcendental entity.

Here too though, Daesoon Jinrihoe is unlike religions that call for a split from society that removes a person from their day to day life to lead a different type of life in some other alternative locale. Daesoon Jinrihoe is a world-embracing Korean New Religious Movement (hereafter as KNRM) that engages in considerable outreach within society such as through education, charity aid, and welfare. In fact, harkening back to the previous discussion of doctrine, the ‘ethical rules (守則, *kr. suchik*)’ of Daesoon Jinrihoe refer practitioners back to the three bonds and the five cardinal relationships (三綱五倫, *kr. samgang oryun*) of Confucianism and to national laws and moral standards. This is because the majority of spiritual cultivation occurs within a person’s day to day life within society and social networks (i.e., Gido prayer and chanting on ordinary days 平日祈禱, *kr. pyeongil gido*), and only some spiritual cultivation is carried out within private, sacred institutions (i.e., holy works 工夫 *kr. gongbu*, spiritual training 修鍊 *kr. suryeon*, and prayer on days of worship 主日祈禱 *kr. juil gido*). When living one’s day to day life in society and operating within social networks, naturally, it is most advantageous and proper to follow shared and accepted moral codes and to obey the laws of one’s nation.

In many East Asian philosophical or religious traditions, it is suggested that spiritual cultivation enhances one’s prospects in regards to afterlife or rebirth. This is a feature that can be found in Daoism, Buddhism, and many folk religions throughout East Asia. Intriguingly, there is no concept of a ‘soul’ in Zhuangzi’s view, since a soul usually implies a fixed and immortal form of identity; a specific ‘I’ that continues forever. Zhuangzi deems ‘identity’ to be a ‘temporary lodging’ that should not be fixed. In keeping with this, Zhuangzi never advocates the discovery of one’s ‘true self,’ and instead indicates that there is only a ‘present self’ that can be enabled to work better so as to allow greater enjoyment of life. Various pursuits of some idealized self would just ‘add to the process of life’ as Zhuangzi said.

By way of contrast, Daesoon Thought has rather specific ideas about the aspects of the self that continue onward after a person has died. While those ideas will be carefully detailed below, prior to their exploration, it is also worth noting that the most desirable outcome for devotees of Daesoon Jinrihoe would be to avoid death entirely by living long enough to participate in the Later World wherein “...all people shall acquire eternal youth and immortality” (*Prophetic Elucidations* 80). In this regard, Daesoon Jinrihoe is among a handful of KNRM that believe that humanity will attain immortality

at some time in the near future. Perhaps not surprisingly, about a dozen or so of the active KRNMs that share this belief are also Kang Jeungsan-inspired religions. Although immortality in the Later World is deemed best, Daesoon Thought also has more conventional teachings regarding afterlife. For example, in *The Canonical Scripture*, a concise description of the aspects of self that ‘survive’ death appears as follows:

When Kim Song-Hwan asked Sangje about the afterlife, He said, “There is a spiritual soul (*bon* 魂) and a physical soul (*baek* 魄) in a person. When a person dies, the person's spiritual soul ascends to heaven and becomes an ancestral god and receives a memorial ritual from the descendants. And after four generations pass, it becomes either a spirit or an immortal. A physical soul returns to earth, and after four generations pass, it becomes an apparition” (*Dharma* 1:50).

To clarify, Kang Jeungsan (above as ‘Sangje,’ the Supreme God) affirms the dual-soul theory that often appears in East Asian Natural Philosophy. In this theory, the soul is separated into yin and yang aspects, and in the translation above the yang aspect of the soul, the *bon* (*ch.* hún), is rendered as the ‘spiritual soul’ (also commonly translated as ‘cloud soul’ in other sources), and the yin aspect of the soul, the *baek* (*ch.* pò), appears as ‘physical soul’ (also known as ‘white soul’). Kang further states that after death, the *bon* ascends to heaven to become an ancestral god (神, *kr.* shin *ch.* shén) which can be venerated by descendants via memorial rituals (祭祀, *kr.* jesa *ch.* jìsì). After receiving rites and bestowing blessings for four generations, the *bon* can become a spirit (靈, *kr.* yeong *ch.* líng) or an immortal (仙, *kr.* seon *ch.* xiān). As for the *baek*, it accompanies the body into the earth with no specified function; however, when the *bon* sublimates into a spirit or immortal, the *baek* becomes an apparition (鬼, *kr.* gwi *ch.* guǐ).

In Daesoon Thought, an individual’s degree of attainment in spiritual cultivation also factors into the soul’s experience of the afterlife. Consider the following verse:

A man who cultivates the Dao shall ascend to Heaven if his soul is soundly concentrated, and it will not disperse even after dying. A man who does not cultivate himself shall vanish away like smoke and bubbles due to the dimness of his soul (*Dharma* 2:22).

This verse might appear to superficially contradict the previous verse, but actually, the original Korean wording makes it fairly clear what was meant by this teaching. Through this verse, Kang Jeungsan instructed his disciples that a person’s *jeongbon* (精魂, *ch.* jīnghún, spirit-essence), has been built up sufficiently, it will stay intact. To use the wording of the earlier passage, this means that there is no risk to the ‘spiritual-soul’

(*kr. hon ch. hún*) which becomes an ‘ancestral god’ later becomes a ‘spirit’ or ‘immortal’ after four generations. If a person is insufficiently cultivated, their ‘spiritual soul’ runs the risk of dispersing and not carrying forth to become an ‘ancestral god’ capable of sublimating into a ‘spirit’ or ‘immortal.’ Presumably, the yin-aspect of the soul (魄, *kr. baek ch. pò*), would still reside with the body during interment, and if anything, the lack of a counterpart might hasten its transition into an ‘apparition’ since it would no longer be tied to the progress of the yang-aspect of the soul.

Beyond these two verses, there is not that much that can be authoritatively said about the afterlife in Daesoon Thought. It is safely assumed that there is a belief in the postmortem precincts (冥府, *kr. myeonbu, ch. míngfǔ*) common in East Asian folk religions as well as in Buddhism and Daoism. The caveat would be that in Daesoon Thought, the postmortem precincts were found by Kang Jeungsan to have created turmoil through faulty judgements (錯亂, *kr. changnan ch. cuòluàn*), and a Reordering Work was conducted to amend this situation. To explain further, traditional conceptions of the postmortem precincts are such that after a person dies, they are collected by one or more emissaries of the postmortem precincts (冥府使者, *kr. myeonbu saja, ch. míngfǔ shǐzhě*) and then taken to face judgment before one of the ten judge kings (冥府十王, *kr. myeonbu siwang, ch. míngfǔ shíwáng*). In the Daesoon Thought, however, the misjudgments of the postmortem precinct are believed to have been so severe that the world ended up in turmoil that required correction via a Reordering Work of Heaven and Earth which was carried out in 1901. The specific remedy was to install heads of offices of the postmortem precinct specific to ‘cases’ involving the dead of Korea, China, and Japan. The heads were made up of two recently deceased contemporaries of Kang Jeungsan: the Donghak revolutionary, Jeon Bong-Jun (全琫準, 1855–1895), who was assigned by Kang to supervise judgments of the Korean dead, and the revisor of *The Book of Changes*, Kim Hang (金恒, 1826–1898), tasked with supervising judgments pertaining to the Chinese dead. Lastly, there was the considerably earlier founder of Donghak, Choe Je-u (崔濟愚, 1824–1864), who was placed in charge of overseeing the judgments of the Japanese dead (*Reordering Works* 1:5-7). Wording and context suggests that these installed ‘heads’ do not replace the ten judge-kings so much as they can overrule any potential misjudgement; afterall, the ten judge-kings and even their emissaries are still enshrined within the fifteen divine positions on the highest shrine kept by temple complexes of Daesoon Jinrihoe and also have their titles recited in the Incantation of Perfected Dharma (眞法呪, *kr. jinbeop-ju*)

As for life, Zhuangzi characterized it as a ceaseless self-affirmation wherein the approach was to follow its flow, and the way to give life expression was to trustfully engage in the experiential surrender of oneself to the unknowable Mystery. Thereupon, ‘following the Dao’ is a matter of “allowing things to happen spontaneously, out of the reservoir of one’s full life experience, entrusting oneself to ‘the unthinking parts’ of oneself” (Bradley 2015, 83). Meanwhile, within the ‘uncarved block’ of life, we should embrace this ‘dangle’ in

thankfulness and maintain tranquility and peace no matter what happens.

In Daesoon Thought, thankfulness and tranquility arising out of spiritual cultivation would definitely be taken as a sign of progress, but as with many desired traits, these states are also emphasized as moral objectives to be aspired to and implemented in one's life even before they naturally ripen as the fruits of practice. In Daesoon Jinrihoe, gratitude in interpersonal relationships is viewed in terms of the 'beneficence' (恩惠, *kr. eunhye*) one receives from others and the 'reciprocation' (報恩, *kr. boeun*) of beneficence that one provides others in return. Interpersonal relationships are not the only grounds for the beneficence and reciprocation; however, as devotees are bound by a precept, "Do not disregard the beneficence bestowed upon you," and this extends first to one's indebtedness to Heaven and Earth for the beneficence of one's 'life, lifespan, and happiness,' which are reciprocated by devoting oneself to 'the Human Way' and "... establishing the great ethic of the reciprocity through sincerity, respectfulness, and faithfulness" (DIRC 2020c, X. Precepts, 4).

For Zhuangzi, forming attachments to objectified subjectivity is nothing more than alienating oneself from the Totality, whereas considering the self to be a 'temporary lodging' enables spontaneous thankfulness. As a result, Zhuangzi urged others to 'participate in the spring of all things.' Therein lies the means to not only experience all things as a joyous up-welling of life, but also the means to preserve inner tranquility in identification with endless Transformation itself.

Previously, it was mentioned that Daesoon Jinrihoe is a KNRM that believes in aspects of the self that survive death as well as in the coming of an earthly paradise and human immortality. It was stated earlier when examining the absence of the concept of a soul in Zhuangzi's system of thought that 'a soul usually implies a fixed and immortal form of identity; a specific 'I' that continues forever.' As a crucial point of nuance within Daesoon Thought, it should be recognized that, in the case of death, the aspects of the self that continue beyond death do undergo further transformation (e.g., the 'spiritual soul' becoming an ancestral god and then later a 'spirit' or 'immortal.') Furthermore, even in the case that one lives to see the Later World and attains immortality, that would also involve transformation. The set of doctrines known as 'aims' (目的, *kr. mokjeok*), for example, contain the connected phrases: Realizing earthly immortality—Renovation of human beings (地上神仙實現—人間改造, *kr. jisangshinseonshiryeon—ingangaejo*). In other words, humans cannot enter into immortality as is. The attainment of immortality will require humans to undergo profound changes (physical, psychological, spiritual, and so on). It is only within that fuller context that Daesoon Jinrihoe could be said to believe in something akin to a soul, but to state this too simplistically without honoring the various differences and points of nuance would lead to many misunderstandings.

In *Zhuangzi*, it is the ceaseless 'Transforming Openness' that should be depended on and identified with in order to maintain joyfulness throughout the continuous process of the accidental circumstances found in life. In this way, one's fixed identity



can gradually disappear where it already exists, and cease to arise where it has yet to exist. Such ‘forgetfulness’ is a spontaneous state that results from an unaware and comfortable sense of being rather than from deliberate actions that attempt to affirm the rightness of each thing as an expression of Nature or actions that seek to forget others or even the world in an effort to flourish.

Zhuangzi reveals that the rationalizing and discriminating mind may lead people into situations wherein they impose themselves on others. The outcome of such situations is counter-productive. The best course of action lies in the realization of a ‘non-fixed-identity’ which leads the mind to wander with indeterminate openness as it unites with the vastness. This becomes a pure psychological and mystical experience.

Zhuangzi’s viewpoint makes it possible for any person in any condition to wander in Transforming Openness without having to be a sage. Keeping the heart in a state of equanimity is not a dream so long as one appreciates and affirms everything encountered.

‘Wandering’ is a form of mental freedom based on ‘affirmation’ of one’s present circumstances. But what is worth mentioning here is that such an ‘affirmation’ is just a starting point which is directed towards a higher spiritual realm— that of ‘wandering.’ It is realized in a longitudinal process of pursuing and elevating the spirit, which advances by degrees until the highest stage has been reached. In essence: ‘affirmation’ matures into transcendence (elevation), and transcendence ripens into wandering. Hence, ‘affirmation’ and ‘wandering’ are two different levels and stages. The former is a ‘condition’ and the latter is its ‘outcome.’ What links the condition of affirmation to the outcome of wandering are practices such as ‘fasting of the heart’ and ‘forgetting oneself’ (Liu Xiaogan, 2006).

It should be noted that the metaphysical Dao is not separate from the psychological Dao in Zhuangzi’s system of thought. According to the original text, careful readers can only reasonably arrive upon the conclusion that they are closely related in two dimensions: the psychological Dao appears and manifests itself when one’s heart is empty (虛, *ch. xū*) through the practice of fasting of the mind. This is the process of pursuit and elevation that was described above.

In this process, the ultimate spirit realm that can be reached is to be united with the metaphysical Dao. Readers can find this in the account that Zhuangzi provided in Chapter 2 wherein he states, “... heaven and earth were born together with me, and the myriad things and I are one (天地與我并生, 而萬物與我為一 *ch. tiāndì yǔ wǒ bìng shēng, ér wànwù yǔ wǒ wéi yī*).” Embracing the universe through the spirit is an intuitive insight into the metaphysical Dao whereby one experiences some form of union. The other dimension is that by following the metaphysical Dao, which refers to the ‘truth’ in the ultimate and most ideal level, practitioners would do best to conform with the psychological Dao in the world that can be realized to the extent of wandering free and being as unfettered as possible. Only when acting in accordance with the

metaphysical Dao, can practitioners naturally arrive upon perfected behavior and wander freely without restriction.

‘Fasting of the heart’ is an exercise which “has as its end the discovery of one’s inner emptiness, the ‘empty room’, and this enables one to ‘be the change’ through non-being the change” (Bradley 2015, 91). The emptiness here refers to a ‘space’ which allows the up-welling of life that is experienced immediately and genuinely. It is already in the inner heart and the only thing one needs to do is to realize it and then rest one’s mind in that original state.

Previously, it was shown that Zhuangzi taught of two ‘stops,’ the ears stopping at listening and the mind stopping at recognition. The instruction to ‘listen with your spirit’ and the spirit’s quality of ‘emptiness (虛, *ch. xū*)’ is best understood in relation to the two ‘stops’ because without the two ‘stops’ people are inclined to form attachments to the ‘outer things’ and to the ‘established mind.’ This is why Zhuangzi put a general emphasis on ‘selflessness,’ which indicates the importance of breaking down the two sorts of attachments by achieving the two ‘stops.’ Furthermore, this is what makes the spirit’s quality of ‘emptiness’ possible in terms of real life application. The ‘stops’ also reveal the essential connotation of “listen with your spirit.” This is best presented through Zhuangzi’s story of Woodworker Qing who is able to demonstrate his mastery after his mind has been fasted.

Woodworker Qing revealed his secret as follows, “When I’ve fasted for three days, I no longer dare to think of congratulations or rewards. When I’ve fasted for five days, I no longer dare to think of honors or condemnation, of skill or clumsiness” (Hamill and Seaton 1998, 108). Here, it is worthwhile to investigate why Woodworker Qing “no longer dares (不敢懷 *ch. bù gǎn huái*)” to dwell upon thoughts of honors, condemnation, skill, or clumsiness. This presumably originates from his humbleness and sense of awe before ‘Heaven’ (i.e., a behavior informed by a value for the nature of things). The state of awe wherein he no longer dared to think of future outcomes or appraisals served as a motivation to entrust himself to Heaven and lose himself in the course of following the Heavenly Way. This resulted in his high level of concentration and full absorption in the activity itself. For instance, in Chapter 19, Confucius marvels at the superb skill of the hunchback snatching up cicadas: “Use the knight’s heart, undivided. There the spirit will congeal.” Absorbed in the congealing of his spirit, he was quite oblivious to other distractions. That process demonstrates his high degree of commitment.

Discussion of concepts tantamount to forgetting oneself in Daesoon Thought, take us back to the idea of a ‘singularly-focused mind,’ wherein a practitioner’s mind is entirely fixed to one specific object or purpose (DIRC 2020a, 544). In the previous cases from Zhuangzi, all of these would be examples of the mind being completely fixed to a given purpose which does not necessarily even have to be spiritual in nature. Although other



forms of cultivation are also seen as essential, a singularly-focused mind is considered crucial in so far as, when the object selected becomes the ultimate object, the Supreme God, or when the purpose selected becomes the purpose of serving the Supreme God, a practitioner will ultimately experience a sense of ‘the Dao is me and I am the Dao (道即我我即道, *kr. dojeuka ajeukdo*)’ (AADDJ 2018, 45). The wording of this phrase can certainly draw parallels with the previous Zhuangzi quotation, “...the myriad things and I are one.” Although in the case of ‘the Dao is me and I am the Dao’ union is implicit rather than explicit, and the Dao is more akin to the principle or pattern behind the myriad things rather than the phenomena themselves. This again, might be more a matter of semantic differences rather than substantive differences.

Ultimately, it was only through continuous fasting (physiological and psychological disengagement) that Woodworker Qing was able to cleanse his mind and eventually even ‘forget’ himself. This reflects an emphasis on the ‘dissolution of self’ wherein one dissociates from identification with ‘self (己, *ch. jǐ*),’ ‘deeds (功, *ch. gōng*)’ and ‘fame (名, *ch. míng*, literally ‘name’ but in the context of others knowing one’s name).’ Hence, he was able to solely focus on his activity and follow the specific method of that activity with an ‘empty’ (fully receptive) spirit. He no longer cared about success or failure or right or wrong. Concern over such matters would have only amounted to distractions or interferences. However, it is worth mentioning that although he enters a state of ‘forgottenness,’ the highest level of excellence in practice, we should not conclude that it is a final stance that Zhuangzi takes. The state of ‘forgottenness’ merely refers to behaving naturally and automatically within the context of a well-performed task that has transcended conscious awareness. For Zhuangzi, a profound ‘awakening’ after arising from that state is also emphasized.

In this sense, “listen with your spirit” can be understood in terms of selfless concentration on an activity in and of itself and as a consequent commitment to the nature of things (the ‘Heavenly Way’ of things). On the basis of eliminating attachments to ‘outer things’ and to the ‘established mind,’ practitioners can fully embrace things as they are and then take actions by following the innate Heavenly Way. This culminates in the dissolution of one’s self even to the extent of forgetting and then awakening spiritually. Therein, the real connotation of ‘emptiness’ is revealed.

In spiritual cultivation in Daesoon Jinrihoe, it could be said that practitioners likewise ‘empty’ themselves; although they might not think of it as such. When directing a singularly-focused mind toward the task of chanting incantations, practitioners are ‘emptied’ of other thoughts which would otherwise compete for their attention. Once they have been emptied of those distractions, the Dao may accumulate in them or as devotees would more naturally express this, divine beings may pass through their mind like an open gate and make use of them as they deem fit.

It is in the highly cataphatic, devotional, and panentheistic language of the previous

sentence that Daesoon Jinrihoe shows its full character as a unique East Asian new religious movement. To further explain the significance of this world view, in Daesoon Jinrihoe, practitioners are understood to be active and dynamic participants in the Harmonious Union between Divine Beings and Human Beings. They are not passive or obedient subjects awaiting commands because they live in the Era of Human Nobility (人尊時代, *kr. injon shidae*) as characterized by ‘nobility being conferred upon humans by having divine beings reside in humans (神封於人, *kr. shinbong eoin*)’ rather than the previous Era of Earthly Nobility (地尊時代, *kr. jijon shidae*) wherein ‘nobility was conferred upon Heaven by having divine beings reside in EarthHeaven (神封於地, *kr. shinbong eo ji*).’<sup>3</sup>

## Conclusion

In conclusion, ‘Fasting of the Mind,’ a key concept promoted by Zhuangzi, has been frequently interpreted as an apophatic practice. By way of contrast, descriptions of methods of spiritual cultivation methods in Daesoon Jinrihoe such as ‘quieting of the mind’ and ‘quieting of the body’ tend to be cataphatic. Despite this seeming difference which exists at least at the rhetorical level, a considerable amount of the spiritual phenomena illustrated in both systems of thought can be found to be quite similar upon closer inspection.

Some differences may be largely semantic or rhetorical, but other differences might arise from the distinct focal points of each respective system of thought. For his part, Zhuangzi focuses mainly on the body, mind, and internal energy. Daesoon Thought emphasizes religious devotion, virtue ethics, and religious community. A notable point of true diversion would be that spiritual cultivation in Zhuangzi’s system of thought is indifferent to the afterlife and rebirth because Zhuangzi does not promote a theory of the soul. A standout uniting feature could be found in how both systems of thought seek to keep negative and unskillful mental phenomena out of the mind while focusing instead upon mental phenomena that are conducive to spiritual progress.

## Conflict of Interest

Jason Greenberger has been Managing Editor 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> Other Jeungsanist religious orders from the same time period also apotheosized Kang Jeungsan as various deities, but Jo Jeongsan was the first to apotheosize him as The Celestial Worthy of the Ninth Heaven, Responder, Thunderbolt-bearer, and Transformer of the Universe (九天應元雷聲普化天尊, gucheon eungwon noeseong bohwa cheonjon \*Chinese: jiùtiān yīngyuán léishēng pǔhuà tiānzūn) and thereby connect Kang Jeungsan with that specific ancient Daoist deity and accompanying lore such as the Precious Scripture of the Jade Pivot (九天應元雷聲普化天尊玉樞寶經, jiùtiān yīngyuán léishēng pǔhuà tiānzūn yùshū bǎojīng) of which the Late Joseon Dynasty expanded Korean edition, Okchu Bogyeong (玉樞寶經), lists the forty-eight divine generals who Daesoon Jinrihoe would later enshrine in Yeongdae.

<sup>2</sup> The divine title, Sangje (上帝, the Supreme God), used to identify the historical figure Kang Jeungsan (姜輦山, 1871–1909) in *The Canonical Scripture*.

<sup>3</sup> Video, *The Reordering Works of Heaven and Earth* (2022, 04:05)

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# Freedom of Religion, *Sangsaeng*, and Symbiosis in the Post-COVID Study of (New) Religions

**Donald A. WESTBROOK**

Donald A. Westbrook is a lecturer with the School of Information at San José State University, USA. He has taught at UT Austin, UCLA, Cal State Fullerton, University of South Florida, and Fuller Seminary, and completed a postdoctoral research fellowship at San Diego State University. Westbrook is the author of *Among the Scientologists* (Oxford UP, 2019) and *L. Ron Hubbard and Scientology Studies* (Cambridge UP, 2022). In addition to Daesoon Jinrihoe, he is currently researching Tai Ji Men, La Luz del Mundo, and other new religious movements, both in and outside the United States.



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## Original Articles

Correspondence to

**Donald A. WESTBROOK**

San Jose State University, USA

[donald.westbrook@sjsu.edu](mailto:donald.westbrook@sjsu.edu)

ORCID

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9768-7720>



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## Abstract

This article explores the intersection of freedom of religion, *sangsaeng*, and symbiosis when considering the post-COVID study of religions, especially new religions. When it comes to the study of new and alternative religious groups, where there is more potential for misunderstanding and misinformation, it becomes all the more important—and indeed mutually beneficial, in the areas of religious liberty, religious freedom, and cross-cultural dialogue—to learn about a tradition by taking into account the spiritual life and practices of members themselves and their own sacred writings and practices. Daesoon Jinrihoe offers a case study of the importance of this principle and the notion of *sangsaeng* in particular is a fruitful utilitarian lens for thinking about how scholars, journalists, and others might approach the study of religion in our complex and global digital age of (mis) information. Daesoon Jinrihoe is also considered in light of Roy Wallis's typology of world-rejecting, world-affirming, and world-accommodating new religious movements. Open areas for sociological research are proposed and the nascent field of Daesoon studies is compared to some similar scholarly endeavors within NRM studies.

**Keywords:** Daesoon Jinrihoe; *sangsaeng*; COVID-19; religious freedom; sociology of religion

## Introduction

This article represents a first academic step on my part into the richly complex world of Daesoon Jinrihoe and Daesoon Thought. It was written on the basis of the emerging scholarship on Daesoon studies, to be sure, particularly what is available in English, but even more than that is highly dependent on reading through the Scriptures of Daesoon Jinrihoe that were kindly mailed to me. I refer to three works—*The Canonical Scripture*, *The Guiding Compass of Daesoon*, and *Essentials of Daesoon Jinrihoe*—all of which I read in detail, marked with notes, and enjoyed thinking about on their own terms and in comparative religious perspective, while acknowledging my own limitations as a newcomer and the regrettable fact that I am unable to read them in their original Korean. However, on another level, I found that these liabilities were somewhat refreshing, since they allowed me a “fresh view,” one might say, into a new religion and its scriptures, similar to someone first encountering the Bible, in English, without any familiarity with Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic or the underlying historical, theological, and sociological contexts of Judaism and nascent Christianity. There is still much to be gained and analyzed with this approach and even potential future scholarly pathways emerge, slowly but surely, as more pieces of a scriptural and worldview puzzle fall into place. As time goes on, I look forward to deepening my understanding of the scriptures, rituals, and community outreach of Daesoon Jinrihoe as a growing new religion on its own terms above and beyond the treatment found in this article. My own professional background is in the interdisciplinary field of religious studies, mostly the study of new religions in America, so I have been delighted to expand out and study Daesoon Thought in preparation for this article. It is vitally important, I think, for scholars of new religious movements (NRMs) around the globe to connect with one another and expand our geographical and scholarly footprints. Fortunately, despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, a number of networking opportunities have been made possible through video calls and remote engagement, hybrid conferences, virtual tours, and so on.

With these disclaimers in mind, it seems to me that Daesoon Jinrihoe and the notion of *sangsaeng*, as presented and understood through these scriptures, offer scholars of religion, and scholars of new religions in particular, a wonderful window into a central feature of Daesoon Thought. Moreover, *sangsaeng*, it seems to me, is a concept that has broader relevance in the post-COVID study of new religions. Indeed, it appears to be a fruitful utilitarian lens for thinking about how scholars, journalists, and others might approach the study of religion in our complex and global digital age of (mis)information in respectful and responsible ways. Finally, at the end of this article, I consider Daesoon Jinrihoe in light of sociologist Roy Wallis's typology of world-rejecting, world-affirming, and world-accommodating new religious movements, and make the preliminary case

that the group appears to be both world-affirming and world-accommodating. This dual classification makes sense in light of how the scriptures present *sangsaeng* and attests to the complexity of Daesoon Jinrihoe as a new religion as well as the sophistication of Daesoon Thought more broadly that defies simple classification. Finally, some possible areas for sociological research are proposed that would serve to deepen and refine our understanding of Daesoon Jinrihoe as a lived religion.

### ***Sangsaeng*, the Academic Study of Religion, and a Scriptural Approach**

The concept of *sangsaeng*, as far as I understand it in its more general sense—that is, the importance of cultivating symbiotic relationships, win-wins, mutual beneficence, cooperation, etc.—also appears to be an excellent theme for thinking about religious freedom and interreligious understanding, especially when it comes to new and alternative groups such as Daesoon Jinrihoe that may be subject to misunderstanding and misinformation, whether in or outside Korea. Our increased reliance on digital based forms of communication during the pandemic has made it all the more important to think about *sangsaeng* and symbiosis in active rather than passive terms, I would argue, especially given the potential for misinformation to proliferate more quickly and insidiously than in previous generations with advent of the Internet and social media. In reading through *The Guiding Compass of Daesoon*, for instance, I could not help but notice the following line in the English translation: “Truthful expression in words protects against criticism as a cult, therefore, you should maintain caution at all times” (DIRC 2020b 1.2, 1.2. v, B).

In addition to my background, teaching, and research in religious studies, I teach in the area of library and information science, where the subject of *information literacy*, as it is often called, is more relevant than ever, and not just in the United States. *Religious literacy*, too, is important on an international level, and it has been a pleasure to see some of the ways in which this new religion from Korea has expanded, engaged with scholars, and continues to produce an impressive body of scholarship of its own, both within the group and outside of itself, in both Korean and English. Indeed, the willingness and ability of a new religious tradition to so consciously and productively cultivate scholarly work in this way is arguably one sign of its maturation and openness, I would argue, and researchers of new religious movements over the years have seen similar developments in other groups, such as the Unification Church, Church of Scientology, the Baha’i faith, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the last of which is another good example of an “old new religion” (Kim 2020, 353), to quote David Kim on Daesoon Jinrihoe. Similarly, Liselotte Frisk, in an article in JDTREA (2021), aptly compared Daesoon Jinrihoe with other NRMs, such as Scientology, The Family International, ISKCON, the Family Federation, and the Osho Movement; and



George Chryssides, in another *JDTEA* article (2022), made excellent comparisons to the Jehovah's Witnesses and Unification Church.

As we continue to (hopefully) move out of this pandemic, or at least into its later stages, it seems worthwhile to reflect on the nature of *sangsaeng* and consider its relevance for study of new religions on their own terms and in comparative context. It brings to mind Max Müller's well known saying that "he who knows one [religion], knows none" (1870 [2016], 113) and highlights the importance of comparative work as a feature of the academic study of religion. Toward that end, I would like to call attention to a number of passages from the scriptures of Daesoon Jinrihoe that stood out to me in this regard. I do not intend this to be a proper or full exegetical or rhetorical analysis (cf. Fehler, 2022), which would require, no doubt, much greater attention to culture, beliefs, and practices of Daesoon Jinrihoe, other Jeungsanist movements, and Korean history that others would be more qualified to undertake—especially by others who can read and research in Korean, and there is certainly space for collaboration between outsiders, insiders, and Korean interpreters. Even so, a number of scriptural passages stood out to me in the English translations as instructive, revealing, and relevant as I remain cognizant of methodological and logistical challenges—many of which have been very helpfully delineated in a 2018 article by Yoon Yongbok and Massimo Introvigne in *The Journal of CESNUR*.

Starting with *The Guiding Compass of Daesoon*, we find an emphasis on mutual beneficence that has its origins in personal responsibility and ethical living, extending out to the family, society, and beyond:

Inwardly realize that, 'I am the one who provokes grudges, and I am the one who must unweave them. If I act first to resolve grudges, then the grudges of others shall be resolved on their own.' When the grudges of both sides gain absolution, the resolution of grievances is thereby achieved. By doing so, mutual beneficence shall be accomplished. Profoundly realize this truth! (DIRC 2020b 1.3, 1.3. iii, A)

This passage brings to mind concepts and passages in many other religious traditions. One is the Zoroastrian motto to cultivate a harmony of "good thoughts, good words, good deeds."

Indeed, later in *The Guiding Compass of Daesoon*, we find this corollary:

There is an old saying that 'If your mind is not sincere, your intention is not sincere. If your intention is not sincere, your acts are not sincere. If your acts are not sincere, you shall not reach the perfected state of unification with the Dao.' Keep this in mind. (DIRC 2020b, 4.1, 4.1.i v, D)

These two examples, with their emphasis on the individual and the resolution of grievances, remind me of this well-known Biblical passage from the Gospel of Matthew:

For the judgment you give will be the judgment you get, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye but do not notice the log in your own eye? Or how can you say to your neighbor, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' while the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye. (*Matthew 7:2-5*, NRSV)

The Golden Rule is often viewed in Christian terms, tracing to Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount to "do to others as you would have them do to you" (*Matthew 7:12*, also see *Luke 6:31*, NRSV). However, most religious traditions, in one way or another, echo this sentiment and promote similar principles about behavior and reciprocity that are arguably grounded not so much in religion or dogma as much as common sense within a well-functioning, well ordered, and just society. *Sangsaeng* seems to have much in common, at a fundamental level, with Golden Rule thinking, but it should be noted that the scriptures of Daesoon Jinrihoe paint a far more complex theological, psychological, and social picture in the context of Korean unification, the self, filial piety, social obligations, spirits, mental cultivation, humility, yin and yang, and the "heavenly Dao" (DIRC 2020b, 2.1, 2.1. iii) that requires one to practice what one preaches for any appreciable effect. In putting faith in action, in attaining mental and bodily peace and well-being, the individual is better positioned to become a model for the edification of others on a path of spiritual growth, progression, and propagation.

I was intrigued to find this Golden Rule language used explicitly in the *Essentials of Daesoon Jinrihoe*. The third in a series of five ethical rules reads as follows:

Do not deceive yourself—this is the golden rule for disciples. Therefore do not deceive your conscience, or delude the world or deceive the citizenry through your speech, nor do anything unethical or unreasonable. (DIRC 2020c, 11. 3)

In *The Canonical Scripture* too, not surprisingly, mutual beneficence (*sangsaeng*) and its opposite, mutual contention (*sanggeuk*), are discussed in many places, explicitly and implicitly.<sup>1</sup> I was also intrigued to learn about the ways in which grievances and grudges are depicted in spiritual-psychological ways, including the presence of "grudge harboring spirits" (*Acts 3:16*, *Acts 4:47*, *Reordering Works 2:19*, *Progress of the Order 1:2*, *Dharma 2:14*) that can afflict one's body and mind. Along these lines, one helpful source is Pochi Huang's 2021 article in *JDTREA*, "*Haewon-sangsaeng* as a Religio-Ethical Metaphor,"

especially the language of “correlative cosmology” (Huang 2021, 106; cf. Schwartz 1985) as a framework for apprehending the dynamic between spiritual and earthly realms.

It goes without saying that the COVID-19 pandemic has affected all areas of life and activity, including in the sphere of religion. However, when it comes to the study of new and alternative religious groups, where there is more potential for deception, misunderstanding, and misinformation, it becomes all the more important—and indeed mutually beneficial, in the areas of religious liberty, religious freedom, and cross-cultural dialogue—to learn about a (new) religion such as Daesoon Jinrihoe by taking into account the spiritual life and practices of members themselves and according to their own sacred writings and practices. Too often, especially among journalists and the general public, we find attention given to sensational narratives, gossip, and innuendo about so-called “cults” and “sects,” making it all the more important that scholars, especially NRM researchers who work with newer and marginalized groups, do their best to understand groups on their own terms and analyze them rigorously and fairly. Researchers thus play a supportive role in combating misinformation, prejudice, and bias, perhaps even in a way that could help resolve grievances or grudges that exist in society—all the more important when political and cultural climates contribute to polarization and where monologue is far too often the norm instead of dialogue and cross-cultural understanding.

## Roy Wallis’ Typology and Daesoon Jinrihoe

With this scriptural introduction of *sangsaeng* in place, I would like to shift attention to the sociological work of Roy Wallis. In his *The Elementary Forms of the New Religious Life* (1984), Wallis put forward a typology well known in NRM studies in which he distinguished between 1) world-rejecting, 2) world-affirming, and 3) world-accommodating new religious movements, a model that seems worth revisiting as one way to better understand Daesoon Jinrihoe from religious studies and sociological perspectives. It seems to me that we can reject straight away thinking of Daesoon Thought as world rejecting given the nature of *sangsaeng*, the openness of the group to engage with the outside world, its social programs and charitable work, and well as the manner in which, according to Don Baker’s essay after the main body of *The Canonical Scripture*, Sangje “brought together the teachings of many different religious traditions, including some not rooted in Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism, shamanism, or Christianity, and added ideas of His own to create something that is totally new yet resonates with Korean traditional beliefs and practices” (Baker 2020, 319; cf. Rigal-Cellard, 2022). As Baker put it, Daesoon Jinrihoe is a “quintessential Korean religion” (Baker 2016, 15) and, to repeat from David Kim, it can be considered an “old new religion” (Baker 2020, 353).

According to Wallis, world-affirming new religious movements “claim to possess the means to enable people to unlock their physical, mental, and spiritual potential without the need to withdraw from the world, means which are readily available to virtually everyone who learns the technique or principle involved” (1984, 22). Here, there would seem to be parallels to the emphasis in Daesoon Thought and practice on the four cardinal mottos: quieting the mind, quieting the body, reverence for heaven, and lastly cultivation (DIRC 2020c, 7. 1)—which can take place at central headquarters, temples, or in one’s home, as I understand it. By contrast, Wallis argues, the “innovatory religious movement with a “world-accommodating” orientation will be seen not so much as a protest against the world or society, but as a protest against prevailing religious institutions, or their loss of vitality. They are seen to have abandoned a living spirituality, to have eschewed experience for an empty formalism” (Wallis 1984, 36-37; emphasis mine). Perhaps, then, if Wallis’ typology is to be of use in assessing and describing Daesoon Jinrihoe, it can be proposed that the movement has aspects that are *both* world-affirming and world-accommodating, especially if one places the movement in the larger context of Korean new religions, as the largest among the traditions of Jeungsanism, and best poised to establish its relevance and vitality of Daesoon Thought both in and outside of Korea.

This dual classification of Daesoon Jinrihoe as world-affirming and world-accommodating appears to be supported by existing sociological research as well. Susan J. Palmer and Jason Greenberger, for instance, have conducted extensive research on children in Daesoon Jinrihoe based on interviews and archival research (2021). They conclude that, while there are schools and programs for younger members, such as youth camps and the magazine *Donggeurami*, the group “appears to be a religion that is designed for adults” (Palmer and Greenberger 2021, 98) in contrast to other NRMs that place greater emphasis on including, recruiting, and retaining children and younger members into their core membership activities. In Daesoon Jinrihoe, Palmer and Greenberger found that “children are awarded the power of choice. There appears to be no such thing as ‘forced indoctrination’ or ‘shunning’” (Palmer and Greenberger 2021, 99). These findings are consistent with a group labelled as world-affirming, especially in the Korean context, where respect for parents and elders would overlap with the central role of adult members who likewise freely choose to participate in activities that would, directly or indirectly, benefit the mental and spiritual lives of themselves, family members. And society on the path to unification, peace, balance, and harmony.

Palmer and Greenberger also acknowledge previous work on Daesoon Jinrihoe with respect to its “millenarian” character (e.g., Kim 2015; Baker 2016; Introvigne 2017a). But in Daesoon Jinrihoe, this millenarian theology seems to require the rituals and participation of human actors to help bring about the full passage, as Massimo Introvigne puts it, “from the old to the new world” (*Gaebyeok*, “Great Transformation”)

(Introvigne 2017a). Moreover, as Introvigne writes, “By equilibrating Yin and Yang, divine beings and human beings shall be unified and a 50,000-year earthly paradise shall be established, where humans will enjoy good health, long life, and eternal happiness and wealth” (Introvigne 2017a). That is to say, the theology and mission of Daesoon Jinrihoe is primarily dependent on the retention and engagement of adult members, whose cultivation and edification efforts *actively and inclusively* foster the soteriological aims of the group in a way that mutually benefits the self, the group, Korean society, and the world consistent with the principle of *sangsaeng*. In this way, the group would again appear to be world accommodating as well, especially as the largest of the Jeungsanist groups and in light of its work to expand beyond South Korea and transform the organization into a global religious movement.

### Some Possible Sociological Projects Moving Forward

Moving forward, there seems to be no shortage of potential sociological projects that would only serve to deepen our understanding of the group. David Kim’s recent book, *Daesoon Jinrihoe in Modern Korea* (2020), serves as an excellent English language introduction but also helps lay a foundation for future work. Certainly, there is much more research that could, and should, be carried on the group’s scriptures and its philosophy and theology. Kim includes detailed chapters on the group’s “canonical literature” (Chapter 4) and “Daesoon philosophical thought” (Chapter 5)—the last of which includes an illuminating section on *Haewon-sangsaeng* (199-204) that is well worth reading.

It is Kim’s chapters on “religious rituals and practices” (Chapter 6), “sacred sites and their functional roles” (Chapter 7), and “social outreach in reductive enterprise” (Chapter 8), however, that in my estimation most powerfully point the way for prospective sociological research. In the (post) COVID study of religion, there are surely many opportunities to engage and conduct interviews on platforms such as Zoom and WebEx. So many of us have become accustomed to video calls and these types of virtual platforms can easily bring together translators and members who might not otherwise be able to connect. However, I suspect in the case of Daesoon Jinrihoe that more substantial fieldwork and interviews will require travel to South Korea to observe communities of practice on the ground. This might include trips to temple complexes and other sacred sites, schools, hospitals, and volunteer organizations, as well as observation of male and female training activities, prayer meetings, devotional offerings, rituals, and festivals, among other expressions of identity, culture, and outreach. Attention should also be given to material culture such as clothing, art, architecture, and iconography.

It will be intriguing to see to what extent participant-observation fieldwork may be

possible in relation to rituals and temple practices—a possibility that will likely require travel as well, not to mention a longer stay in order to build trust and immerse oneself in the group’s culture, customs, and lifestyle. In terms of initial or “foot-in-the-door” access, though, the good news is that Daesoon Jinrihoe has already begun to open its own doors to academic researchers with conferences and visits in a manner that suggests a positive, proactive, and productive future. This too can be viewed through the lens of *sangsaeng* as a win-win scenario: on the one hand, it offers the world a chance to better understand this new religion and its own members and, on the other hand, scholars have the opportunity to propose and conduct research and fieldwork that might otherwise be difficult or impossible to carry out.

The academic study of Daesoon Jinrihoe is also significant because it helps lay bare open areas in NRM studies with respect to Asian religious traditions. There have been encouraging scholarly signs in this area, such as CESNUR conferences in Korea (2016) and Taiwan (2018), the publication of Brill’s *Handbook of East Asian New Religious Movements* (2018), an edited volume from David W. Kim on *New Religious Movements in Modern Asian History* (2020), and monographs, such as Massimo Introvigne’s *Inside the Church of God Almighty: The Most Persecuted Religious Movement in China* (2020). In addition, there has been attention specifically on Korean NRMs, such as Shincheonji (Introvigne 2021a) and Kaengjŏngyudo (Kaplan 2021). There is value in case studies as well as comparative works, such as Introvigne’s article in *Nova Religio* entitled “The Flourishing of New Religions in Korea” (2021b), that situates groups such as Daesoon Jinrihoe in the larger context of Korean (new) religion and trends. David Kim’s monograph on Daesoon Jinrihoe also gives attention to the group in comparative context, an approach that strengthens his analysis as he analyzes the unique theological, ritualistic, and sociological dimensions of the organization.

## Daesoon Jinrihoe and the Church of Scientology Compared

In the spirit of comparative analysis, and drawing on my own previous studies, it may be useful to consider the Korean-born Daesoon Jinrihoe alongside the American-born religion of Scientology, which I believe also defies simple categorization in light of Roy Wallis’ tripartite typology. Elsewhere, I have argued that the Church of Scientology qualifies, as Wallis rightly observed, as a “world-affirming” religious movement, especially in light of its programs to improve individual and in turn societal well-being (Westbrook 2019, 263; Wallis 1984, 6, 28). At the same time, there are aspects of Scientology’s theology that I have analyzed as “counter-apocalyptic” in light of the Cold War milieu in which the church was born, and its beliefs, practices, and communal life were conditioned (Westbrook 2019, 264). In particular, this includes the mission of Scientology ministers as well as parishioners but especially members of the full-time



clergy known as the Sea Organization, whose members devote their lives to Hubbard's goals to spread Scientology and "clear the planet" (i.e., either produce Clear individuals, per Hubbard's Dianetics and Scientology techniques, or otherwise increase sanity and stability, on a global level, through humanitarianism or advanced auditing [counseling] techniques).

Thus, it seems to me that Scientology, as with Daesoon Jinrihoe, ought to be considered *both* world-affirming and world-accommodating, as it seeks to empower individuals to, in effect, save themselves and society around them in a way that in the end benefits both members and outsiders alike. In other words, the goal is not necessarily to convert the entire world to Scientology, even if church members might desire such an outcome in a grand eschatological worldview, just as Daesoon Jinrihoe, as far as I can tell, does not have the goal to persuade the world to join its cause in the immediate or realistic future.

Scientology has been described as a "quintessentially American" new religious movement (Kaplan 2006, 96-98), in much the same way that Daesoon Jinrihoe has been labelled a "quintessential Korean religion" (Baker 2016, 15). Both have global aspirations and, in the case of Scientology, has been relatively successful at transplanting itself outside of its American origin points, and now claims "Churches, Missions, and affiliated groups...across 167 nations" (Church of Scientology International 2022a). Even allowing for inflated or exaggerated statistics (see, e.g., Introvigne 2017b), Scientology has certainly expanded its institutional footprint by opening or renovating churches outside the United States, and no doubt owes at least some of its missiological success to large scale efforts to translate Hubbard's enormous canon or writings and lectures (counted as scripture) into dozens of languages (Bridge Publications 2022). In the last decade alone, churches have opened or been renovated outside the United States in Johannesburg, Stuttgart, Perth, Amsterdam, Copenhagen, Budapest, Tokyo, Bogota, and Kaohsiung (Church of Scientology International 2022b).

## **Daesoon Studies, Scientology Studies, and Beyond**

Aside from historical or theological points of similarity, Daesoon Thought and Scientology have both benefited from an increase in academic attention in recent years. Although the Church of Scientology has commissioned scholars over the years to publish studies on the group (see, e.g., the appendix essays in Church of Scientology 1999; and Church of Scientology 2022c), most of the academic work on Scientology to emerge in the last fifty years, and especially in the last two decades, has come from sociologists, historians, religious studies scholars, and even journalists working on their own, often with limited or no access to the church and its own members. There have been a number of book-length exceptions, however, such as the works of Chagnon

(1985), Whitehead (1987), Reitman (2011), Westbrook (2019), and Thomas (2021), the last of which relied on “Free Zone” or schismatic Scientologists and showcased the ways in which the Church of Scientology has evolved and splintered since its founding in the 1950s. Thomas has argued that scholars should focus attention on “Scientologies” in light of the diversity of interpretations of Hubbard’s work and legacy (2020), and here one might draw a parallel to the numerous schools of thought under the umbrella of Daesoon Thought.

Indeed, it seems me that Daesoon studies has experienced a recent surge in attention and scholarly output, just as we have seen similar developments in the field of NRM studies in the subfields of Scientology studies, Mormon studies, Baha’i studies, Unification studies, and others. It also seems that a fair number of Daesoon studies scholars are themselves adherents of its philosophy and worldview, whether that means membership in Daesoon Jinrihoe or other groups, and certainly a similar phenomenon has occurred in say the development of intellectual work on Mormonism, with many scholars coming to the subject as current or former members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) or perhaps the Community of Christ (formerly the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, or RLDS). Interestingly, to continue the comparison with Scientology, the same cannot be said to be true. With very few exceptions (see, e.g., Roux 2020; Simmons 1976), academic researchers of Scientology have come to the movement from outside the group, arguably due to an anti-intellectual culture within the Church of Scientology—based, I think, on a reliance on Hubbard’s canon to speak for itself as a tactic to eliminate the possibility for interpretation and thus alteration—that has not yet led to a culture in which church-based historians, theologians, apologists, and the like are needed or frankly wanted. Instead, on occasion, the expertise of outside academics, especially those open to studying the group and its practices on its own terms, have been enlisted in public relations and legal settings. Despite institutional aversions, Scientology studies has gained steam, especially over the last decade, and more work is on the horizon, as a variety of stakeholders—outside scholars, current members, and former members—are beginning to contribute their voices in rich and diverse ways (Westbrook 2022).

Daesoon studies, too, has gained momentum, in no small measure thanks to the periodical in which this piece appears, the *Journal of Daesoon Thought and the Religions of East Asia (JDTREA)*, and recent issues attest to the work done on this new religion from both inside and outside the movement—and in fact, the lion’s share of recent scholarship comes from NRM scholars who, like myself, have no personal affiliation with the group. Unlike other subfields such as Scientology studies, *JDTREA* has consciously positioned itself in relation to Daesoon studies *and* East Asian religion more broadly, in much the same way that say Mormon studies has often situated itself in relation to American history, North American religion, and (as the LDS church has expanded) international historical contexts.



*JDTREA*'s vision for itself as an academic periodical rooted in, but not reducible to, Daesoon studies presents a number of practical and methodological advantages for the journal, and the field, moving forward. For one, it allows the journal to cast a wider net for submissions to the journal, which is useful as its gains more recognition and prestige in its formative years. But even more than that, it is arguably part of a commitment to interdisciplinarity and cutting-edge scholarship that transcends provincialism and an understanding of Daesoon Thought without appreciation of the larger religious, social, political, economic, and other contexts in which this and other systems of thought develop. For this reason, at least on the face of it, it would appear that the project of Daesoon studies is perhaps most similar to Unification studies, especially given that both grew out of Korean-born NRMs. The Unification Theological Seminary (UTS), to this point, has published a *Journal of Unification Studies* since 1997 (UTS 2021). This periodical, true to its name, seeks out work from "a Unificationist perspective... [and] papers from diverse viewpoints that engage Unification theology and practice" (Wilson, n.d.). *JDTREA*, by contrast, "is the only peer-reviewed, English language journal exclusively dedicated to research on Daesoon Thought and the contemporary relevance of East Asia Religions" (*JDTREA* 2022).

This vision for a broader scope is also, returning to an earlier theme in this article, itself arguably an extension of the concept of *sangsaeng*. It represents an intention, I would argue, to put into scholarly practice the notion of cross-cultural understanding that emerges from healthy and respectful but rigorous academic dialogue, debate, and peer review. As more English language researchers take seriously Daesoon Jinrihoe and East Asian (new) religions, research on this NRM will surely grow in sophistication and deepen our appreciation for the nuances best known to those familiar with its Korean centers and populations. And if someday, Daesoon Jinrihoe expands beyond Korea in the same that the Unification Church did—and in ways that perhaps someday parallel the success that the Church of Scientology and so many other NRMs have had from the United States—the scholars publishing in this space will have been part of cultivating early academic awareness about a group in its relatively early history of reaching beyond itself and to the rest of the world.

## Post-Truth and the Post-COVID Study of Religion

Earlier I mentioned the importance of information literacy and more specifically religious literacy. The need for both has grown all the more urgent in our age of "post-truth," misinformation, and disinformation; realities that seem to have only grown in seriousness in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. In my other area of professional life, library and information science, there is no shortage of works on the need for information literacy and specifically on the practical forms that training along these lines can, and should, take, whether for children, adolescents, adults, in the classroom,

in the library, or in everyday life (see, e.g., Levitin 2017; McIntyre 2018; O'Connor and Weatherall 2018; and on the intersection between technology, social media, society, and literacy see Noble 2018; Vaidhyanathan 2018; Weinberger 2019). Religious literacy is one important sub-dimension. On a practical level within NRM studies, religious literacy has often expressed itself in the form of scholars correcting claims or perceptions about so-called “cults” or “sects” and in relation to practices such as “brainwashing” and “deprogramming” (Introvigne 2022). W. Michael Ashcraft has produced a wonderful history of NRM studies (and cultic studies) (Ashcraft 2018) that situates major players, methodologies, and controversies, especially in the past fifty years.

Today, rhetoric surrounding so-called “cults” continues unabated in the media—certainly in the United States with which I am most familiar—and in recent years has been applied in political, social, technological, and other contexts in addition to the more familiar religious uses. Steven Hassan’s book *The Cult of Trump: A Leading Cult Expert Explains How the President Uses Mind Control* (2019) is one example. Another that has enjoyed mass popular success is Amanda Montell’s *Cultish: The Language of Fanaticism* (2021), which led to a podcast, “Sounds Like a Cult,” with episodes that explore “the modern-day cults we all follow” (2022). Subjects of some recent episodes include: multi-level marketing, sororities and fraternities, the royal family (UK), and flat earthers (2022). The 2022 annual meeting of the Association for the Sociology of Religion (ASR) in Los Angeles included a session on “‘Cults’: The International Return of a Dubious Category” (I was one of the speakers, as were Massimo Introvigne, Holly Folk, and Rosita Soryte) (2022). I think it is important that scholars continue to research this phenomenon, as a matter of academic interest, but also push back on the excesses of the word “cult” in popular culture, especially when used to denigrate, marginalize, and oppress religious minorities. From an academic point of view, the term is pejorative, imprecise, and subjective to the point of meaninglessness—but these are arguably the same characteristics that have allowed such a contested and divisive word such as “cult” to proliferate in our post-truth world in the first place, a world that is too often driven by social media, anonymous communication, trolling, monologue over dialogue, artificial intelligence, and a lack of empathy. At the same time, it should be acknowledged that a loaded word like “cult” is sometimes used by individuals coming to terms with their experiences in groups in ways that are therapeutic as well as academic or polemical in nature (see, e.g., Young 2022).

How, then, should the post-truth and post-COVID study of religion proceed? It seems to me once again that the concepts of *sangsaeng* and symbiosis, taken proactively rather than passively, are useful methodological starting points. Misinformation can spread and become viral in ways similar to the COVID-19 pandemic that we have all experienced over the past two years. It can lead to misunderstandings, grudges, discrimination, persecution, and even violence. It is all the more important that those

of who study minority religions such as Daesoon Jinrihoe do so responsibly and with careful attention to our methods, sources, and the diversity of people and perspectives at play. It is also important to build trust and foster relationships, something that can be difficult, though by no means impossible, to accomplish in light of language barriers and geographical distance. These challenges can be overcome and, as restrictions continue to lift as the pandemic (hopefully) reaches its final stages, the opportunities for fieldwork on the ground in Korea will be plentiful, assuming access can be granted, and researchers come to projects with the proper cultural and linguistic training (or else the assistance of translators). And until then, there are numerous fruitful paths forward on a remote basis in terms of historical analysis, theological interpretation, and comparative religious studies.

Last but not least: transparency and open access to information will be essential in the post-COVID study of (new) religions, especially when the general public, and scholars too for that matter, expect easy and quick access to their sources. For this reason, it is highly commendable that *JDTREA* is making itself available on an open access (OA) basis. Too often journal articles are hidden behind paywalls, unavailable at one's particular university library, or, in the cases of older works, quite often unavailable in digital form and thus, for all practical purposes, lost to researchers without access to academic libraries and archives. Of course, this is not a problem unique to NRM studies or the humanities and social sciences. It should be taken into account that while open access initiatives do result in free access to the end user (i.e., the researcher), this does not mean that the backend process of publishing works on an OA basis come without expense, whether on the publisher's side or, as quite often happens (though not at *JDTREA*), via article processing charges (APCs) passed on to authors. As more periodicals continue to embrace the OA model that makes the most sense for them, *JDTREA*—and by extension Daesoon studies—is helping to model a new path forward that will perhaps encourage other journals in the NRM world to make a similar move. *The Journal of CESNUR* is an example of another relatively new OA periodical that publishes NRM research (2022). For more on the history of open access and its practical implementations, Peter Suber's *Open Access* (2012) is an excellent introduction for scholars and publishers alike.

## Conclusion

Daesoon Jinrihoe offers scholars of religion a unique entry point into learning more about Korean religion. As this group continues to make itself available for outside and scholarly investigation, scholars of religion, and in particular researchers of new religious movements, should take advantage of opportunities as they come along to learn more about this group and its members. My own introduction came via the scriptural texts and engagement with the notion of *sangsaeng*—but it soon became clear that this new religious organization has developed a sophisticated intellectual self-consciousness

through conferences, books, journals, and other activities in promotion of Daesoon Thought and studies, both for itself and the broader world. Analyzed against Roy Wallis' 1984 typology, it appears that the group has characteristics that make it both world-affirming and world-accommodating, a preliminary conclusion that I invite others to further investigate, refined, or challenge. But it seems to me that the group's theology and practices, and its extensive social engagement, defy simplistic sociological classification, especially as this Korean-born NRM seeks to internationalize and engage in scholarly conversations about itself. In the wake of post-truth and COVID-19, scholars of religion and defenders of religious freedom stand to benefit from the theology of *sangsaeng* and its potential to build bridges in world too often divided by misinformation and disinformation, especially in online forums where monologue reigns over dialogue.

I would like to close with a passage from *The Canonical Scripture* that I think is methodologically relevant and instructive for academic researchers as more of us continue to learn about Daesoon Jinrihoe. Sangje told his disciples:

You always want to learn the arts of the Dao, but even if I were to teach them to you now, it would be like pouring water on a rock; it would not permeate inside but would just flow over the outside. When the arts are needed, I will open them to you. Until then, keep cultivating your minds diligently. (*Dharma* 2:12)

Scholarship on Daseoon thought, at least in English, is in its relatively early and promising stages of development, increasing in sophistication and depth at a rapid pace, evidenced, for instance, in the peer reviewed work found in periodicals such as *JDTREA* and the *Journal of CESNUR*, with much more presumably to come. One way for researchers to continue cultivating our minds, if I may use that phrase, is to maintain our diligent academic study of Daesoon Jinrihoe. Some of us, myself included, come to the movement as non-members and outsiders, eager to learn more and even, someday, to perhaps conduct fieldwork at sites in Korea. Others may come to this academic study as insiders, bringing with them the richness of a perspective informed by daily practices, upbringing, and other benefits of membership in the group. This diversity of positions, backgrounds, and perspectives will serve Daesoon studies well. As time goes on, scholars from around the world will have the opportunity to contribute to the scholarly record, introduce our students and other scholars to the richness of this Korean-born tradition in comparative ways, promote religious literacy, and even combat misinformation in the spirit of *sangsaeng* in our globalized, interconnected world.

## Conflict of Interest

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

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## Note

- <sup>1</sup> I recommend reading through *The Canonical Scripture* with the assistance of Don Baker's essay "Reading *The Canonical Scripture*" (DIRC 2020a, 318-23) as well as regular use of *The Literary Companion Dictionary*, conveniently found in the back of the same volume.

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# Molding the East Asian Dragons: The Creation and Transformation of Various Ecological and Political Discourses

**NGUYEN Ngoc Tho and  
PHAN Thi Thu Hien**



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**Original Articles**

Correspondence to

**NGUYEN Ngoc Tho**

Vietnam National University, Vietnam

**ngoctho@hcmussh.edu.vn**

ORCID

**NGUYEN Ngoc Tho**

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9386-0509>

**PHAN Thi Thu Hien**

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9562-112X>

Nguyen Ngoc Tho is an Associate Professor of Cultural Studies and is the Dean of Faculty of Cultural Studies at USSH, Vietnam National University – Ho Chi Minh City. He was a visiting scholar at Sun Yat-sen University, the Harvard Yenching Institute, Harvard University's Asia Centre, Boston University, and Brandeis University. He is the author of six books and over 40 journal articles.

Phan Thi Thu Hien is a Professor of Literature and is a senior faculty member of Cultural Studies at USSH, Vietnam National University – Ho Chi Minh City. She was a visiting scholar at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, Republic of Korea, and University of Hong Kong and has authored 25 books and over 50 journal articles.



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## Abstract

The dragon is a special imaginary figure created by the people of East Asia. Its archetypes appeared primarily as totemic symbols of different tribes and groups in the region. The formation of early dynasties probably generated the molding of the dragon symbol. Dragon symbols carried deep imprints of nature. They concealed alternative messages of how ancient people at different locations dealt with or interacted with nature. Under pressure to standardize in the medieval and late imperial periods, the popular dragon had to transform physically and ideologically. It became imposed, unified, and framed, conveying ideas of caste classification and power, and losing its ecological implications. The dragon transitioned from a semi-ecological domain into a total social caste system.

However, many people considered the “standardized” dragon as the symbol of the oppressor. Because of continuous orthopraxy and calls for imperial reverence, especially under orthopractic agenda and the surveillance of local elites, the popularized dragon was imbued within local artworks or hidden under the sanctity of Buddhas or popular gods in order to survive. Through disguise, the popular dragon partially maintained its ecological narratives. When the imperial dynasties ended in East Asia (1910 in Korea, 1911 in China, 1945 in Vietnam), the dragon was dramatically decentralized. However, trends of re-standardization and re-centralization have emerged recently in China, as the country rises in the global arena. In this newly-emerging “re-orthopraxy”, the dragon has been superimposed with a more externally political discourse (“soft power” in international relations) rather than the old-style standardization for internal centralization in the late imperial period. In the contemporary world, science and technology have advanced humanity’s ability to improve the world; however, it seems that people have abused science and technology to control nature, consequently damaging the environment (pollution, global warming, etc.). The dragon symbol needs to be re-defined, “re-molded”, re-evaluated and reinterpreted accordingly, especially under the newly-emerging lens—the New Confucian “anthropocosmic” view.

**Keywords:** : Dragon; East Asia; standardization; ecology; New Confucianism

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

2012 was the Year of the Dragon according to the East Asian zodiac. That year, the Chinese government introduced a stamp featuring a dragon. The dragon was depicted facing the viewers. Its mouth was wide open, its fangs ready to bite, and its claws (five in each foot) preparing to attack. The stamp surprised the public and sparked debate among Chinese commoners and scholars about the design of the dragon. Many scholars and people preferred an image of a friendlier and more humane dragon instead. The image of the dragon on the stamp, on the other hand, displeased many East Asians who were familiar with the hierarchical order and imperial power embodied in the Chinese dragons. It raised new questions among East Asian scholars. Has the de-centralized Chinese dragon of the post-war era been “recentralized” recently? What message does the “recentralized” dragon convey to its East Asian neighbors and the world as China rises in the twenty-first century?

Studies on the Chinese dragon (a prominent representative of East Asian dragons) have been conducted mainly by Chinese scholars. Their research focused on Chinese dragons as a symbol of national identity and Chineseness; therefore, the scholars formed the center-periphery split structure between standard and non-standard dragon features. Such ideas can be found in the works of Sun Zuoyun (1960), Li Ting (1963), Liu Dunyuan (1978) Yuan Dexing (1978), Wang Changzheng (1985), Yu Ziliu (1985), Wei Yanan (1986), Xu Huadang (1988), Qiu Pu (1988), Wang Weiti (1990, 2000), Zhong Tao (1991), Chen Shuxiang (1993), Zhang Daoyi, Pang Jin (1993, 2000), Hao Chun, Gao Zhanxiang (1999), Wang Dayou (2000), Wang Dong (2000), Ji Chengming (2001), Ye Yingsui (2001), Wei Zhiqiang (2003), Wang Shuqiang, Feng Dajian (2012), and others (Wang 2000). On the other hand, some scholars focused on the diversity of East Asian dragons as well as their diverse origins. For example, Wen Yiduo (1942, 1993), and other scholars particularly stressed the Hundred-Viet/Baiyueh origin of Chinese dragons. Previously, two Russian writers, D.V. Deopik (1993) and N. I. Niculin (2006) also confirmed the Hundred-Viet/Baiyueh’s contribution to the shaping of the Chinese dragon (Trần 2004).

In the West, a few scholars have published works that have taken anthropological or artistic perspective on the Chinese dragons. The few scholars who have published works about Chinese dragons include Schuyler V. R. Cammann’s *China’s Dragon Robes* (1952), L. Newton Hayes’s *The Chinese Dragon* (1973), Peggy Goldstein’s *Long is a Dragon* (1991), Tao T. Liu’s *Dragons, Gods, and Spirits from China* (1994); Valery M. Garrett’s *Chinese Dragon Robes* (1998), Andrew Chittick’s “Dragon Boats and Serpent Prows: Naval Warfare and the Political Culture of China’s Southern Borderlands” (2015), and Martin Arnold’s *The Dragon: Fear and Power* (2018). However, the discourse about Chinese and East Asian dragons is still a new issue in Western academic circles. Western

peoples have their own dragon symbols which normally convey negative implications, but this article will limit itself to analysis on East Asian dragons.

The primordial East Asian dragon carries an ecological narrative. East Asian dragons are said to originate from ancestors questioning and doubting these creatures' "mysterious" nature. A Chinese writer, Ning Yegao, called this "the vague thinking" [模糊思维]. It appears when people witness their natural environment changing unexpectedly (Ning 1999, 23). Accordingly, people composed the symbol of the dragon as an imaginary "god" who could represent themselves in dealings with the upheavals of the natural world. As a result, the traditional dragon is supposed to excel at swimming, diving, running, flying, transforming, sanctifying, and so on. By installing and absorbing both secular components and sacred powers, the dragon has become the "king" of all creatures.

As society evolves and forms social caste systems, people cultivated and modified the dragon to include more social features in which many were mutually opposed and destructive, making the dragon symbol an "arena" of both natural and social discourse.

Pre-imperial Chinese dynasties (Xia, Shang, and Zhou) successfully applied the agenda of "conquering, admitting and subjugating new cultures." The rulers generously accepted partially the symbolic figures of lands and tribes they reached. For example, archaeologists found pighead figures in Hongshan culture in northeastern China and crocodile-like and snake-like figures in areas that reach from the Lower Yangtze River to North Vietnam. The symbolic figures have been recognized as proto- dragons (Nguyen 2016). Remnants of these archetypes still remain in some specific categories of dragons nowadays, such as the snake-like dragon, fish-like dragon, crocodile-like dragon, bull or buffalo-like dragon, tiger-like dragon, horse-like dragon, dog-like dragon, bird-like dragon, bear-like dragon, and tree-like dragons, in the genealogy of East Asian dragons.

Because of the centralization of Huaxia Chinese civilization, all components of symbolic figures were put into a larger and systematic structure to standardize the mold of dragons. All of those animal-like dragons were alternatively scanned and selected for their progressive parts which largely represented the bureaucratic interests. The Chinese dragon continued to evolve inside the framed model during imperial periods, finally molding the "standard" dragon comprising three main parts and nine similarities [三停九似]. In the Song Dynasty, Luo Yuan said that the Chinese dragon was made up by nine components: deer horns, a camel head, rabbit eyes, a snake body, a pearl-like belly, fish scales, tiger legs, eagle claws, and cow ears. Accordingly, the standard dragon has a total of 117 scales. Of the 117 scales, 81 are yang scales (9 x 9, symbolizing the good features) and 36 yin scales (9 x 4, the negative features). Both yin and yang components make the dragon in line with the mysterious circulation of heaven and earth, thus innately conveying sacred power. The Chinese dragon was much modified and standardized in the Song and Ming dynasties and was continuously nurtured and

castigated by pre-modern local elites because of Confucian orthodoxy.

One of the other sources that contributed to how East Asian dragons were molded is Indian tradition. Many Indian primary figures were adopted and localized in China. Bi'an (狴犴, bệ ngạn in Vietnamese), one of nine children of the dragon, is the Chinese version of the Indian Rahu symbol. Similarly, many Indian Buddhist elements were absorbed and localized within the molding of Chinese dragons.

## **Standardizing the Dragon: The Imperial Orthopraxy**

If the early period of the evolution of Chinese dragons was identified with the bottom-up methodology of building, the late imperial periods witnessed the strong top-down standardization and imperial superimposition on the symbol as a means of organizing and controlling society. The concept of “standardizing”, as defined by James Watson (1985, 323), is the way “[t]he state, aided by a literate elite, sought to bring locals under its influence by co-opting certain popular local deities and guaranteeing that they carried ‘all the right messages[:]... civilization, order, and loyalty to the state’.” The late imperial Chinese states strongly supported standardized cults, rituals, and symbols, believing that ritual orthopraxy could serve as a powerful force for cultural homogenization (von Glahn 2004, 251–253). Stephan Feuchtwang (1992, 57–8) called this action an “imperial metaphor,” and E. Thompson dubbed it the “symbolic control” (Tu, Hejtmanek and Wachman 1992, 18). In Chinese culture, the standardized dragon functions similarly to a god. Paul Katz emphasized that “cultural integration in China was attained via the standardization of culture, here defined as the promotion of approved deities [...] by state authorities and local elites” (Katz 2007, 71–90).

Claiming to be “orthodox” is a vital part of Chinese popular culture. Rawski (1985) stressed that Chinese culture had become highly integrated partly because of the efficacy of its educational values. Symbolic practices are a key means of cultural integration that are strongly fostered for political purposes by the state and its agents. State-sanctioned symbols “produced a high degree of cultural unity, transcending social differences in mythic interpretation and variant local ritual practice” (Sutton 2007, 5). As a matter of fact, the overwhelming political and social narratives of the dragon symbol restrained and hindered the deployment of its ecological implications throughout almost the entirety of the imperial periods.

However, standardization has been demonstrated as an interactive procedure in which different groups interpret symbols according to their general understanding and their own interests. David Faure (1999, 278) argued that standardization was “a channel whereby knowledge of state practices and institutions entered villages.” Elites and religious specialists hold rituals to assert the legitimacy of their own interests, even when confronted with state hegemony. Philip Kuhn (1980) affirmed that local elites

got enough capacity to create and maintain their influence in the local communities. Joseph Esherick and Mary Rankin (1990), in their support of Max Weber's theory, stated that local elites used their own wisdom to maintain their dynamics within the local background necessary to link and mediate the gap between the imperial palace and the commoners. Both Joanna Meskill (1979) and Keith Schoppa (1982) praised the active role of local elites in maximizing the interest of local commoners. However, there were a number of cultural elites who were instrumental in promoting orthopraxy as a mechanism of control (Tu, Hejtmanek and Wachman 1992, 131). As a matter of fact, "the key to being Chinese is acceptance of external ritual form, not adherence to an internal, conceptual orthodoxy" (Tu, Hejtmanek and Wachman 1992, 9–10).

Therefore, to a certain extent, the symbol of the dragon represents "a symbol of submission to authority" (Tu, Hejtmanek and Wachman 1992, 43). The emperors diminished the original dragon and reconstructed ones that met their own interests of power (see also Hao 1999, 10–11). This statement matches the idea of Victor Turner who asserted that the symbols were probably used as means and tools to control society (Turner 1967). Such orthopraxy was most forceful during the Ming dynasty as one still can see its legacy in contemporary society. The emperor himself completely possessed the "mature" and "pure" dragon which grew fully five claws on each foot while under the mandarin bureaucratic system, Buddhas and gods had to share the immature and impure dragons with three or four claws. As a result, commoners confronted the emperor wherever they saw the symbols of the dragon. They were even prohibited to point the eyes or draw the legs if they planned to depict "a dragon", which is reflected in the idiom, "Yegong hao long" (葉公好龍, Mr. Ye loves the dragon). The idiom tells the story of Mr. Ye, a local officer who loves dragons. He ordered soldiers to decorate his house with different dragon motifs. This aspiration of Mr. Ye moved the Jade Emperor of Heaven. He appointed the Dragon King to appear in Mr. Ye's dream to show his gratitude. Mr. Ye, despite his strong admiration of the dragon symbol, turned out to be so frightened that he ordered his soldiers to annihilate all decorative motifs of the dragon symbol. He finally realized that he could admire, love and desire the dragon, but could never touch it.

The royal courts of China, Vietnam and Korea regularly held dragon-boat competitions as means to demonstrate their military power. According to Andrew Chittick, Song China and Lý Vietnam during the tenth to twelfth centuries annually organized the event as a significant part of military and political culture. The Chinese persistently decorated the boats with dragon designs while in Vietnam, by comparison, "the more diverse earlier decorative practices were retained and adapted to local preferences" (Chittick 2015, 148–149, 156).

In Korea, it was the identical "familism" which alienated and further promoted Confucian virtues and orthopraxy in Korean culture (Lee 2003, 133–141; Kim 1991,



134), thus the traditional Korean dragon largely reflects Confucian hierarchy and social order. It was believed that the well-known myth *Dragon of the East Sea to Protect Korea* recalled the wish of becoming the East Sea guardian dragon of the great king Munmu in early Korean history. Furthermore, the dragon was closely attached to the birth of national founders; therefore, it has become a feudal symbol (Tcho 2007, 99).

Japanese culture is a mixture of both indigenous tradition and Chinese Confucian values. Confucian ethics can be found in Japan's earliest history, such as the *Kojiki* (712 CE) and the *Nihon Shoki* (720 CE). Imperial Confucianism was "less emphasized in Japan during the Tokugawa period" (see Tu, Hejtmanek and Wachman 1992, 3, 13, 31, 40). As the O Yo-mei school (Wang Yang-ming) strongly developed during late imperial periods, Japanese Confucianism became entirely secularized. The Japanese dragon was thus greatly de-centralized and de-Confucianized. It enjoyed a freer style in both physical appearance and hidden significance.

Joseph Buttinger (1958; 1972) called Vietnam "a smaller dragon", implying that Vietnamese culture was deeply influenced by Chinese Confucian ideology. Standardization (and/or orthopraxy) was also promoted by local bureaucratic systems during feudal dynasties; however, such aspect was not as strong as in China or Korea. Keith Taylor's research on Cao Biền (高駢, Gao Pian), a Chinese governor during the period of Tang rule (ninth century ACE.), found that he strongly promoted the Confucian education in Vietnam. It laid a radical Confucian foundation in the country that later became central for the building of independent dynasties later. However, during the tenth to the fourteenth centuries, the Đinh, Tiền Lê, Lý and Trần dynasties unified the country and ruled under Buddhist rather than Confucian ideology (Taylor 1976, 149–181). The Ming invasion and rule between 1407–1428 further grounded Chinese-styled Confucian education in Vietnam and helped develop Vietnamese Confucianism (see McHale 2002, 398; Whitmore 2010, 107). However, the state of Confucianism had weakened in Vietnam, since the Vietnamese "adopted shallow versions of Confucianism rather than internalizing it" (McHale 2002, 409–10, 416). John Whitmore asserted that while the Vietnamese "dealt with in Confucian terms, does not hide the non-Confucian nature of the society it describes" (Whitmore 1976, 200). In Vietnam, Confucianism is not seen as a Chinese tradition but rather as a native expression of Vietnamese values (Richey 2013, 60). As a matter of fact, standardization (and/or orthopraxy) was not strong in Vietnamese culture. As a result, Vietnamese culture is quite diverse, including how dragons are portrayed.



Figure 1. The decorative display in Southern Fruits Festival in Suối Tiên Theme Park (Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam) in 2012 (vnexpress.net)

## Various Reactive Narratives of Related Social Groups

Commoners did not completely submit to the symbolic hierarchy embodied in the dragons as emperors and bureaucrats had expected. Arthur Wolf (1974) stated that there was “a vast gulf between the religion of the elite and that of the peasantry” (cited in Weller 1987, 3). Local commoners gained support from local elites in many cases and responded wisely to the orthopractic process to take back their interests. As late imperial dynasties strengthened their standardization missions, the struggles became more and more serious. Commoners managed to design and utilize the symbol of the dragon as a way to show their militancy and solidarity. The upper class had to accept it in order to reach a balance in dealing with both the royal order and commoners. Gilbert Rozman pointed out in his research that Chinese Confucianism has actually included at least five components: imperial Confucianism, reform Confucianism, Confucianism of social elites who do not hold high government positions, merchant Confucianism, and mass Confucianism (Rozman, ed. 1991, 161; also cited in Tu, Hejtmanek and Wachman 1992, 40, and Tucker 2004, 17–18). The compromised solutions (if any) were usually settled within the sphere of mass Confucianism. Chinese traditional arts and culture were thus being refreshed and renewed, making Chinese tradition one of the most creative civilizations of the world.

Since dragons were engrossed by the emperors, and a hierarchical system was applied to the symbol, Chinese commoners took their efforts to compose various creative forms of dragons, such as kui long (夔龍, quỳ long), chi long (螭龍, li long), zhu long

(竹龍, bamboo dragon, trúc long), and mei long (梅龍, apricot dragon/mai long). Physically, these popular “immature” dragons “lack” some radical parts (such as legs, claws, and muscles); therefore, they were allowed to be used widely. In comparison with the “mature” imperial and bureaucratic ones, the popular dragons embody largely decorative values rather than socio-political narratives. In certain cases, these decorative dragons were manipulated by the imperial palace and bureaucratic systems for their own uses.

The people of Yuecheng District, Zhaoqing city of Canton province (China) reserve their highest reverence to the local goddess, the Mother Dragon (龍母娘娘). The goddess took shape from a historical event that happened during the early Qin dynasty (early second century BCE). When the Qin Emperor wanted to pacify the lands south of the Five Mountains (五嶺山, present-day Guangxi, Guangdong and North Vietnam), he confronted the local Hundred-Viet people (百越民族) who resisted him. However, the Qin army defeated the local Hundred-Viet people and started ruling their territory. Yi Husong (易乎宋), the leader of local Hundred-Viet armies, was killed. Since then, the local people deified her as a goddess who controlled the Xi-jiang River (Western River). Her master temple was built in town known today as Yue-cheng (悅城). Modern visitors arriving at the temple are told the story of Mother Dragon and her five little dragons resisting the attacks from Qin imperial troops. Such spirit not only praises local identity but also attests to the anti-centralization and anti-orthopraxy pressures by the local traditions (see Ye and Jiang 2003).

In *the Journey to the West* (西遊記) by Wu Cheng'en (吳承恩, Ming Dynasty), one of the Dragon King's sons were defeated by the Monkey King. He transformed into a horse to escort Master Xuanzang to the land of the Buddha in “the West”. Similarly, one can easily find various images of dragons in local Buddhist and Taoist temples in China, Korea, Japan, and Vietnam nowadays. Attaching symbolism to religious traditions was a creative way for commoners to maintain the symbol of the dragon.

Recently, Dr. Du and Dr. Liu from Jiangxi presented at Harvard (in February 28, 2019) on a case study at D Village, south of Nanchang city. Villagers took advantage of local history and cultural resources to renovate and perform the collective bench dragon dance with a hundred performers and a thousand participants. Accordingly, the villagers wrapped up their narrative of anti-imposition on their land ownership by the local authority and state-sponsored developers. The symbol of the dragon and local deity were used as a form of disguised “tool” for their upward resistance and village solidarity. Unfortunately, corruption was found among the village leaders those who leveraged the organization of the dance in order to exchange gifts. This led to the suspension of the event in 2017.

In Korea, the dragon joined the Buddhist world since the Three Kingdoms Period (57 BCE –668 CE) and was officially worshipped as a god during the Goryeo Dynasty (918–1392) (Tcho 2007, 93–99). The Korean commoners were more motivated by local

familism and imported Confucian hierarchy. Alexander Woodside said the Koreans tried to differentiate themselves from China “by stressing much more clearly the distinction between sons of primary and secondary wives in descent groups” (Woodside 1998, 197). They actually tightened the Confucian application in their practical society which ensured a strong and stable cornerstone for Confucian hierarchy. Their respect for the symbol of the dragon strongly represented their desires and interests. Once they confronted the crisis of moral misuse by members of the upper classes (i.e., the kings, Yangban families, and local authorities), the dragon became the symbol of resistance. Both the Vietnamese and Koreans expressed a determination to oppose any textual imperialism in Chinese courts histories that demeaned the importance of the Vietnamese and Korean political centers. As such, recording history became a major form of oppositional “boundary maintenance” by Vietnamese and Korean state centers and their elites against Chinese hegemony (Woodside 1998, 199). However, there are no stories about the symbol of the dragon representing a form of bottom-up resistance or mobilization in Korean culture, except when people utilized the image of the Guardian Dragon being arrested by the Chinese Marshall Su Dingfang (蘇定方) in Baekje kingdom during an attack from the Chinese Tang Dynasty (Yoon 1999, 133).

The dragon is depicted negatively in a Japanese Buddhist story. As a part of the Japanese dragon culture, the dragon contains the significances of victory and righteousness. A Japanese esoteric Buddhist myth tells a story of the Immovable Buddha, Acala (不動明王) swallowing the rivalry sword. Legend has it that Acala fought 95 heterodox species that had incarnated into the “wisdom-fire sword” (智火之劍). After the heterodox species turned into the wisdom-fire sword, he turned into Dragon King Furikara (俱利伽羅龍), used his four claws to seize tightly the sword of heterodox species and swallowed it, therefore defeating them (Nguyen 2016).

Japanese dragons are identified as less orthopractic symbols in East Asia. In Japanese, the dragon is called Ryu which was borrowed from the Chinese in the late Nara period. Because of its geographical location and natural environment, Japan was minimally involved in the standardization process. Instead, the Japanese tended to absorb natural catastrophes (such as volcanoes, earthquakes, and tsunamis) into the symbol, making the dragon a reflective figure of both good and bad natural phenomena. As the de-sinicization spirit grew stronger in late feudal periods, more and more Japanese people considered the dragon as an evil symbol (Nguyen 2016). In Japanese mythology, the hero, Susanoo, slaughtered the fierce Yamato-no-Orochi dragon to stop its attacks on the islands.

During the Heian period, the Kyohime Temple recorded in Great Japan's Fawa Experience (大日本國法華經驗記) has also shown these features of Japanese dragons. The Edo paintings at Dojo Temple (道成寺) tell the story of a female dragon, named Princess Kiyo (清姫), being angered because Anchin (安珍), a monk she pursued,

disappeared. A similar version is found in a Heian period story. It said that once the female dragon, Princess Kiyo, fell in love with Anchin, but he rejected her. Kiyohime turned into a dragon to frighten Anchin, forcing him to hide inside the iron bell in the Dojo Temple. He was finally burned by her anger (see Great Japan's Fawa Experience 『大日本國 法華驗記』).

As stated above, pre-colonial Vietnam was not a strong Confucian state, and the Confucian orthopraxy was not effective. Confucianism had to compete with native non-Confucian traditions (as described by Whitmore 1976, 200). Furthermore, Vietnam is bordered by Laos and Cambodia, two Indianized Southeast Asian states, and had indirect contacts with Indian culture via Indian monks and masters. Vietnam's contact with religious figures and its neighbors diversified its traditional culture. In the eleventh to fourteenth centuries, Vietnamese royal and bureaucratic dragons looked more like Indian naga snakes than Confucian dragons (See Viện Nghệ thuật 1973; Trần 2012; Lee 2013, 345). Confucianism rapidly developed in the fifteenth century (under the Le Dynasty); however, it declined in the mid-sixteenth century because Vietnam split into two (Tonkin and Cochinchina), a division which lasted until the late eighteenth century. The Nguyen Dynasty (1802–1945) tried to recover Chinese-style Confucianism; however, Western intervention in Vietnamese politics prevented the movement. Since 1858, French colonialism in Vietnam nearly put an end to the long-standing orthopraxization of dragons. Recently, Tran Trong Duong, a cultural researcher in Hanoi, discovered that the popularly-known dragon structure was an Indian creature (Makara) that dated back to the seventeenth century in But Thap Temple (Trần 2012). Many presumably-certified Confucian objects have also been re-classified as local or Indianized remnants.



Figure 2. Nine-headed dragon protecting the Buddha, which resonates with local Khmer Theravada Buddhism. (Nguyen 2016)





Figure 3. The Chinese army previously severed the dragon's head  
(vietnamnet.vn)

### Re-defining and Re-interpreting the Dragon in the New Era of the “Ecological Turn”

The creation of symbols is a systematically structural process in which human beings construct symbols to carry certain implications subjected to the change of time and space. In their daily lives, people tend to frame events and things into certain symbols to make their own narratives and interpretations. Ferdinand de Saussure (2011 [1959]) clarified that a symbol includes the structure of two radical components, the signifier and the signified. Claude Levi-Strauss suggested the concept of “binary opposites” to interpret symbols (Levi-Strauss 1964). As a matter of fact, symbols are closely associated with human beings’ political lives, family rituals, rites of passage, and so on (Weber 1916; Parsons 1951; Geertz 1993; Howe 2009). Victor Turner viewed it from a different perspective. He rejected the idea that symbols worked as the patterns carrying social features and social consciousness. He asserted that symbols were used as means and tools to control society (Turner 1967). Schneider especially stressed on the “dynamic” of culture and hence indirectly affirmed the changeability of the symbols (Schneider 1980). Truthfully, regardless of their diverse typology and interpretative significances, symbols always originate from nature and are associated with specific forms of social discourse. They can be interpreted only in their own specific contexts.

A sustainable symbol must be embedded in a well-defined environment and carry shared values in its meanings. To re-interpret the symbol of the dragon, we probably need a diverse toolkit, such as core concepts, reasonable approaches, good environmental backgrounds, and basic interpretation mechanisms to achieve progress. Fortunately, the new Confucian vision in the early twenty-first century and postmodernist viewpoint can provide a radical means and methodology for this mission.

As a symbol, the dragon has been continuously modified and “superscribed”<sup>2</sup> with ideas or implications that reflect the transformations of the temporary society even though state-sponsored standardization has never ended. Consequently, the interpretation of the dragon symbol ought to be contextual. According to Antonio Gramsci, it is definitely not the case that culture “persists through time, handed down from one generation to another” (cited in Phạm 2009, 176). Robert Weller, a well-known anthropologist, emphasized the importance of context-based interpretation and re-interpretation on socially oriented issues in China and East Asia (Weller 1987, 7). Similarly, Thomas Gold in his consideration about identity asserted that “cultural identity [...] was not uniform over time or place” (Tu, Hejtmanek and Wachman 1992, 41). Previously in a publication on the context-based interpretation of religious practices, Clifford Geertz stated that religion as a symbolic system could not exist apart from a cultural context. According to him, symbols “shape and are shaped by worldviews and ethos”, and people's worldview and ethos, their cosmology and their spiritual practices are as mutually confirming entities expressed in symbols and ritual (also cited in Tucker 2004, 22, 23).

Therefore, identity is an ongoing tradition which opens various platforms for researchers and readers of different backgrounds and different generations. Symbolic meanings derive from social backgrounds that are constantly produced and reproduced, negotiated, and constructed (see further Stoller 1989; Eipper 1998). Tu Weiming's [杜维明] analysis on the new vision of Confucianism in the early twenty-first century also posited that “Confucians insist that we begin our journey of self-realization with the acknowledgment that we are concrete living human beings embedded in the world here and now” (Tu 2004, 489). Phạm Quỳnh Phương in her research on the historical symbol Trần Hưng Đạo in Vietnamese tradition once dubbed that “although culture might be a collective representation, it is neither a homogenous thing nor a mere social unifier or value enhancer in the Durkheimian sense” (Phạm 2009, 15–16). Truthfully, as more narratives have been continuously attached to the dragon, we can suggest re-defining and re-interpreting the symbol in our era.

One striking idea that may stimulate new ways of interpreting dragons is Tu Weiming's concepts of “anthropocosmic” and “the ecological turn” of the new wave of Confucianism: the transformed interpretation of the ancient Chinese philosophy, “Tianrenheyi, or the unity of Heaven and Humanity as a whole” (天人合一). Accordingly, Confucian humanism is definitely not secular nor transcendent. Instead, it carries an “anthropocosmic vision” and “emphatically rejects anthropocentrism” (Tu, Hejtmanek and Wachman 1992, 18; Tu 1998, 17–19; Taylor 1998, 44–45; Tu 2004, 480, 489). Fan Ruiping called this vision “a weak anthropocentric account of man and nature and that such an account is cosmic-principle-oriented” (Fan 2005, 107). From an anthropocosmic point of view, the relationship of heaven, earth and humans is dynamic

and mutually reinforcing (McBeath and McBeath 2014, 24; Fan 2005, 105–122) or interactive. The concept of the vitalism of the earth and the co-creativity of humans was emphasized in which the creativity of Heaven in the Confucian cosmological worldview is paralleled by the vitalism of the natural world (see Tucker 2004 25). From that standpoint, Tu further suggested that human beings should reserve their sensitivity, sympathy, and empathy toward nature as well as human society. “Human beings, as co-creators of the cosmic order, are responsible not only for themselves but also for Heaven, Earth, and the myriad things” (Tu 2004, 494).

Rodney Taylor called for preserving harmonious relationships with the natural world, with a focus on nonhuman animals (Taylor 1986, 237–63). Tucker went further that “humans are embedded in and dependent on the larger dynamics of nature” (Tucker 2004, 20, and asserted that *Tianrenbeyi* in a global ethic that will counteract the ecological crisis (Tucker 1998, 187–210; cited in McBeath and McBeath 2014, 24). Such an “anthropocosmic” point, if viewed, likely reminds us of the past symbols of the dragon itself before the process of standardization in which ecological imprints played a basic role in the ways dragons were shaped and interpreted. The long-standing process of orthopraxy brought the dragon away from its primary status. One cannot deny the fact that the most standard dragons still carry forms of both ecological and social discourse; however, the latter has been so strongly emphasized that it could restrain any contiguity between the dragon symbol and human desires to obtain a harmonious life with nature. As long as the superimposed implications have not been deconstructed the symbol of the dragon will die out in the daily life of the modern community. Many people hoped and believed that the disappearance of feudal regimes in East Asia would restore the ecological narratives embodied in the dragon symbol; however, recent state-sponsored dragon stamps in China might suggest the opposite direction. Therefore, the restoration of the dragon’s ecological imbue ment will be best performed under the “anthropocosmic” vision of new Confucian philosophy. Such a vision can be manipulated as the main philosophical core for the building, the usage, and the interpretation of the dragon in modern East Asia.

Well-known scholars Liang Shuming (梁漱溟 1979, 200–1), Mou Zongshan (牟宗三), Tang Junyi (唐君毅), and Feng Youlan (馮友蘭) (see Tu 2004, 480–508) as well as current researchers Tu Weiming, Mary Evelyn Tucker, Wang Gungwu, Robert Weller, Adam Seligman, and others (see Kelly 1998, 93–119) are positively working towards restoring the innately harmonious relationship between human and nature. Some of them suggested the idea that Confucian spirituality ought to be appreciated to ensure the fundamental balance of human-nature relationship (see Tu, Hejtmanek and Wachman 1992, Tu 2004, Tucker 2004). The symbol of the dragon should be rebuilt in such a context in which the dragon preserves its authentic response to nature and further develops updated forms of social discourse which are happening in specific



times and places. Social discourse can be changed due to the pluralism in human society; however, the dragon as a natural response is a core value of the symbol must be protected from being distorted. As the dragon's imprints of nature are promoted, its spiritual power is thus respected in both rational or religious ways. In other words, the deep imbue ment of the dragon in the spiritual world could help maintain the basic essence of the dragon symbol and keep it associated with the daily life of commoners.

In order to create a flexible and liberal value system of the dragon symbol, we should apply the post-modernist point of view in re-defining, re-molding and re-interpreting it. George De Vos noted Durkheim's view that modernization indispensably secularized all practices, therefore, people "must look to some source other than the supernatural for the embodiment of the sacred" (Tu, Hejtmanek and Wachman 1992, 12). The "source" that De Vos mentioned cannot be a thoroughly science-based point of view since contemporary human beings are suffering due to the serious damage that nature has underwent. Shih Chih-yu once wrote,

Confucianism actually encourages eremitism if state authority deviates from the spirit of the Dao, the essence of which can be sensed only by the individual. In other words, the freedom from overall obligation to people holding office may have given the Chinese a higher degree of liberty in making judgments independent of their social status (Shih 1995, 126; also cited in Kelly 1998, 96).

We can pursue post-modernist viewpoints in re-defining the dragon if the symbol is definitely decentralized and removed from orthopraxy.

In a statement regarding the freedom and liberalization in re-defining and re-interpreting human practices in the New Confucian period in China and East Asia, Theodore De Bary and Wing-tsit Chan said that it was not necessarily needed in terms of political ideology but in terms of self-cultivation (cited in Tu, Hejtmanek and Wachman 1992, 130). Before that, Mou Zongshan, a New Confucian scholar, considered modern Confucianism as "a reformed moral metaphysics"; Confucian scholars cared more about human values and "are occupied with figuring out how these values can lead to human flourishing". Such an ideology is named "concern-consciousness" (cited in Berthrong 1998, 188). New Confucian "anthropocosmic" vision will strongly motivate the de-politicalization of the symbol of the dragon. As Berthrong wrote, modern scholars are actively screening and evaluating to check what should be preserved or modified, versus what should be abandoned (Berthrong 1998, 191–192). Presently, in making the dragons, local artists in East Asia do not care about old-fashioned orthodox features. Instead, they deliberately focus on the structure, the physical appearance and the aesthetics of the dragons to meet the commercialized demands of the market. In

most cases, the dragons are made with four-clawed legs. “It is because making a three-clawed dragon does not qualify the aesthetic criteria while the five-claw structure is too complicated and ugly”, an ethnic Chinese man said when carving a dragon for the local Beidi Temple [北帝廟] in Vinh Chau town, Soc Trang province of Vietnam (personal interview, 2016). A similar explanation was expressed by another local Chinese in Tanjung Pinang, Indonesia (personal interview, 2017). Truthfully, the modern East Asian dragon-makers are relatively liberal in their mindset; they are not imposed by any hierarchical norms and values.

The dragon is a regional symbol of East Asia and the world; therefore, we must preserve the universal lens to re-define and re-interpret it. The founding of the traditional dragon obviously showed a diverse contribution of the archetypes even though it was then reframed and standardized by imperial Chinese emperors more than any other state in East Asia. Confucianism has been recognized as a special philosophical system carrying universal values, thus Confucian practices carry regional and international commonalities. As Tu, Hejtmanek and Wachman (1992, 95) stated, the standardized kinship groups and ancestor worship patterns or rituals acted as “the glue that helps hold Sinitic societies together”, and creates “the illusion of unity and interpretive agreement”. It is unfair and inhumane to assert common practices on any single state. In the new era, it is the universal values (especially the “anthropocosmis” concept). The symbol of the dragon should be read as a companion to our ordeals with nature. The “anthropocosmic” vision will actively play an important role in abolishing ethnocentrism or any transformed imperial agitation (if any) in the symbol of East Asian dragon. The dragon must be modified to its regional commonalities and universal values rather than having an emphasis on any specific national identity. As long as people know the history of how the symbol of the dragon was formed and developed, they will learn that the Chinese traditionally framed, molded and standardized the symbol of the dragon during their imperial dynasties; therefore, it is unnecessary to make any further assertion about that.

If universal values can be grouped as “the notion” of the symbol of the dragon, and New Confucian “anthropocosmic” vision be identified as a special form of “ritual”, then, in applying the point of view of Seligman and Weller (2012), a postmodern liberal mind in shaping, using and interpreting the dragon will directly create and promote common “shared experience” between different classes of people in one country and between peoples of different countries who own the symbol of dragon. As Mary Evelyn Tucker said, “the rituals reflect the patterned structures of the natural world and bind humans to one another, to the ancestral world, and to the cosmos at large” (Tucker 2004, 25). The vitality and significance of the dragon in this “ecological turn” period are easily handled if peoples are actively engaging in making and sharing the experience.

## Conclusion

The dragon reflects the mutual relationship between human beings and nature as well as a spiritual response to nature's impacts on human lives. The orthopractic history of the East Asian dragon shows that as long as the dragon was forcibly imposed in centralization and standardization processes by imperial forces, it was taken further away from its ontological stance, thus causing the constraint and abolishment of its ecological narratives. The more forms of political discourse that were superimposed on the symbol of the dragon, the more classification and tension were constructed between the states and peoples. The dragon thus became a tool of political propaganda rather than a symbol. The recovery and revitalization of the dragon symbol today must be aligned with the new vision on the relationship of human beings and nature (at least in East Asia), the New Confucian "anthropocosmic" viewpoint, to ensure the consistency of its ontological foundation. Such a vision has been built up by twenty-first-century scholars in accordance with the application of universal cosmology and postmodern liberalism. The dragon-molding methodology should be embodied in a more pro-nature and pro-aesthetics mindset which reasonably allows people to shape, define, use, and interpret the symbol of the dragon in an active way. The notion of the dragon, despite the continuous changes driven by imperial political narratives, is widely shared from a postmodernist viewpoint. We further need to establish an "anthropocosmic" vision as a special form of "ritual perception" in order to create a sharing, sympathetic and mutual respect among the peoples of East Asia. Given the fact that the symbol used to be superscribed with the imperial Chinese state values and interests, the modern people optimistically yearn for the manifestation of the so-called "East-Asianness" feature or even universal essence of the symbol of the dragon.

## Conflict of Interest

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

## Notes

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<sup>2</sup> The term was used by Prasenjit Duara (1988, 778-95).

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# Daoist Thought through Symbols Observed in the Architecture of Tu An Hieu Nghia Pagodas and Temples from the Tri Tôn District, An Giang Province

**NGUYEN Trung Hieu and  
NGUYEN Phuoc Tai**

Nguyen Trung Hieu was born in An Giang Province, Vietnam, in 1986. He began his doctorate in Cultural Studies at Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City, University of Social Sciences and Humanities in 2016 and graduated in 2020. Trung Hieu is a lecturer at Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City, An Giang University. His research focus is Vietnamese indigenous religions, folk beliefs, and Southeast Asian culture.

Nguyen Phuoc Tai was born in Dong Thap Province, Vietnam, on 29 August 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.



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## Original Articles

Correspondence to

**NGUYEN Phuoc Tai**

FPT University, Can Tho Campus, Vietnam

**tainp11@fpt.edu.vnm**

ORCID

**NGUYEN Trung Hieu**

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8212-9577>

**NGUYEN Phuoc Tai**

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



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## Abstract

Daoism was introduced into the South-West of Vietnam via two main entries: the missionaries from North and Central Vietnam who migrated to the South by following the Southward movement and the spread of Daoism by Chinese migrant men who came and settled in the South-West of Vietnam from the late seventeenth century to late nineteenth century. However, the biggest influence of Daoism in the Southwest of Vietnam was mainly the Chinese missionaries of Daoism. As time went by, together with the impacts of social and historical circumstances, Daoism had a strong influence on the lives of the South-West people in terms of different aspects, especially their faith and religions. The impact of Daoism into people's faith and religion was considerable, especially to the indigenous religions, of which the religion, Four Debts of Gratitude, is a representative example.

With the aims of clarifying how Four Debts of Gratitude was influenced by Daoist thought and how the indigenous religions and systemized ideologies in the South-West of Vietnam were related during the period of living condition expansion as well as co-habitation of several ethnic groups in the region, this article focuses on Daoist thought expressed in typical symbols in the sacred architecture of the Four Debts of Gratitude such as Cổ Lầu, wine gourds, and the Eight Trigrams. Once properly examined, it becomes clear that the prominent symbols and other Daoist elements show that Daoism had a profound influence on the Four Debts of Gratitude.

**Keywords:** Daoist thought; symbols; pagoda architecture; the Four Debts of Gratitude



## Introduction

Four Debts of Gratitude (四恩孝義, Tú Ân Hiếu Nghĩa) was founded in 1867 by Ngô Lợi (吳利), nicknamed Ông Đạo núi tượng (a Daoist hermit in Tượng mountain). This was the second indigenous religion which appeared after Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương in An Giang province. According to several previous research projects and statements by the followers of the Four Debts of Gratitude, the religion is actually a branch of Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương (寶山奇香).

The process of the foundation and spread of Four Debts of Gratitude by Ngô Lợi was associated with people's campaigns of wild land reclamation and hamlet establishment in Thất Sơn with its center being the Ba Chúc and Lương Phi communes, located in Tri Tôn district, An Giang province. The construction of pagodas and temples indicated that the religious followers had on one hand settled down and on the other committed to themselves to completing the basis for their religion system and model of religion organization during the early campaigns of spreading their new religion.

The complexes of pagodas and temples for Four Debts of Gratitude were built in different periods, mainly after Ngô Lợi took a group of followers to the Tượng Mountain for settlement from 1876 to 1890, when he finally passed away. These pagodas and temples were built under the guidance of Ngô Lợi. However, during Ngô Lợi's "evacuation trips", these religious constructions were burned down by the French rulers who took up crusade campaigns to kill Ngô Lợi due to their accusation that he was "heretical figure", and the head of an anti-government movement. He was suspected of this because brought large groups of military-age men together. When the political turmoil was over, Ngô Lợi and his followers began the restoration and reconstruction of their pagodas and temples. After his death, these pagodas and temples were further rebuilt and renovated into their modern-day forms.

Because the history of the religion's spread was conducted unfolded under a challenging and complicated situation, this article seeks to explain the meanings of the religion and its religious thought as expressed through the symbols featured in the architecture of the order's pagodas and temples. The first matter to determine is whether or not these architectural characteristics actually came from the ideas of the religion's founder. Second, it should be asked if there were there any alternatives or adjustments to the architecture under the guidance of Mr. Trò or Mr. Gánh. Additionally, were there any different ideas behind those constructions? Preliminary conclusions about the meanings and religious thought contained within the symbols found in the architecture of the order's pagodas and temples were reached via three focuses: firstly, a reference to religious values, secondly, pictures of pagodas and temples collected for an investigation in 1975, and lastly, confirmation of findings and clarification by elder followers and groundkeepers of pagodas and temples.

Religious thought is expressed not only in the scriptures, teachings, and other such mediums but also through the architecture of the sacred spaces. The relationship between religious thought and the architecture produced by those religions can be clearly seen. For example, the architecture of Hindu temples, Buddhism temples, Islamic mosques, Cham temples, Theravada Buddhist temples all depict various ideological aspects of the religions to which they belong. In the same way, since its birth, Daoism has expressed the most prominent concepts from its system of thought through the architecture of their sacred spaces. Over time there has been an evolution to those architectural structures; however, the symbols — the “expression” of their religious thought via temple and shrine architecture — remains well-preserved.

The system of architecture used to produce Daoist pagodas and temples is very rich and diverse in terms of concepts related to construction such as: how the size of the temple corresponds to the subject of worship, attention to directions, the architectural style, and other such considerations. All of these matters require an in-depth and systematic study. However, not all the temples and shrines of Daoism express meaning and thoughts through architecture because there are also temples and shrines that are intentionally plain and undeveloped. Therefore, in this article will focus on explaining the Daoist meanings and thought expressed through some of the most prominent symbols shown in the architecture of some pagodas and temples that can be easily seen. The differences in pagoda and temple architecture among Daoists, Buddhists, and indigenous religions will also be brought up for comparison. The pagodas and temples selected for this study will be those with significant historical value and those that play an important role in the religious life of Daoist followers in Tri Tôn district and many other localities in the South-West of Vietnam.

## **Daoist Thought Shown by the Symbols on Architecture in Pagodas and Temples**

As mentioned, the construction of pagodas and temples was carried out by Ngô Lợi after the time of wild land reclamation to establish a village for the followers' life settlement in the Tượng mountain (Ba Chúc commune, Tri Tôn district). The first place of worship to be built was “tiền đình, hậu tứ” with the An Định communal house (front) and Phi Lai pagoda (back) on 19 November 1877. “In An Định communal house hundreds of Gods and heroic martyrs were worshiped while in Phi Lai pagoda the Buddhas as well as a Trần Diệu<sup>1</sup> were worshiped in the main hall” (Ha 1971, 21). According to Phan Tất Đại, Phi Lai pagoda worships Tay An Buddha at the ancestral altar and a Trần Diệu painting is enshrined at the main altar (Phan 1975, 7). Sơn Nam, a researcher on South-West culture said, “Phi Lai pagoda worships a form of the Jade Emperor, Ngọc Hoàng Huyền Khung Cao Thượng Đế (玉皇玄穹高上帝), who is alluded

to symbolically through a large purple cloth unaccompanied by any other image” (Son 2009, 58). In fact, according to our records from fieldwork, and through our consultation with the elder followers of the religion, Phi Lai pagoda is the place to worship the Jade Emperor, which in Vietnamese folk people call him Trời, as studied by Sơn Nam. The expression for the image of the Jade Emperor is the large symbol of Trần Triều dynasty on the wall of the main hall of the pagoda. Around the altar dedicated to worship of the Jade Emperor are four separate altars for worshipping other gods. This layout expresses Daoist thought quite clearly. Those four altars enshrine “four stones” covered with red cloth placed at the four directions (East, West, South, and North) around the altar for the Jade Emperor. These deities are called the “four great gods” or “the four great continents” by Daoist followers. The “four great gods” and “four great continents” are the four islands of the “Fairy Land (or land of immortals)” positioned around the Heavens. These deities guard the Heavens. This can also be referred to as “four great continents in the sacred realm” (Nguyen 2003, 681). “Eastern Đại Bộ Châu, Western Đại Bộ Châu, South Đại Bộ Châu, and Northern Đại Bộ Châu” (Nguyen 2003, 865)



Figure 1. Eastern Đại Bộ Châu, Western Đại Bộ Châu, South Đại Bộ Châu, and Northern Đại Bộ Châu

In addition, on the two sides and in front of the altar for the Jade Emperor, there are three other altars: Thiên Hoàng (天皇, Emperor of Heaven), Địa Hoàng (地皇, Emperor of Earth) and Nhân Hoàng (人皇, Emperor of Humanity). These altars express the concept of the inseparable cosmological relationship between Heaven, Earth and Humanity and the process of the birth and movement of the universe<sup>2</sup> according to the concept of Daoist Dịch lý (易理, patterns of change).

Given that the Jade Emperor is the main focus of worship, the symbols in the overall architecture of Phi Lai pagoda convey meanings tailored to conveying that the God of Heaven, the Jade Emperor, is the most powerful force behind the creation of

the universe according to Daoist thought. Structurally speaking, the foundation and facial architecture in the style of four statues (also representatives of the five elements when combined with the main altar) is typical of what is found in the architecture of communal house pagodas in the Southwest; however, Phi Lai pagoda bears some profoundly unique symbols such as the block known as the “three-floor tower” stretching straight on the roof of the pagoda in the front room and two symbols of “Hồ Lô” (Wine Gourd) on the left and right sides in the space behind. The Wine Gourd on the left is where the bell is placed, and the one on the right is for the drum. They are called the Bell Tower and Drum Tower respectively. The religious-ideological significance of the architectural symbols of this ancient tower and gourd is associated with the subject of the “supreme spirit” of the Jade Emperor, who is worshiped inside the main hall of the temple.



Figure 2. Phi Lai Pagoda's Bell Tower and Drum Tower were designed to resemble the shape of a wine gourd

According to previous researchers, the architectural symbols at Phi Lai pagoda, including “the image of two giant wine gourds of the Bell Tower, the Drum Tower, and the fire on its top” create close and impressive image like the architectural style of the “garlic shaped” tower of Islamic mosques and like the fire seen on the roofs of Khmer pagodas (Dinh 1999, 154). Similarly, according to Phạm Anh Dũng, the architectural symbols of Cổ Lầu and Wine Gourd represent: the most significant basic architectural feature in the integration of Cham pagoda architecture with Vietnamese pagoda architecture (not communal houses), which is the simplification of the “circular arch” roof (also known as the “onion” roof). This feature creates a special highlight in the overall architecture of the façade (Pham 2013, 141). However, these explanations have not really elucidated the religious significance from the symbols and have even partly incorrectly stated the connection between the temple's architectural symbols and the religion's ideological thought. Based on the ideological aspect of religion, the

characteristics from other symbols, the concept of spiritual objects of worship, and other such factors, we realize that these symbols are the result of a deep influence from the Daoist ideology of the Chinese people. This also makes evident the process of the spread of Daoism and its multifaceted influence in the South.

Regarding the symbol of *Cổ Lầu* (ancestral house or communal house), its overall structure is a three-level architectural block on the roof of a pagoda. The highest symbol is a pavilion with the shape of four statues. The length of each side of *Cổ Lầu* is not uniform at each level. At the lower level, the length is more than 2 meters, with the total area of nearly 10 m<sup>2</sup>. The top-level edge is about 0.5 meter in length. The height from the top to the foot of the Co floor tower is more than 4 meters. Around the upper floor, there is a tetrahedral corridor. The middle and lower floors are the second and third levels of roofs respectively. The most important structure of *Cổ Lầu* is the pavilion on the top.

According to some elderly Daoist followers, the two key symbols at Phi Lai pagoda are the *Cổ Lầu* and Wine Gourd. Between the two, naturally the *Cổ Lầu* is of the greatest importance. The meaning of this ancient three-level pavilion is also explained as the symbol of the Three Emperors or the Three Generative Forces. The highest floor is for *Thiên Hoàng* (Emperor of Heaven), the middle floor is for *Địa Hoàng* (Emperor of Earth), the bottom floor is for *Nhơn Hoàng* (Emperor of Humanity), or *Thiên* (天 Heaven), *Địa* (地 Earth), and *Nhơn* (人 Humanity). In addition, it is said that the *Cổ Lầu* of the three level pavilion represents Buddhas, Sages, and Immortals, and the top being the throne for *Ngọc Đế* (the Jade Emperor) (Nguyen 2019). Because the “Supreme God” worshiped in the temple is *Ngọc Hoàng* (the Jade Emperor), the God who created the universe and human beings according to the Daoist Principles attested to in *The Book of Changes*, the highest peak of *Cổ Lầu* is the place upon which the Jade Emperor reigns. The trinity of Three Generative Forces, Heaven, Earth, and Humanity, is an eternal relationship that forms real life. The three are seen as binding each other in the universe like the inseparable structure of *Cổ Lầu* from high to low and vice versa.

The symbol of *Cổ Lầu*, the highest temple worshipping the Jade Emperor according to the Daoist conception, not only appears at Phi Lai pagoda but it can also be observed at some other pagodas of Four Debts of Gratitude or in the architecture of more recently established sects. No matter what form it takes, these examples still retain the symbolic design and religious significance of a *Cổ Lầu*, and their presence results overall in architectural features that separate these holy sites from Buddhist temples. Mr. Trần Lê Văn Mưu (1856–1935), one of Ngô Lợi’s followers went to Bà Rịa Vũng Tàu to preach in Long Sơn Big House, the temple where he presided over the construction being built as a space for religious practice and worship ceremonies. The overall architecture of the Big House has many different floors. Each floor symbolizes the “reigning place” of the worshiped spirit. Under this scheme, the place for worshipping the Jade Emperor is

called the “Forbidden Pavilion.” The Forbidden Pavilion was given its name to indicate that it is a pure place, where the Jade Emperor often comes down to reign when he descends to the earth. Therefore, it is only open on religious holidays and only those with duties such as religious dignitaries are allowed to enter there during ceremonies. Women are forbidden to go upstairs due to these purity rules (Phan 1975, 112). According to the elderly Daoist followers who had talks with us during our field trips, “Cổ Lầu represents the Jade Emperor, and it is also seen as the place where the Jade Emperor rests. Consequently, ordinary people are forbidden from entering that holy space” (Nguyen 2019).

Based on the central subject of worship, the Jade Emperor at Phi Lai pagoda, it can be said that Cổ Lầu is a form of Forbidden Pavilion, where the Jade Emperor or Heaven “reigns” and resides when he descends to the earth. In the first decade of the twentieth century, these Cổ Lầu, Forbidden Pavilions, and High Towers were also spaces of right practice and cultivation or of religious practice and other related practices performed by Daoist followers or the variant tradition, Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương. In Daoism, the divinity known as the Jade Emperor is the supreme god and the master of Daoism. In accordance, the worship and practice of Daoism often take place at “high floors” like those of Cổ Lầu, Emperor Pavilions, and Forbidden Floors. These are sacred symbols that order to find “thông công” (通功, an act of communion) between human beings and the Supreme Being.

Regarding to the symbol of the wine gourds: two large wine gourds located on the left and right behind Phi Lai pagoda are actually the Bell Tower (Bell Pavilion) and Drum Tower (Cổ Lầu), which were designed in the shape of a wine gourd. Each bell tower and drum tower are equally shaped like a gourd with the structure of a “wine gourd shaped tower.” Three features can be highlighted here: first, on the top of the gourd tower, the mouth of the wine gourd is designed as another smaller wine gourd to form a “dual gourd” with the widest diameter of the wine gourd being about 3 meters and the height from top to bottom being about 1.5 meters. Second, the middle floor is octagonal, and each side corresponds to one of the Eight Trigrams of Dịch Lý, the patterns of change (Heaven, Lake, Fire, Thunder, Wind, Water, Mountain, and Earth). Third, the bottom floor is a tetrahedral structure with the interior area being about 8 meters square where bells, drums, and altars for the “common gods” and “ancient gods” are placed. Outside the tetrahedron floor, there is a surrounding corridor.

Through in-depth interviews, the image of these two ancient wine gourds dated from the period of the re-establishment of the pagoda around 1886–1889 by Master Ngô Lợi; a time after the French colonialists no longer oppressed believers. According to the description recorded by Hà Tân Dân in 1971, the current Drum tower and Bell tower were formerly a tower with a gourd-shaped image above them. Perhaps that is why the author, due to the influence of the “onion” pyramid architecture in the Islamic mosque's architecture, thought that this gourd symbol had an “onion” shape. In fact, in



terms of the architectural history of this temple and other similarly shaped (wine gourd-like) temples; all were deemed to be influenced by the architecture of Islamic mosques. According to the described image in Hà Tân Dân's research, in the past, there were domes around the tower, and on each floor, there was an image of a “dual-gourd.” In later repairs, the followers replaced the tetrahedral dome-shaped tower with the current large wine gourd, while the dual gourds on the top remained unchanged.

The wine gourd is a popular symbol on the temples and shrines of Four Debts of Gratitude in Tri Tôn, An Giang province. The wine gourd symbol appears in many different positions. Sometimes it becomes a typical symbol in the overall architecture of the temple. For example, at Tam Bửu pagoda (opposite of Phi Lai pagoda), where the Buddha and the Great Master are worshiped, on the roof of the pagoda there is a symbol of a “three-leveled gourd” or a “duplicated gourd,” which means that the gourd is divided into “three folds.” To explain, below is a large yellow gourd, in the middle is a small gourd, on the mouth of a small gourd there is a smaller red gourd. On the top of the mouth of the smallest gourd is the Buddhist symbol of the swastika (卐). In other temples such as Tam Bửu Pagoda (An Thành village, Ba Chúc commune, Tri Tôn district), Mã Châu Temple, Hội Đồng Temple, Quan Âm Temple, Thanh Lương Pagoda, and An Thành Temple, all feature the typical symbols of the wine gourd with one to three pieces placed in different positions.



Figure 3. Hồ Lô (wine gourd) Symbols at Hội Đồng Temple

In some places, the wine gourds are placed on the top of the tower in the middle of the roof, and in some pagodas, consecutive gourds are placed on the tops of the towers in accordance with the pagoda-roofs in the shape of four consecutive “comparable” statues, or the wine gourd is placed on the highest top of the “Mộc trụ thần quan (poles of banners).” In general, the wine gourd symbol, regardless of its position, size, or number, can be taken as a typical symbol in the pagodas and temples of Four Debts of Gratitude in Tri Tôn district.

The meanings implied through the symbol of wine gourd-shaped architecture at Phi Lai pagoda or the wine gourd symbol placed on the roofs of the temples of Four Debts of Gratitude have no specific explanation; even to the followers of this religion we consulted. The followers said that they obliged and repaired the pagodas by following how the Great Master taught them in “poetic lines” or how the pagodas looked in the previous time. They gave more explanation that before building the pagodas, the Great Master sketched the “lợp lằng (blueprint)” for the pagoda, and then he and his followers built the pagoda in accordance with the sketch.<sup>3</sup>



Figure 4. Tam Bửu Pagoda (Wikipedia)

Regarding the symbol of wine gourd, Mr. Đạo Trần, a disciple of Ngô Lợi, on his acceptance of the Master's order to go out to preach, was given a wine gourd, which he later explained to the religious people “represented the sky and earth” (Phan 1975, 31). The meaning of gourd, as explained by Mr. Đạo Trần, is to be “one with the sky and earth.” This is similar to the interpretations given by some elderly believers who we surveyed. The two wine gourds at Phi Lai pagoda represent Heaven and Earth meaning the sky and earth in the wine gourd (Nguyen 2019). The wine gourd collects all things and sends them out in the manner of a few Daoist hermits (Nguyen 2019). In another explanation, it is said that the wine gourds are depicted in two varieties: the one with a swastika on the top represents the Buddha (and Buddhism) whereas the one without the swastika on the top represents Daoism (Nguyen 2019). According to our investigation, the types of wine gourds with a swastika on the top placed on pagodas and shrines of Four Debts of Gratitude were present only in Tam Bửu pagoda (An Định) while the rest did not feature swastikas. It is possible that since Tam Bửu pagoda is dedicated to worship of “the Buddha and the Great Master,” the wine gourds there bear a swastika, the highest symbol for “Buddhas.” Following that logic, the wine gourd symbol below the swastika is a symbol of Daoism as shown in other pagodas or temples. This is a form of cultural exchange and fusion between Buddhism and Daoism, and that fusion is clearly reflected in the thought and devotional practices of the Four Debts of Gratitude.



The wine gourd has become a representative symbol in the overall architecture of temples and shrines of the Four Debts of Gratitude; however, this symbol rarely appears in Buddhist temples. Little ornamental dots may be seen on the top of the tower of a Buddhist temple; nevertheless, these dots are not considered to be an important part of the temple's architecture. Because of this, it is not often considered to be specifically indicative of Buddhist architecture.

The wine gourd symbol appears prominently in Daoist thought and practices, and this is especially pronounced in the Daoism of cultural and ethnic groups in Southeast Asia. According to Đinh Hồng Hải, the wine gourd, which is one of the forms of the gourd symbol, "... is quite common in the culture of the Vietnam and Southeast Asian ethnic groups. It is also considered as a symbol of the origin of the formation of ethnic groups in this area" (Đinh 2018, 67). However, the gourd in a general cultural and ethnic Southeast Asian context is different from the concept of the wine gourd in Daoism because it has more natural social and ecological functions than it does spiritual functions. In other words, the gourd in Southeast Asian culture has more functions such as "saving people from hunger" and "saving people's lives" than it does spiritual functions. In the Daoist worldview and ideological thought, the gourd often goes hand in hand with outward manifestations and symbolizes the spiritual practice, and mystical medicine of the Daoists, and most importantly, the concept of creating all things in the heaven and on earth. "Hỗ Lô can represent the Way because 'chaos' and 'Hỗ Lô' are closely related in their sound and meaning. Mystics often say: Heaven and earth are in the wine gourd, and this includes how the character 'hỗ (葫)' in the word 'Hỗ Lô (wine gourd)' contains the component 'nhất (一, oneness, monism)' (Truong 2012, 274)".

In the Yin-Yang system, the Dao (or "Vitality") is a form of chaos in the universe that gives rise to the duality of yin and yang. The yin-yang symbol is an initial form of the wine gourd symbol. According to Từ Tuấn Kiệt, "Daoism attaches great importance to the image and symbolic meaning of the wine gourd. Daoists and Daoism originated from Lao Tzu. In Vietnamese Daoism, Lao Tzu's mentor was Ho Tu (何託 or 何托 depending on the source), a native of the Trinh kingdom during the Spring and Autumn period. Ho Tu was also known as Hỗ Lô which is a homophone with hồ lô (葫蘆, wine gourd) (Nguyen 2013, 376)". In the first decade or the end of the 20th century, some followers of Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương and Four Debts of Gratitude also did Daoist practices such as "going into isolation to practice the Way" on the "Three Daoist Pavilions," taking the symbol of wine gourd containing "medicine for mysterious diseases," and placing a wine gourd on the altar.<sup>4</sup> These methods of practice and the wine gourd symbol are the remnants of Daoist practice forms that the followers of Four Debts of Gratitude have been influenced by in the past and from the Chinese immigrants who spread Daoism in the Southwest throughout different time periods. In addition to these traces, the thought and practice

of Daoism in Four Debts of Gratitude are reflected in the system of teachings and practices of the followers. This was mentioned by many previous researchers and the followers themselves who summarized it as “Training Essence, Vitality, and Spirit according to Daoism” (Ha 1971, 123).

From the references to the wine gourd symbol in Daoism and the thought and practice of Daoism in the Four Debts of Gratitude, it can be said that the architecture imitating the shape of a wine gourd and the wine gourd symbol at the temples and shrines of Four Debts of Gratitude originated from Daoist thought and its perception of cosmology. Cosmology in this context can be spoken of as “the occult” (玄牝) and the “heavenly root” (天地根), i.e. the origin of heaven and earth (Nguyen 2013, 368). Caodaism is also deeply influenced by Daoist thought and symbols, including the wine gourd symbol: “a wine gourd is one of the two treasures of Li Tiezhuo (李鐵拐), one of the Eight Immortals. Today they came to earth, guiding sentient beings, setting an example for men” (Tay Ninh Holy See 1999, 35). In Daoism, Li Tiezhuo is one of the “eight immortals who cross over the sea.” He is depicted carrying a wine gourd of “boundless magic power,” and often uses the wine gourd to eliminate violence and destroy evil. He grants “reincarnation” to human beings. It seems that the wine gourd has been closely associated with the idea of immortality and the revival of the Daoist Fairy world (realm of immortals) in folklore (Nguyen 2013, 368).

Thus, based on many aspects, it can be recognized that the architecture bearing the wine gourd symbol and the gourd image placed on the shrines of Daoist religions carries the ideological thought and symbolic significance that symbol also has in Daoism. This is done according to the hybrid practice system of the Three Religions (Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism), in which “đi Phật đi tông” (taking Buddhism as the main religious practice), the wine gourd is one of the symbols of Daoism representing the universe and people as “heaven and earth.” With specific regard to the Daoist spiritual practice, it is spoken of in terms of training Essence, Vitality, and Spirit to “preserve the flesh (Đặng Tiên nguyên thể).”<sup>5</sup>

Along with the gourd symbol, another remarkable symbol at Four Debts of Gratitude pagoda that clearly expresses Daoist thought would be the shape of the Eight Trigrams which is frequently worked into architecture. Prior to its reconstruction Tam Bửu pagoda<sup>6</sup> was built opposite Phi Lai pagoda. In addition to the overall architecture of the façade and the pagoda's foundation that adopts the shape of the four icons commonly seen in communal houses and pagodas in the Southwest, on the top of the pagoda, rested the main architectural symbol which occupied two-thirds of the temple's roof area. The tower had a circumference of more than 4 meters, and it stood about 3 meters high. The tower was divided into three levels: the highest was the gourd symbol, the middle was the tower's body, and the lower portion was the base of the tower. Excluding the gourd symbol, the main structure of the tower was the middle body and the base of the tower.

The overall shape of the tower, the middle body, and the base of the tower, was such that it had eight sides. The tower and the eight-sided figure represented the shape of the Eight Trigrams in the Daoist concept of Qing Li (清理, purification) and Separation Thought. The surface between the sides of the tower was engraved with “lines” corresponding to the Eight Trigrams: Heaven, Lake, Flame, Thunder, Wind, Water, Mountain, and Earth.



Figure 5. Tam Bửu Pagoda (<https://angiang.gov.vn>)

The roof of the pagoda in the form of the Eight Trigrams Tower or an architectural style in the form of the Eight Trigrams system can also be observed at pagodas such as Tam Bửu pagoda (An Thành village) , Phi Lai pagoda (with the Eight Trigrams and wine gourd symbols as mentioned above) and Thanh Lương pagoda. At the construction site of Tam Bửu pagoda in An Thành village, in front of the pagoda is a “Vô Quy” temple that is about 5 meters high and 20 meters wide. “Vô Quy” has a low three-leveled roof with the symbol of gourd on top.



Figure 6. Thanh Lương Pagoda

Below is an eight-sided tower roof corresponding to the Eight Trigrams. On the surface of the edges the Chinese characters for “the Eight Trigrams” are engraved. The entrance to the left of “Vô Quy” is called “the Eight Trigrams Gate.”



Figure 7. An example of an Eight Trigrams Gate

According to believers, this “Eight Trigrams Temple” is used as a gathering place for believers use during important religious practice such as worshipping Tam Nguyên and worship on the day commemorating the opening of the temple.

The roof of the pagoda in the shape of the Eight Trigrams and the Eight Trigrams synagogue are not only reflected in the temples and shrines built by Ngô Lợi but also in the temples built by his disciples and later religious believers. These key examples of the influence of Daoist thought. One typical example is the shrine (also known as Ba pagoda) to Tây Vương Mẫu (西王母, Queen Mother of the West) in Núi Tô commune, Tri Tôn district. At Tây Vương Mẫu Temple, the top of the pagoda roof is designed in the shape of the Eight Trigrams tower, and it occupies two-thirds of the area there. The surface of each side of the tower is engraved with “lines” corresponding to the hexagrams in the Eight Trigrams system. As the name of the temple indicates, the main deity worshiped is “Queen Mother of the West (Tây Vương Mẫu)”. Devotees believe that she is a Mother Buddha in the West as a directional correspondence with the Five Elements which directionally represent East, West, South, North, and Center. Similar to this point of view, in the Cao Dai dictionary, Nguyễn Văn Hồng explains the following about Tây Vương Mẫu: “Tây means “the West,” referring to femininity. Vương means “king,” and Mẫu means “mother.” The West is the direction where the sun sets, and that is where Yin vitality gradually becomes feminine while the opposite is East, the direction where the sun rises. Yang vitality gradually becomes masculine. According to fairy tales, in the East, there is Đông Vương Công, who controls Yang Vitality, and in the West, there is Tây Vương Mẫu who controls Yin vitality. Đông Vương Công (King Lord of the East) is also known as ‘Mộc Công (Lord of Wood),’ because according to Five Elements, wood corresponds to the East. Tây Vương Mẫu is also called Kim Mẫu (the Golden Mother), because of the metal (Kim means ‘gold’ but also the element, ‘metal’) corresponds to the West.

Many traditions take Đông Vương Công to be the Supreme Being, and thereby, he is synonymous with the Jade Emperor of Heaven, who is in charge of Yang light. Tây Vương Mẫu is spoken of as Đức Diệu Trì Kim Mẫu (Her Holiness the Golden Mother of the Jade Pond), who controls Yin and Light.

The monks who aim to achieve the Way of the Fairy are supposed to first go see Đông Vương Công and then see Tây Vương Mẫu. After that, they are to attend the ceremony of Taishang Laojun (Lao Tzu's deified form) and Đức Ngươn Thỉ Thiên Tôn (元始天尊, the Celestial Worthy of the Primordial Beginning) (Nguyễn 2003, 314)."



Figure 8. A shrine to Tây Vương Mẫu (Queen Mother of the West)

By examining the image of Tây Vương Mẫu, we can see that the Tây Vương Mẫu Temple's worship practices were adapted from the Mother Goddess worship of Daoism that originated in the religion dedicated to Tây Vương worship. Despite the transformation of the names and images, the concept of the universe's creation according to the Eight Trigrams system in Daoist thought is still evident through the Eight Trigrams tower located on the temple's roof.

With regard to the Eight Trigrams within the context of Daoist thought, there is specific reference to the relationship between Heaven and Earth and the movement of Heaven and Earth that gradually forms the third subject, human beings (and all myriad things). These comprise the Three Generative Forces that is mentioned in some teachings of the Four Debts Gratitude. In general, this movement took place in a process: the universe was the first in a chaotic mass and then extreme polarities were formed, those polarities generated heaven and earth, and those two elements gave rise to various phenomena eventually leading to the emergence of the Eight Trigrams (Heaven, Lake, Flame, Thunder, Wind, Water, Mountain, Earth). In turn, the Eight Trigrams gave birth to all other myriad forms. According to the concept of the Four Debts of Gratitude, the supreme deity who ruled over the universe in that turbulent period was the Jade Emperor, as mentioned in their scripture regarding the Jade Emperor. Devotees consider the translation of their scripture to be sacrilege,



and with that in mind, a description of the relevant section will be offered in place of a translation. The scripture is comparable to Chapter 42 of the *Daodejing* or Neo-Confucian philosopher Zhou Dunyi's *Taijitu*; both of which depict the sequential unfolding of the universe. The unique feature of the scripture is that it centers around the Jade Emperor as the Mover and/or Overseer of the unfolding of the universe, and the specific items mentioned as coming into existence include but are not limited to the Three Generative Forces, Taiji (the Grand Ultimate, Yin and Yang), and the Eight Trigrams (presumably as the natural phenomena represented through the trigrams but perhaps also as trigrams themselves).<sup>7</sup>

In the Daoist *Book of the Five Texts* (五教文), the movements of Heaven and Earth, as well as the movements of the Eight Trigrams (Heaven, Lake, Flame, Thunder, Wind, Water, Mountain, and Earth), are associated with the lunar year timeline. For example, Heaven corresponds to the years of Tuất (Dog) and Hợi (Pig); Lake corresponds to the Year of the Rat; Flame corresponds to the years of Sửu (Buffalo) and Dần (Tiger), and so on. The movements of the Eight Trigrams correspond to the lunar years and are linked to the birth of sages who rule over Heaven and Earth, and to the forecasting of calamities and blessings in human life and the universe. Moreover, it also refers to the ultimate goal of establishing the Thượng nguyên (上元), a happy realm for the well-being of humans.<sup>8</sup>

The mystical meanings of the Eight Trigrams in the sutras or as indicated through the architectural symbols of the temple such as the Eight Trigrams tower and the Eight Trigrams house show that Daoist thought and practice hold an important position in the practice and thought of the Four Debts of Gratitude. The Eight Trigrams tower, the Eight Trigrams house in the architectural system of the temples and shrines of Four Debts of Gratitude carry Daoist cosmological meanings regarding the formation of heaven, earth and human beings. This is seen as a “beautiful sacred realm” that directs people to firmly follow the spiritual path to change their fortunes and future. In addition, through the symbols of the Eight Trigram architecture, it is also explained that Daoist thought always goes hand in hand with Buddhist and Confucian thought. This forms a tightly bound co-existence among the Three Religions.

In addition to the architectural symbols of Cổ Lầu, Wine Gourd, towers, and the Eight Trigram house, the pagodas and temples of Four Debts of Gratitude are often built with the architectural symbol of a “three-level tower” in the same system or isolated on different roofs of temples and shrines. This can be observed at temples like Thanh Lương, Tam Bửu, Temple of the Canton, Linh Bửu Pagoda, and the Temple of Quan Âm. On the roof or at the roof points connecting the four icons, the temple there often features towers. Thanh Lương Pagoda has the symbol of three consecutive high towers on the roof as a highlight for the entire temple's architecture. This trio of towers is such that each tower has a completely different design and size. Viewed from the front side,

the front and rear towers bear the symbols of wine gourd on the top. The middle tower does not. The front tower is larger, the body of the tower is octagonal, and each side corresponds to the trigrams that make up the Eight Trigrams: Heaven, Lake, Flame, Thunder, Wind, Water, Mountain, and Earth. The middle tower and the last tower are designed in a tetrahedral style wherein each side corresponds to the four icons and the four directions: East, West, South, and North. This type of architecture and the demarcation of the central deity in the temple partly expresses the concept of the universe and human life. This too, complies with Daoist thought. Thanh Lương Pagoda worships the spiritual image of Diệu Trì Kim Mẫu. According to the concept of Daoism: “Diệu Trì Kim Mẫu is the one who keeps the division of power of the Supreme Being (be that Heaven or the Jade Emperor or other another deity depending on tradition). She was created by the Supreme Being to control the Yin Light and ‘to create and bring forth the myriad created spirits (tạo hóa ra Vạn linh)’ in the invisible sacred realm. After doing so, the myriad spirits descended to earth to form all things; that is to say, they became sentient beings” (Huynh 2017, 87).

The delimitation of the position of the gods in the temple is related to the symbol of the shape of the three towers on the roof of this pagoda and the connected symbol of a three-tiered tower. Three neighboring towers are adjacent to each other at Thanh Lương Pagoda and some other temples, shrines, and single towers, but in the form of a three-tiered tower symbolizing “Thiên Hoàng, Địa Hoàng, and Nhơn Hoàng” or “each tower or each floor of the tower is seen as an abode for Buddhas, Sages, and Immortals as they reign (Nguyen 2019). These interpretations of the significance of these symbols act as additional supporting evidence that demonstrates how the concept of the creation of the universe and life and the harmony between the “tangible” and “intangible” spirits of the universe throughout the realms of Heaven, Earth, and Humanity (the Three Generative Forces) in Daoism is sometimes further symbolized in human form as “Buddhas, Sages, and Fairies (immortals).” In either variety, the influence of Daoist thought on this indigenous religion is clearly shown. What is conveyed is the birth of the universe from Heaven or Jade Emperor and Earth or the Queen Mother whereby all things are created in Yin Light.

Therefore, it can be preliminarily determined that the towers built at the most typical positions on the roofs of temples and shrines of Four Debts of Gratitude bear the religious significance of Daoist ideological influence. This occurs in two different variations: one wherein single-tower structure uses each tower floor for numerological meaning and the other wherein three-tower structure use each tower to convey the same numerological teaching. Either way, the deity being worshiped and the position of that deity in the theology and practice of the religion takes place within the emphasis on the number three which alludes to the Three Religions. The architectural symbols of the three-level monolithic tower or the row of three consecutive towers on the roof of the

pagoda and shrine become the highlight of the overall architecture of the pagodas and temples of Four Debts of Gratitude in Tri Tôn. This architectural symbol built into these towers is completely different from the architectural style of temples of other religions such as Buddhism, Bửu Hương Kỳ Sơn, Caodaism, or Hòa Hảo Buddhism.

## Conclusion

The above-mentioned symbols in the architecture of pagodas and shrines of Four Debts of Gratitude in Tri Tôn clearly show the impact that Daoist thought and Daoist cosmology had on this indigenous religion. Daoist ideology is not only expressed through poetry, chanting prayers, and spiritual practice but also through the architecture of temples. The symbols of Cổ Lầu, Wine Gourd, towers, the Eight Trigram houses, and three-level monolithic towers or three adjacent towers on the roof of the pagoda, have all become identifying features or symbols brought up for comparison between the religious temples' architecture with existing interwoven multi-ethnic and multi-religious cultures in Tri Tôn district in particular and in An Giang in general.

Due to many social and historical reasons that affect religion, it is difficult to be sure whether or not these symbols are completely the “inheritance of architectural values established from thought in the past.” However, considering the following aspects: a) historical image, b) the principle of religious beliefs of the leaders of the former congregations and religious communities in carrying out the “words of the Great Master” when they were not yet affected by economic and multitudinous socio-political issues as the religion is at present, c) theology and subjects of worship in religion, d) interpretation of elderly believers, the meaningful and strong degree of similarity between the given aspects, it can be concluded that the typical symbols in the architectural system of temples and shrines of Four Debts of Gratitude such as Cổ Lầu, Wine Gourd, the Eight Trigram architecture, and towers contain deep and profound meanings found within Daoist thought. The Daoist influences expressed through the architectural symbols of the temples along with many other elements in this religion contribute to the affirmation that Four Debts of Gratitude is a religion that integrates the three religions: Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism.

## Conflict of Interest

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



## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Trần Điều is a deep purple cloth stretched out on a plank or a piece of wall that is painted deep purple. The size of the cloth is flexible and dependent on the size of the space allocated to the enshrinement.
- <sup>2</sup> According to the followers of Four Debts of Gratitude, the deployment of the pagodas worshipping spirits was decided by Ngo Loi. Phi Lai pagoda worships the Jade Emperor; Tam Buu (An Dinh hamlet) pagoda worships Buddha and the Great Master; Thanh Luong pagoda worships Dieu Tri Kim Mau.
- <sup>3</sup> According to the followers of the Four Debts of Gratitude and Ha Tan Dan's statistics, from the time he went to Tuong mountain for land reclamation in 1876 to the time he passed away in 1890, Master Ngo Loi built 16 pagodas, temples, and communal houses for the followers. From that time on, no additional pagodas or temples have been built; however, some sites have been restored.
- <sup>4</sup> The matter is not cited here for numerous reasons.
- <sup>5</sup> In Buu Son Ky Huong or Four Debts of Gratitude, there are tales about "giữ gìn nhục thể (preserving one's carnal form)" and "đăng Tiên nguyên thể (using one's body to achieve immortality)". The examples are a tale about Cù Đa, about the death of Ta Paul or about Ngo Loi.
- <sup>6</sup> The pagoda was demolished and reconstructed. The information in this article relates to the previous site pre-demolition.
- <sup>7</sup> Four Debts of Gratitude, Ngoc Hoang Cot Tuy Chan Kinh, Ba Chuc, typed copy, p.20, 21. According to the perspectives of the followers of Four Debts of Gratitude, the believers can only read the Daoist sutra in Sino-Vietnamese characters for comprehension, not for translation. The believers state that nobody could understand the words spoken by Buddhas, Sages, or immortals, and therefore, it cannot be translated. Efforts at translating are equated with committing transgressions because misrepresenting holy words is transgressive. Believers insist that the scripture be only transcribed into Chinese characters and special Vietnamese characters. In deference to their string wishes, here is the original: "爾時世尊高上玉皇 (Nhị thời thế tôn cao thượng Ngọc Hoàng)/虛空自然運轉三才 (Hư không tự nhiên vận chuyển tam tài)/八卦太易太初 (Bát quái thái dị thái sơ)/太始太素太極 (Thái thủy thái tổ thái cực)/一天二地三人 (Nhứt thiên nhị địa tam nhân)/轉八卦乾坎艮震巽離坤兌 (Chuyển bát quái càn khảm cấn chấn tốn lý khôn đoài)."
- <sup>8</sup> "Bây giờ còn hồi đình ninh/Chuyển vận Bát quái mới bình mới an/Cung Cấn vốn thiệt tam liên/Còn trong Tuất Hợi nào phiền chúng sanh/Cung Khảm trung mãng đã dành/Năm Tý bước tới dữ lành mới hay/Cung Cấn phúc hoân tỏ bày/Sửu Dẫn xuất Thánh phép hay vô thường/Cung Chấn ngưỡng bốn khải thương/Năm Mẹo bước tới thanh trường phục nam/Cung Tốn hạ đoạn chưa kham/Thìn Tỵ mới có thông tam côi đường/Cung Ly trung hư rõ ràng/Qua Ngọ thôi mới Minh Hoàng trị ngôi/Cung Khôn lục đoạn thương ôi/Mùi Thân tứ giáo mới ngôi định phân/Cung Đoài thượng khuyết cũng gần/Tối Dậu có Phật mười phần thành thoi/Chuyển luân Bát quái đất trời/Chân nhi phục thủy lập đời Thượng Nguyên" (Duc Bon su nui Tuong n.d., 12). According to the perspectives of the followers of Four Debts of Gratitude, the believers can only read the Daoist sutra in Sino-Vietnamese characters for comprehension, not for translation. However, in order to provide the readers with the content of the sutra, we would like to transcribe this passage into Chinese characters, as this is a common and accepted alternative way of writing the Sutra of The Four Debts of Gratitude: 此刻還叮嚀問，八卦轉運才平安，乾宮三連原始，眾生煩惱在狗豬年之中，所口宮中滿當然，至子年免或善才知，艮宮福換錄示，醜寅出聖法好極了，震宮四門可憐，卯年進到肅清復南，巽宮下段沒受，龍已開通三界，離宮中虛清楚，過午年明黃龍主宰，坤宮六段傷哉，未申坐下劃定四教，兌宮靠近滿缺，至酉年有佛才十分體胖，天地八卦轉運，真兒水復立上元（《五教文》像山本釋德，安江省知尊縣，12頁）。
- <sup>9</sup> It can be argued that thap tam cap could also be called a "co lau."

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# Otherness and Diversity in Vietnamese Confucianism: The Formation of the Symbol of the Ancestral King Lạc Long Quân Based on the Nguyễn Huy Thiệp Complex

**DINH Hong Hai**

Dinh Hong Hai earned two bachelor's degrees; one from Hanoi University of Industrial Fine Arts in 1996 and the other from Vietnam National University, Hanoi in 1998. After completing his M.Phil program at the University of Delhi (India) in 2006, Hai attended Harvard University from 2008 to 2010 and then defended his Ph.D. dissertation at the Graduate School of Social Sciences in 2011. He now serves as a faculty member at Vietnam National University, Hanoi, and deputy general secretary of the Asian Semiotics International Association (ASIA).



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## Original Articles

Correspondence to

**DINH Hong Hai**

National University, Hanoi, Vietnam

[haidinh@vnu.edu.vn](mailto:haidinh@vnu.edu.vn)

ORCID

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8007-5306>



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## Abstract

Quân sư phụ (君師父) is a concept of respectfulness derived from the Chinese Confucian concepts of *sân găng vũ cháng* (三綱五常, the Three Principles and Five Constant Virtues) and *sân cóng sì dé* (三從四德, the Four Virtues Applied to the Three Male Figures) that is applied to Vietnamese Confucianism in regards to not only kings but also Chinese Emperors, as well as Chinese culture generally. In his famous literary work *Vàng lửa* (Golden Fire), Nguyễn Huy Thiệp revealed the Vietnamese attitude to Chinese civilization: “Our country could be characterized as *nhược tiểu* (弱小, small and weak). Vietnam was like a maiden forcibly deflowered by Chinese civilization. ‘She’ enjoyed it, but also came to hate it and feel disgraced by it” (Nguyễn 1988). This is a special sentiment or psychological complex of the Vietnamese in relation to Chinese civilization. The research findings are that the Nguyễn Huy Thiệp complex is the rationale behind which the symbol of the ancestral King Lạc Long Quân (貉龍君) was altered via Sino-Vietnamese motifs in order to develop Vietnamese Confucian thought.

**Keywords:** Nguyễn Huy Thiệp complex; Lạc Long Quân; Sino-Vietnamese motifs

## Introduction

In the Chinese Confucian concepts of *sân găng vũ cháng* (三綱五常)<sup>1</sup> and *sân cóng sì dé* (三從四德)<sup>2</sup>, the character *quân* —君 (in *Quân-sư-phụ*—君師父, meaning “King, Master, and Father”) ranks first, and this reflects the respect and admiration of Vietnamese Confucian scholars to not only the Kings of their own nation but also to the Chinese Emperors, as well as to Chinese culture. To the extent that, in his famous literary work *Vàng lửa* (Golden Fire), Nguyễn Huy Thiệp made a unique comment regarding this established way of thinking:

Our country could be characterized as *nhược tiểu* (弱小, small and weak). Vietnam was like a maiden forcibly deflowered by Chinese civilization. ‘She’ enjoyed it, but also came to hate it and feel disgraced by it. (Nguyễn 1988).

This is presumably a special kind of inferiority complex commonly observable among Vietnamese people towards the Han Chinese race and civilization, as noticed by Nguyễn Huy Thiệp. It also demonstrates a distinct and diverse aspect of Vietnamese Confucianism. In this research, it will be referred to as the *Nguyễn Huy Thiệp Complex*, a pseudo psychoanalytical term with which the formation of the symbol of the ancestral King Lạc Long Quân (絡龍君) can be explored via Sino-Vietnamese motifs based on the characteristic Confucian ideological foundation of the Vietnamese people.

## Chinese Confucian Civilization’s “Rape” of Vietnamese Culture according to Nguyễn Huy Thiệp’s Perspective

In the Viet people’s myth of *cha rồng-mẹ tiên* (dragon father and fairy mother), the couple, Lạc Long Quân and Âu Cơ, work as a Sino-Vietnamese motif in which the father and husband Lạc Long Quân is the offspring of a Chinese family (神農, Shennong). However, it is this legendary couple’s “racial” conflict (technically the two are of different species but this is likely a metaphor for ethnicity) that motivates their separation or divorce. Each of them took half of their children and travelled their own path, which was consequently spoken of by some as “the first divorce in history.” In the view of symbolic studies, this marriage seems to be an inevitable fate that the Vietnamese culture would suffer at the hands of Han Chinese culture, but the divorce is a terrific creation by those who concocted this ‘love story.’ By doing so, they cleverly crossed off the role of the Chinese father (Lạc Long Quân) such that Hùng Kings (sons of Mother Âu Cơ) became the ancestors of the Vietnamese people, and these relational roles were meant to continue in perpetuity.

All along, only Hùng Kings have been recognized as the “Nation’s forefathers” of Vietnam, and this was confirmed by the State of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam

through the inauguration of the festival for the *Ancestral Anniversary for Hùng Kings on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the third lunar month*. Thus, the formation of the symbol of the ancestral King Lạc Long Quân that has endured for many centuries is actually a result of the formation of the forefathers of the Vietnamese people.<sup>3</sup>

Though the separation or divorce took place (in the myth), a number of Vietnamese people now still identify themselves as “the offspring of the Lạc and the Hồng” or “the descendants of the Dragon and the Fairy” (descendants of Lạc Long Quân and Âu Cơ), implying that the Vietnamese people share the same origin or lineage of Lạc Hồng (in other words, their bloodline comes from Lạc Long Quân and the Hồng Bàng Clan). The above-mentioned phrases are always associated with the Vietnamese people’s pride in their own race. This is rooted in the history books that mention the Hồng Bàng family, such as *Đại Việt Sử ký toàn thư* (The Complete History of the Great Viet), *Khâm định Việt sử thông giám cương mục* (The Imperially-Ordered Annotated Text Completely Reflecting the History of Viet), and *Việt Nam sử lược* (A Brief History of Vietnam). According to these works, Lạc Long Quân married Âu Cơ who gave birth to a sac of one hundred eggs which hatched into a hundred children and one of them, King Hùng became the Forefather of the Vietnamese people. The Vietnamese people call themselves “the descendants of the Dragon and the Fairy,” and consider themselves the offspring of Lạc Long Quân and Âu Cơ. They use the words “*đồng bào*” (同胞, compatriot) which holds the implication of “being born from the same sac.”

What exactly are *Lạc and Hồng or Dragon and Fairy*? Why do these appellations exist? Answering these questions will help people better understand the developmental stage of the cognition behind ethnic processing in Vietnam and further comprehend the ancestral symbols of the Vietnamese people. The internal contradictions of the Vietnamese people in finding their own ancestral symbols over the past centuries have been formed through three endogenous elements as follows: 1) the Vietnamese people’s need to find their own origin; 2) their psychological need to assert their own long-standing culture; and 3) the complexity of their ancestry (Dinh 2018a, 263).

These internal contradictions were woven into an analogy by Nguyễn Huy Thiệp when he created the image of a forceably deflowered maiden as follows:

The most prominent feature of this country is its weakness. This country is like a virgin raped by Chinese civilization. She felt pleasure, but then humiliation and hatred... Nguyễn Du (a beloved national poet) is a child of that virgin girl, bearing blood full of legends about the man who raped his mother... Nguyễn Du’s mother (contemporary politics via analogy) conceals from her son her indignity, and she endures with great spirit and restraint... The Vietnamese community is an inferior one. How small it is in comparison to the Chinese civilization; a civilization whose greatness goes hand-in-hand with its vileness and ruthlessness. (Nguyễn 1988).



This excerpt shows how Nguyễn Huy Thiệp excellently used the method of analogy to describe the Vietnamese people's internal contradictions through Nguyễn Du's displeasure when the latter had to heavily rely on Chinese references when compiling his epic poem, *Truyện Kiều* (The Story of Kiều). The fate of Kiều and the poetical novel *Truyện Kiều* are similar to the destiny of the Vietnamese people when faced by the Chinese empire. This is an unacceptable feeling that was compulsorily accepted (by the contemporary administration at the time of Nguyễn Du) despite the extremely strong oppression levied upon them by Chinese civilization as it manifested in Confucian thought. The outstanding conception of the Three Principles (King, Master, and Father) which was popular among Vietnamese Confucian scholars (like Nguyễn Du) was extended not only toward their Vietnamese kings but to Chinese emperors as well. This was the precondition for the 'birth' and development of a National Forefather such as Lạc Long Quân in medieval histories, a process in which authors of *Đại Việt Sử ký toàn thư* (The Complete History of the Great Viet) acted as the first contributors.

In psychoanalytic terms, structures in the unconscious that are antithetical to drives can be described as complexes. To borrow this term, the complex of the Vietnamese people consists of pride, complacency, low self-esteem, and inferiority. Through this complex, the formation of Lạc Long Quân (the signifier) can be studied as a typical symbol of Sino-Vietnamese motifs (the signified). Consequently, we can also recognize that Lạc Long Quân is a Confucian symbol (in the symbolic cluster of King, Master, and Father) rather than a genuine historical figure. This figure was produced by the thousand-year Confucian influence that is defined by Nguyễn Huy Thiệp as "rape" perpetrated by the Chinese civilization. From a comparative point of view, we can see that the formation of the symbol Lạc Long Quân in *Đại Việt Sử ký toàn thư* is similar to the "birth" of Kiều in Nguyễn Du's work.

## The Formation of the Symbol of Lạc Long Quân in National Histories and Legends

Relying on state historical records that survive into the present day, as Hậu Lê Dynasty (1442-1789), Vietnamese historians admitted or accepted some legends as part of history; however, they referred to these editions by different names such as *ngoại kỷ* (外記, supplemental chronicles) or *huyền sử* (玄史, unofficial history). For example, in *Đại Việt Sử ký toàn thư*, *Ngoại kỷ—Book 1* it is written:

Lạc Long Quân, real name: Sùng Lãm, was the son of Kinh Dương Vương. He married Âu Cơ, daughter of Đế Lai, and she gave birth to one hundred sons (tradition has it that they gave birth to one hundred eggs) who became ancestors of Bách Việt. One day, he told Âu Cơ: 'I am a dragon while you are a fairy. Water and fire are opposites and can never match with one another.'

Thus, they bid each other farewell, deciding that 50 sons would follow their mother to the mountain, the remaining 50 children would accompany their father to the south (to the Southern Sea in some versions). The first son Hùng Vương succeeded to the throne [Lê Văn Hữu, Phan Phu Tiên, Ngô Sĩ Liên Ed. (1697, 1993, 3)].

It is possible to conclude that many historians during this period refrained from criticizing mythological elements when writing them into the historical records.

Unlike Ngô Sĩ Liên, under the Nguyễn Dynasty (1802–1945), King Tự Đức differentiated historical elements from mythological ones in a more specific and scientific way. Though still including the above ambiguous and contradictory details in *Khâm định Việt sử thông giám cương mục*, King Tự Đức issued a royal edict (on the 12<sup>th</sup> day of the seventh lunar month of the ninth year of the reign of Tự Đức, or 12 August, 1856) in which he remarked:

The stories of Kinh Dương Vương and Lạc Long Quân written in old histories may be real or unreal. Even if real, it would be better to not discuss them. However, the old histories, one and all, were recorded in the main texts, and most of those notes are fabulous myths which are odd and unreasonable (*Khâm định Việt sử thông giám cương mục* (National Historical Bureau of the Nguyễn Dynasty 1998, 4).

In modern times, when mentioning the Hồng Bàng clan, Trần Trọng Kim wrote the following notes in detail in his book, *Việt Nam Sử lược* (A Brief History of Vietnam):

Hồng-Bàng Clan (2879–258 BC): Tradition has it that King Đế Minh, a third-generation grandchild of King Shennong, in his southward patrol to Ngũ Lĩnh Mountain (present-day Hunan Province), met a fairy and married her. They gave birth to a son named Lộc Tục. Later, Đế Minh passed the throne to his eldest son, Đế Nghi, who became the emperor of the north, and he appointed Lộc Tục to be the king of the south. Lộc Tục proclaimed himself Kinh Dương Vương and took the kingdom name Xích Quỷ. At that time, Xích Quỷ Kingdom's territories bordered Lake Động Đình (Hunan) in the north and Hồ Tôn Kingdom (Champa) in the south. Ba Shu (Sichuan) was to its west, and the Southern Sea was to its east. Kinh Dương Vương became the king of Xích Quỷ in around 2879 BC (?) and married Long Nữ, daughter of the King of Động Đình. They gave to birth to Sùng Lãm who succeeded his father. He called himself Lạc Long Quân. Lạc Long Quân married King Đế Lai's daughter, Âu Cơ, and gave birth to one hundred sons all at once. Lạc Long Quân told Âu Cơ: "I am a descendant of the Dragon King whereas

you are a fairy. Our ability to live together will not endure for long. Now you take 50 children to the mountains, and I will lead 50 others to the Southern Sea.” (Trần 2018, 77).

However, in this book, Trần Trọng Kim offered a remark: “The origin of this story is probably that, from Lạc Long Quân onwards, Xích Quỷ Kingdom was divided into different states, called Bách Việt (百越, Baiyue, the One Hundred Viet States). Therefore, the land of Hu-Guang (Hunan, Guangdong, and Guangxi Provinces) is still called Baiyue. This is an exaggeration based upon nothing” (Trần 2018, 78). This shows that those who “record history” scientifically should not automatically accept mythical elements but should raise questions whenever sufficient foundations to explain ambiguous contents are found lacking.

Through the examples above taken from key historical texts available in Vietnam, some comments can be made as follows. The “birth” of Lạc Long Quân, as noted in *Đại Việt Sử ký toàn thư*, *Khâm định Việt sử thông giám cương mục*, and *Việt Nam Sử lược*, was copied from the same mythical motif available in the pre-existing work, *Lĩnh Nam chích quái liệt truyện* (嶺南摭怪列傳, Selections of Strange Tales in Lĩnh Nam). It is noteworthy that *Lĩnh Nam chích quái* is a semi-fictional work (列傳, liệt truyện) rather than a book of history (史, sử) or the records of a historian (史記, sử ký). But when those myths were copied again and again in books of history by feudal-era historians in later periods, it set a precedent for an academic category error. That category error contributed to the historicalization of the legend Lạc Long Quân-Âu Cơ and transformed Lạc Long Quân from a legendary figure into a pseudo-historical one. This caused a number of Vietnamese people to believe in themselves as descendants of Lạc Long Quân; this idea still persists to the present day.

That category error, though discovered early on (as confirmed by King Tự Đức’s royal edict and by Trần Trọng Kim’s comment), has not been scientifically resolved, and this has left some historical doubts that persist to this day. That made a history-related issue—the nation’s origin—so unhistorical that King Tự Đức called it, and related content, “fabulous myths which are odd and unreasonable.” In light of this, what role should Lạc Long Quân play in order to become “reasonable”? Below, a review of this figure as a legendary motif through the non-historical perspective of symbolism will be utilised to produce multiple insights.

## **Lạc Long Quân and the Vietnam’s Legendary Founding: Symbolism and the Forefather**

Research into the vague origins of figures such as Lạc Long Quân has been conventionally regarded by historians as being outside of their field. Instead, research into Lạc Long Quân and other such figures fits into the purview of mythology. *The*

*Legend of Lạc Long Quân-Âu Cơ* is a fascinating story about the dawn of the Vietnamese nation, and it includes a motif which is somewhat common in the cultures that have a great influence on Vietnamese culture, such as Indian culture, Chinese culture, and the culture of other neighboring ethnic groups. That motif is the legend of founding the country through an egg-sac (Đinh Hồng Hải 2019: 5). From the motif of the egg-sac, much can be learned about the role of Lạc Long Quân in the legendary founding of Vietnam, and this also provides a chance to review the position of this myth in the history of the Vietnamese people. It is easy to recognize that the motif of egg-sac in country-founding legends is quite popular and has played a role in the development of various civilizations. But why is egg and egg-sac imagery selected as the prototype for the birth of country-founding legends? Based on the characteristics of mythology and maximizing the human imagination, it seems that the symbol of egg or egg-sac represents the zenith of imaginative thinking.

In the search for their own forefathers, medieval Confucian thinkers found the symbol of King Hùng appropriate for Vietnamese culture. However, a “fatherless” ancestral king would be difficult to accept in the broader context of Confucian values. Therefore, the application of the egg motif to the forefather’s birth may have been an inevitable step. And efforts to rationalize and validate this egg necessitated revealing the egg’s mother. Consequently, Âu Cơ’s entrance into the myth likewise became an inevitable result in the process of relaying a traditional creation with a beautiful symbol of the nation’s ancestor.<sup>4</sup>

It seems that Confucian intellectuals, especially historians, were not truly satisfied with the nation’s mother being “without husband,” and this required the further “creation” of a well-matched husband for Mother Âu Cơ (a suitable proverb in Vietnamese states: *Sinh con rồi mới sinh cha, sinh cháu giữ nhà rồi mới sinh ông*; meaning “One becomes a father only after a child is born, and a one becomes a grandfather only after a grandchild is born”). In the end, an “excellency” of the Chinese royal lineage was no doubt the ideal Confucian choice for the position of the nation’s forefather. Hence, the husband of the nation’s Mother, Âu Cơ, joined her in forming the symbolic pair, the Dragon father and Fairy mother. It is precisely at that point that all the complications began.

The nation’s Forefather, Lạc Long Quân, was named ‘Sùng Lãm,’ and naturally, he also needed a father.<sup>5</sup> This ‘search’ revealed that his father led to the “birth” of Kinh Dương Vương or Lộc Tục. And Lộc Tục, in his turn, needed a father, and as a result, he was shown to be a third-generation grandchild of the Flame Emperor Shennong (China’s Yandi Shennong 炎帝神農), named ‘Đế Minh.’ Despite his vague origin, he was placed in the position of the father of Kinh Dương Vương in the legend. Up to that point, three kings can be noted (Kinh Dương Vương, Lạc Long Quân, Hùng Vương), and this draws comparison with Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors (三皇五帝) of China.

Thereby, the patriarchalization of Vietnamese ancestors can be observed, and it can further be analyzed as an attempt to Sinicize the origins of the “barbarian” Vietnamese people from the perspective of medieval Confucian intellectuals operating under the notion of “*vô tổn Trung Hoa*” (“non-inferiority to China”, see below). An inevitable consequence of this tradition-creating process is that the Vietnamese people’s ancestors “morphed” into the offspring of the Flame Emperor Shennong, who is considered by the Chinese to be their own forefather. But both the Flame Emperor and the Yellow Emperor (黃帝, Huangdi) of China were “descendants” of Pangu, the god who emerged from an egg.<sup>6</sup> Thus, though being interpreted in different myths, all the country-founding legends of both the Vietnamese and Chinese peoples eventually arrive upon the commonly held utmost limits of human imagination—the symbol of the egg.<sup>7</sup>

Therefore, to decode the legend of Lạc Long Quân, prejudice towards seeing him as a historical figure should be avoided. Instead, Lạc Long Quân should be viewed in his role as a symbol. To learn about this symbol, by the way of semiotics, it is necessary to “read the symbol.” Accordingly, Lạc Long Quân is a *signifier* of the “ancestor” in Vietnamese culture. This reflects the more complicated *signified* in Vietnamese culture in the past and at present. Among countless signified things through the symbol of Lạc Long Quân, a motif can be recognized which is used in numerous myths, legends, and tales. It combines Chinese elements and Vietnamese ones into a Sino-Vietnamese motif. This is the core factor that formed the symbol Lạc Long Quân—a character of Han origin (漢人) in the country-founding myth of the Vietnamese people.

## Lạc Long Quân as a Sino-Vietnamese Motif

Generally speaking, the Sino-Vietnamese motif is a basic unit in the structure of numerous medieval myths in Vietnam. This motif combines indigenous cultural elements (folk) and Chinese cultural factors (royal) into a new cultural synthesis accepted by both common people and mandarins (high-ranking imperial officials from China or natively in Vietnam). With the ‘somewhat Vietnamese’ surname, *Lạc*, the patriarchal conception of the Han race and the Chinese royal criterion of *Long Quân* (a Dragon King) were combined such that Lạc Long Quân became a symbolic monarch of the Vietnamese people according to a decidedly Chinese vision.

Names with the Chinese character *quân* 君 (i.e., Lạc Long Quân) or *vương* 王 (ie. Hùng Vương) are clear evidence of the royalization, Sinicization, and symbolization of the Vietnamese nation’s forefather. This is most clearly reflected in the Three Kings (Hùng Vương, Lạc Long Quân, and Kinh Dương Vương). If the name Lạc Long Quân (貉龍君) is more thoroughly analyzed from a symbolic perspective, there is a realization that the word *Lạc* or the family name *Lạc*, via homophone, is a signifier for the Vietnamese or Lạc Việt (雒越 or 貉越; indicating tribal people which included but was

not limited to the proto-Vietnamese). *Long Quân* is a reference to the dragon king (龍王 Long Vương, 龍君 Long Quân). Being comprised of exclusively Chinese features, he was introduced into Vietnamese culture through the process of royalization or Sinicization into the symbol of the ancestral king of the Vietnamese:

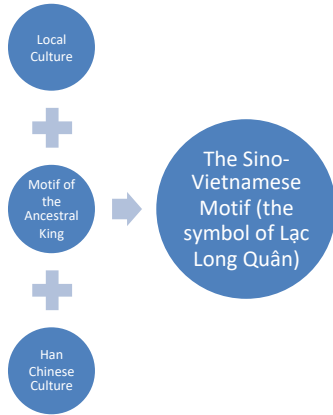


Table 1. The formation of the Sino-Vietnamese motif: Lạc Long Quân

It can be seen that the formation of the Sino-Vietnamese motif during the stage of building Vietnamese independence was a transition from the myths of world creation, such as *Truyện quả bầu* (The Story of the Gourd), *Đẻ đất đẻ nước* (The Birth of Earth and Water) and others, imbued with Southeast Asian indigenous features (Dinh 2018: 67–92), to country-founding myths. Why did the Vietnamese at that time tend to insert Chinese cultural elements into their country-founding myths? The answer may be that the model of the nation (or kingdom) used by the Vietnamese during the period of building feudal independence and autonomy was basically an imitation of China’s model. Therefore, an archetypal kingdom of the Chinese and a country-founding legend related to Chinese culture seemed to be the most suitable model according to the notion of “*vô tổn Trung Hoa*” which was already deeply rooted in the thinking of Vietnamese Confucian intellectuals, as discussed below.

Nowadays, it is crucial that newly-founded states gain official recognition from the international community and especially from the United Nations (for example, the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste in 2002 or South Sudan in 2012), and they also need recognition from their neighbors. In the history of Vietnam, if vassalage was not mentioned, most of the independent and autonomous states established in Vietnam (with kings) should be recognized by neighboring kingdoms, including China. Is it true that the creation of a Sino-Vietnamese motif for ancestral kings was aimed at gaining easy recognition from Chinese emperors? Certainly, the formation of the Sino-Vietnamese motif in Great Viet (Đại Việt) culture was not smooth because there always existed resistance (implicit or overt) against Han ethnic elements being included in



history books or in the culture of the Vietnamese. Take for example King Tự Đức's royal edict which was mentioned above. Those forms of resistance mirror the actions of the "virgin girl" described in Nguyễn Huy Thiệp's analogy. However, it is through this mythological Sino-Vietnamese motif that "Mother Âu Cơ" had an opportunity to play her role as the Nation's Mother. Because of the "Han" origin (offspring of Shennong), Lạc Long Quân could not become the Vietnamese Nation's Forefather. Instead, only King Hung (Âu Cơ's son) could be seen as truly deserving of the position. This also explains why, during the feudal period, although the Vietnamese always adopted the Chinese patriarchal viewpoint as their "pillar" (via Confucian concepts such as the Three Principles and Five Constant Virtues and the Four Virtues Applied to the Three Male Figures) there were still indigenous elements that existed which were opposite to those Confucian views (such as *lệnh ông không bằng cồng bà*— "the wife's say is more decisive than the husband's", and *nhất vợ nhì trời*— "one's wife comes first, and Heaven second"). In the opposite direction, the Nguyễn Huy Thiệp complex has always arisen in the sentiments of Vietnamese people. Confucian influences are still rather strong in Vietnamese culture, and it is especially the case that the concept of "*vô tốn Trung Hoa*" still lingers, in part, because it formed the "Han Chinese ethnic" origin of Lạc Long Quân.

### **The Nguyễn Huy Thiệp Complex and the Han Ethnic (漢人) Origin of Lạc Long Quân**

To study the "Han ethnic origin" of Lạc Long Quân, it is first essential to understand the Vietnamese Confucian concept of "*vô tốn Trung Hoa*." (無遜中華, non-inferiority to China) is "an ideological tendency" that arose under the Trần Dynasty and strongly developed during the Lê Dynasty. Its expectation was that efforts to convert the Vietnamese culture to the Chinese standards would be a positive direction. It was an ideological tendency held primarily by Confucian scholars (*Vn, Nho gia*). The vast majority of Vietnamese Confucians, even great scholars like Phạm Sư Mạnh under the Trần Dynasty or Lê Quý Đôn under the Lê Dynasty, took the Chinese culture and civilization as the system of reference whenever pondering matters related to culture or ideology. This reflected the national inferiority complex and the attitude of *dân tộc* "*Nam nhân Bắc hướng*" (Southern people looking toward the North). Even Confucian patriots, when they wanted to prove that Vietnam was a "civilized" country, would make assertions such as "*Hồ Việt đồng phong các đệ huynh*" (Nguyễn Trung Ngạn, meaning "the Chinese and the Vietnamese are brothers sharing the same customs") or that Vietnamese civilization was "no different from China" ("*bất dị Trung Quốc*") or that it was "not inferior to China" ("*vô tốn Trung Quốc*") (Lê Quý Đôn). Even bolder thinkers such as Hồ Quý Ly, who dared to disparage many Confucians from Confucius to Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi, and posited many unique perspectives on academics and culture, when responding to the Northerners about our nation's customs, stated:

‘Dục vấn An Nam sự  
An Nam phong tục thuần.  
Y quan Đường chế độ  
Lễ nhạc Hán quân thần.’

Meaning:

Do not ask about Viet Nam’s affairs (because)  
Viet Nam’s customs are extremely beautiful  
Clothes are similar to those of the Tang Dynasty  
Rites and music are the same to the Han era.

Having rites and music that were ‘the same as those from the Han era,’ and having ‘clothing similar to that of the Tang Dynasty’ was considered a criterion for Vietnam’s status as a civilized country (Trần Q. V. et al 2015, 478–479). In reality, the concept of “*vô tồn Trung Hoa*” did not only create the symbol Lạc Long Quân, but it also contributed to the formation of many other ancestral symbols of the Vietnamese. The comparison table below shows the correlation between ancestral symbols of China and Vietnam.

	Chinese	Vietnamese
Symbol of the origin	Pan Gu egg (盤古, Vn. Bàn Cổ)	Sac of one hundred eggs (trăm trứng)
Legend	Liu Yi zhuan (柳毅傳)	Legend of Lạc Long Quân - Âu Cơ
Ancestral origin (Vn. tổ tiên)	Fuxi (伏羲) - Shennong (神農, Vn. Thần Nông)	Viêm Đế - Thần Nông
Ancestral mother	Nu Wa (女媧)	Âu Cơ
Ancestral king	Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors (三皇五帝)	Three Kings: Kinh Dương Vương, Lạc Long Quân, Hùng Vương
Ancestral clan	Fuxi Clan (伏羲氏), Shennong Clan (神農氏), Nuwa Clan (女媧氏)	Hồng Bàng Clan
Forefather	Pan Gu (Vn. Bàn Cổ)	Thủy tổ [Ancestor](Nam bang thủy tổ)
Ancestral symbol (Vn. tổ tiên)	Dragon	Dragon and Fairy

Table 2. Comparison of ancestral symbols between the Chinese and the Vietnamese (Dinh 2018, 29)

This was a popular standard of Vietnamese Confucian intellectuals in feudal times who were likely unaware that their thinking was indicative of a latent national inferiority complex. In accordance with those standards though, Vietnamese Confucian intellectuals had to royalize many indigenous cultural elements (by Sinicizing Vietnamese culture) by eliminating folk village tutelary gods, compiling records and stories of deities, and by legitimizing or Sinicizing purely Vietnamese names into Sino- Vietnamese ones (for



example Kê Noi to Cổ Nhuế, T'Lèm and Chèm to Từ Liêm). This was especially necessary for legitimizing the nation's forefathers.

This was a necessary condition for the Nation's Forefather, Lạc Long Quân, "to be born;" however, the sufficient condition for him to become righteous in Vietnamese culture was that he must have an ancestral relationship with the Vietnamese people rather than demonstrate absolute adherence to China. And the Sino-Vietnamese motif became a "perfect couple" sufficient for both the satisfaction of mandarin classes and the recognition of the masses. The "Han ethnic" origin of the symbol of Lạc Long Quân came into existence out of this standard. It is easy to realize that, from the Nguyễn Huy Thiệp complex to the three endogenous elements of the Vietnamese, or the concept of "*vô tón Trung Hoa*" to the Han ethnic origin of Lạc Long Quân, it was all the process of the formation of the nation's forefather through writing a script and data also dependent on Chinese language and conventions.

From the perspective of symbolism, we can see that the birth and existence of Lạc Long Quân sprung from a legitimate aspiration of the Vietnamese; their desire for independence as a country ruled by a King (or the nation's forefather) such that they would not be inferior to China. By linking the word Lạc (the surname of Lạc Long Quân) with the word *Lạc* (in the name of Lạc Việt) and *Lạc bird* in many current publications, we can realize the significance of this sign (Lạc) as the Vietnamese element (or the indigenous element of the Vietnamese) within the signifier—the Nation's Forefather, Lạc Long Quân (Đinh 2018b, 710).

In general, country-founding myths that create rulers, ancestral kings, or national forefathers, are a phenomenon popular among many cultures throughout the world. Multitudenous examples exist such as King David of the Jews and the Flame Emperor and Yellow Emperor of the Chinese. However, in Vietnam, although the country-founding mythology was "completed" in the medieval period with various symbols like Hùng Vương or Lạc Long Quân, "the demand for tradition creation" has not decreased but has instead been further "perfected" in the twenty-first century.

A recent example can be observed in the construction of statues of the eighteen Hùng kings, which included plaques conveying their respective reigning titles, lifespans, and number of wives and children. These details were then recognized as 'records' in Vietnam in 2015 (T. B. Dũng 2015). Recently, some have "discovered" that the nineteenth Hùng king (Lê 2016) and the temple of Kinh Dương Vương (who is considered to have been the grandfather of Hùng Vương) were built at a cost of 500 billion Vietnamese dong; about \$20 million US dollars (Đoàn 2012). These cases clearly show the continuing demand for "tradition creation," which can also be shown by the construction of the temple to the Nation's Mother Âu Cơ which started on 18 September 2001.

Through the symbolic perspective, it is demonstrated that the Sino elements within

the symbol Lạc Long Quân were formed from the concept of “*vô tĩn Trung Hoa*” which represents a sort of reactivity rooted in the Nguyễn Huy Thiệp complex. As a country-founding myth, the symbol of Lạc Long Quân was royalized (or Sinicized) through a Sino-Vietnamese motif—the symbolic pair of a Dragon Father and Fairy Mother, or, if the analogy is removed, a Han-Chinese Father and a Vietnamese Mother. This is an inevitable consequence of an ethnocentric viewpoint (or the previously mentioned sentiment of Trần Quốc Vượng’s that Southern people should look towards the North) held by Confucian intellectuals. That was their impetus for creating the “half Chinese, half Vietnamese” forefather of the Vietnamese people. Considering China to be a de facto model of civilization and progress, they built up the symbol of an ancestral king (Lạc Long Quân) who had Han Chinese ethnic origins.

The above concept not only held influence throughout the feudal period but also continues to impact on a number of intellectuals in modern society who obsess over the supposed Han ethnic origin of the nation. That historical obsession has led some modern scholars, like Đào Duy Anh, to give controversial explanations about their nation’s ancestors by claiming that the origin of the Vietnamese was from China or that the totem of the Vietnamese was the Lạc bird which originated from China (Đào 2005: 53). Some scholars even provided definitive claims about “the Han ethnic origin” of the Vietnamese without feeling the slightest need to verify that claim (Đỗ Ngọc Bích 2010). This has kept the academic community in a state of perpetual debate for this past decade. It generally rings true that the Vietnamese people have been continually grateful to Chinese culture which has brought about many achievements of civilization for themselves and humankind, but they do not need to express this gratitude by unwillingly and non-scientifically accepting the Han people as their ancestors.

## Conclusion

Thanks to modern methodologies and interpretive frameworks (such as Anthony Smith’s ethnosymbolism and Eric Hobsbawm’s invented tradition) as well as research methods in terms of regional studies, archaeology, and especially genetics, the hypothesis of the “Han origin” of the Vietnamese has been increasingly found to contain many inadequacies and irrationalities. However, from the symbolic perspective, the formation of the symbol Lạc Long Quân through the concept of “*vô tĩn Trung Hoa*” is completely reasonable because the Vietnamese people have continually operated under the Nguyễn Huy Thiệp complex. Through this study, it can be affirmed that the Forefather, Lạc Long Quân, a typical symbol in traditional Vietnamese culture, was formed from a Sino-Vietnamese motif. He cannot be seriously entertained as having been a historical figure. Better understanding of the complexity of Sino-Vietnamese cultural exchange can be found through reflections on the Nguyễn Huy Thiệp

complex. Understanding this characteristic not only yields better comprehension of the Vietnamese nation's history, but, more importantly, it aids in understanding that this complex has long existed in the Vietnamese national and ethnic sentiment, and is likewise present in a wide swath of traditional cultural elements of Vietnam. This complex not only existed in the past but still survives at present. This is proven by the enduring concepts of the Vietnamese as “offspring of the Lạc and the Hồng;” “offspring of the Dragon and the Fairy.”

## Acknowledgment

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## Conflict of Interest

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

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Three principles (the ruler guides his subjects, the father guides his son and the husband guides his wife) and five constant virtues (benevolence [仁], righteousness [義], propriety [禮], wisdom [智], and fidelity [信]).
- <sup>2</sup> Confucian moral injunctions for women, namely: obey in turn three males: one's father, husband and son. Further, there are the four virtues of morality 德, physical charm 容, propriety in speech 言, and efficiency in needlework (功).
- <sup>3</sup> This formation is further boosted through the construction of the temple dedicated to the Nation's Mother Âu Cơ on 18 September 2001, on Ốc Sơn Peak within the complex of Hùng Kings' temples, Hy Cương Commune, Lâm Thao District, Phú Thọ Province.
- <sup>4</sup> If the country-founding myth of the Vietnamese stopped at the symbol Âu Cơ (or the Nation's Mother of the Vietnamese), perhaps the issue of the Nation's Forefather would not be so complicated that it leads to heated debates at present.
- <sup>5</sup> The Confucian concept of filial piety views not bearing a son as impious (不孝有三, 無後為大— As Mencius said, “Among three crimes of filial piety, the crime of not having a son is the worst.”).
- <sup>6</sup> According to Chinese mythology, the universe was a huge cosmic egg that coalesced for 8,000 years and then Pangu emerged from it.
- <sup>7</sup> From a biological point of view, humans are mammals with live-bearing viviparous reproduction (viviparity) rather than through egg-laying (oviparity). Thus, the above-mentioned myths of ancestral origin are not valid for historical or biological research, but are considered creations of literature and art.

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## B O O K   R E V I E W S

- Zeng Yong (曾勇), *A Study of the Life Values of Ge Hong and Ge Changgeng* (葛洪, 葛長庚入生價值觀研究)  
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**Zeng Yong (曾勇), *A Study of the Life Values of Ge Hong and Ge Changgeng* (葛洪, 葛長庚入生價值觀研究). Beijing: People's Publishing House, 2021, 616 pp.**

**ISBN: 978-7-01-022728-3, ¥ 138 (pbk)**

**ZHONG Hui**

Jiangxi Normal University, China

Professor Zeng Yong's *A Study of Life Values of Ge Hong and Ge Changgeng* is another masterpiece launched by the New Knowledge Library of National Studies. This book is the first academic work in China to study the philosophy of life values of Taoism in a more systematic way. It was published and distributed by People's Publishing House in 2021. Its book number is ISBN:978-7-01-022728-3, with a total of 600,000 words, and 616 pages.

The author uses the methods of documentary evidence, the combination of history and theory, comparative analysis, etc., closely following the literature, organic combination of point, surface and body, in-depth excavation, combing the life values of the two high Taoists, outlining and constructing the philosophical system of Taoist life values. The book consists of "Introduction", "Conclusion", and the first and second chapters of the text, with ten chapters. The author takes the Taoist culture of the two historical periods of the Two Jin Dynasties and the Southern Song Dynasty as the background and focuses on two representative Taoists, Ge Hong in the Two Jin Dynasties and Ge Changgeng (Bai Yuchan) in the Southern Song Dynasty. Through the case studies of Taoist figures, the author examines and interprets their life value meanings, life value ideals and life value practices, enters the life world and ideal realm of body cultivation, and reveals their life values in body cultivation. The study will examine and interpret the meaning of their life values, life value ideals and life value practices, enter into the world of life and ideal world of cultivation, reveal the fundamental significance of their life values in the cultivation of body and practice and the characteristics of Taoism, and then summarize the core content of Taoist life values and refine the basic characteristics of Taoist life values. The "Introduction" section lays the foundation for the whole book, and the "Conclusion" section summarizes and sublimates it so that it is coherent and integrated with each other.

The core contents of Taoist life values are summarized in Zeng's book as follows: the code of life of "respecting the Way" and "valuing virtue", the way of life of "cherishing life" and "embracing simplicity". The core elements of Taoist life values are summarized in Zeng's book as follows: the life principle of "respecting the Way" and "valuing virtue",

the lifestyle of “cherishing life” and “embracing simplicity”, the ethical orientation of “promoting goodness” and “shangan” (尚安), and the ultimate ideal of “attaining immortality”. The basic characteristics of Taoist life values are summarized as follows: the unity of life in which “Tao” leads to “three views”, the self-purpose of “persuading goodness to become immortal”, and the transcendence of eternal life in which life is refined at the same time; the immortality of immortality, the dream of value generation, and the thought of ethical implications in three aspects. The author explains Taoism’s dream of immortality and its life implications from three aspects: the immortality of longevity, the dream of value generation, and the thought of ethical implications. By analyzing the life values of Ge Hong and Ge Changgeng, the author puts forward the view that “Taoism takes Tao as the essence, life as the carrier, and life and Tao as the value convergence”, which should be considered a fair and impartial argument.

The author’s distinctive viewpoints, extensive quotations, and well-researched arguments, combined with life perceptions, create a Taoist philosophy of life value monograph. This book is novel in perspective, detailed in content, clear in thought, profound in theory, and mature in research techniques. This book is an exemplary work of the modern transformation of Chinese traditional culture (Taoism) with its reasonable layout and structure!

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**Tony Swain, *Confucianism in China: An Introduction*. London and New York:**

**Bloomsbury, 2017, xiii, 297 pp.**

**ISBN: 978-1-4742-4243-1, \$34.95 (pbk)**

**Carole M. CUSACK**

University of Sydney, Australia

Tony Swain's *Confucianism in China: An Introduction* is an interesting and readable study, which is accessible to readers with minimal specialist knowledge, yet is methodologically complex enough to satisfy more advanced audiences. Part One consists of two chapters; "On Confucianism and religion" and "The way of the Ru". The first demonstrates how enmeshed Western scholarly arguments about the nature of religion are with Western efforts to classify the traditions and customs of the "other" (peoples encountered during the colonial era, roughly from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries). Also, scholars from non-Western cultures—including China—absorbed ideas from colonisers, and in the contemporary, globalised world it is difficult to isolate particular strands. Swain notes that Confucius was not a Confucian, and that Rujiao (the way of the scholar) was not a religion, though he thinks that it may be becoming one. This is due to the imbrication of Western and Chinese learning in modernity, and the influence of Mou Zongsan, the premier Ru scholar of the twentieth century, and one of the authors of a 1958 manifesto that argued core ideas "are pervaded by [religious] sentiments, and hence [are] quite different from occidental atheism" (p. 17). The second chapter is largely an exposition of these core Ru ideas.

Part Two has three chapters; the first, "A history of sages," examines the life context of Konzi, the mythology of King Wen and King Wu of Zhou, the five "Confucian classics", and the revival of ritual that he transmitted (an act that Swain regards as innovation, though Kongzi denied this). Chapter 4, "Two paths: mysticism and ritual", discusses rival thinkers Mengzi (Mencius, or Master Meng) and Xunzi (Xun Kuang, or Master Xun). The former discussed Heaven and human nature extensively, arguing humans are innately good. The latter opposed this view, and argued that rites (li) were "introduced into the world by ancient sage-kings in order to harmoniously satisfy human desires" (p. 85). He did not think the classics (which he knew well) were as important as ritual and music in the cultivation of human virtue. This part concludes with "From ritual masters to Classicists" which opens with a sketch of the Han dynasty as crucial to China, and the Ru tradition as equally essential, and unpicks this intimate connection as a fabrication, analysing the historians Sima Qian and Ban Gu, noting that "During the

Han, Ru began telling a story that is still being told today ... the First Emperor, in his ruthless quest for military supremacy, detested the cultured and moral ways of the Ru. To ensure their teachings did not hinder him, he ordered their Classics to be burnt” (p. 97). This, though based on Sima Qian, is not accurate; Swan notes that it is during the Han Dynasty that the Ru became classicists, and not ritual specialists. He concludes that while the Han era transformed the Ru, the later experience of Daoism and Buddhism were equally, if not more, transformative.

Part Three opens with “Learning of the Dao”, which establishes the idea of the Three Teachings (Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism), and that the reunification under the Sui dynasty had initially favoured Buddhism, though the Tang rulers favoured Daoism. The Ru rose to prominence from the start of the Song dynasty (960 CE). The development of print as a mode of textual manufacture and of the examination system as the prioritisation of statecraft, and the emergence of a number of powerful teachers, particularly Zhu Xi, created a different context. Chapter 7, “The Principle of the Heart and Mind,” recovers China’s past as a world-dominating power, and considers the relationship between the Ru and the Ming dynasty. Teachers including Wang Yangming, whose fusion of the Ru and Chan Buddhism was notable, and Wang Gen who argued that self-cultivation would rectify the world. The Manchu takeover in 1644 challenged China by not being ethnic Han, and the Ru played a part in creating stability. Part Four starts with Chapter 8, “The Great Unity,” which interrogates the idea of datong, the Great Unity, which Swan argues is not Confucian, and the nineteenth century transformation which resulted in Hong Xiuquan (1814–1864) claiming to be the younger brother of Jesus; he went on to lead the Taiping Rebellion, which Swain claims was a revolution, given it was the first “to comprehensively condemn the Ru edifice” (p. 171).

After this came the Boxer Rebellion, and the deposition of the Last Emperor, Pu-Yi (1906–1967) in 1912 when he was just six years old. Swain briefly covers the warlord period, the rise of the new Culture Movement, and the critique of Ru ideals that emerged in the early Communist period. The ideal of venerating classics was antithetical to a generation that had turned its back on authority. Liang Shuming (1893–1988) is identified as the harbinger of the New Ru Learning, which his colleague Xiong Shili (1885–1968) was the direct founder of. The fate of disestablished Confucian scholars after the Revolution is considered; these two men were harassed, their books burned, and safety threatened during the “anti-Kongzi campaign ... [when] ‘Kongzi’ was synonymous with ‘reactionary’” (p. 200). The next chapter, “New Ru learning,” discusses the movement that Swain claims “was an ingenious concoction that turned fragmentary developments into a well-defined commodity” (p. 204) in the 1980s. Fang Keli (1938–2020) headed up the committee that organised fifteen scholars into three generations that defined the New Ru Learning. The “second generation” (Tang Junyi, Xu Fuguan, and Mou Zongsan) authored the Manifesto mentioned above, published initially in two

Taiwanese journals, *Democratic Review* and *National Renaissance*; Swain sees these authors as “seeking to consolidate a revival, even perhaps to initiate a movement” (p. 212). Mou argued that China could incorporate Western science and technology without being diminished, as China could advance “the West’s philosophical and religious understanding” (p. 220).

The final chapter of *Confucianism in China: An Introduction* brings the Confucian tradition into the twenty-first century. Swain discusses the 2008 Olympic Games, the proliferation of statues of Kongzi in China, the contribution of Jiang Qing (b. 1953) to the promotion of Ru learning as the core of Chinese culture and the code that must be returned to for the future, and efforts to place Confucianism as a “de facto civil religion” (p. 235, quoting Anna Sun). There are birthday celebrations every year for Kongzi in Qufu, children are being taught the Classics again, and films like Hu Mei’s *Kongzi* (2010) starring Chow Yun-fat place Confucius at the heart of Chinese civilization. This is an interesting history of Kongzi and his followers, and as interesting a historiography of writings (Western and Eastern) about Confucianism and religion from the mid-nineteenth century to the present. Swain’s undecided conclusion as to whether the Ru might become a state-sponsored ideology or state religion is actually less important than it might seem. The destination is not really the story; rather the journey holds the reader’s attention.



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Elisabetta Porcu and Michael Dylan Foster (ed.), *Matsuri and Religion: Complexity, Con-tinuity, and Creativity in Japanese Festivals*. Leiden: Brill, 2021, 332 pp. ISBN: 978-90-04-46652-4, €74 (pbk)

**Dana MIRSALIS**

Pacific University, USA

*Matsuri and Religion: Complexity, Continuity, and Creativity in Japanese Festivals*, edited by Elisabetta Porcu and Michael Dylan Foster, is a rich new volume on *matsuri*, Japanese festivals. The ten chapters were originally published in 2020 as a special issue of the *Journal of Religion in Japan* and have been repackaged in book format.

Porcu and Foster's introduction leads the reader through the broader themes of the volume as well as their theoretical and methodological underpinnings. They imagine the volume as a "multi-sited ethnographic, historical, and theoretical study" (1) that crosses disciplinary boundaries. They, along with their fellow contributors in the nine main chapters of the volume, focus on three major themes—complexity, continuity, and creativity. To briefly offer an overview of how they engage with and define these terms, they examine *complexity* not only of the structure of festivals but also of symbolism, sociality and interaction, and historical interpretation. They highlight the imagined (or desired) historical *continuity* of festivals—both with the past iterations of the festival and with future generations' performances. Finally, they think of *creativity* as being entwined with *continuity*, as communities adapt festivals in the face of demographic, social, and economic shifts. Foster and Porcu start from the premise that *matsuri* "are intrinsic to religious, social, cultural, touristic and recreational life in Japan" (1), but also that *matsuri* are "social and historical phenomena" that are "neither static nor immutable" (2). They argue that "*matsuri* play significant roles in the lives of individuals and communities and often serve as both markers and makers of identity" (2).

In Chapter 2, Tsukahara Shinji considers the float decorations of the Sawara Grand Festival in Chiba. He traces the origins of the current decorations—most of which date to the late nineteenth and early twentieth century—noting that while these figures are grounded in prewar nationalism, as they are drawn heavily from emperors, mythological ancestors, and historical figures, they were freely chosen by the people of Sawara due to their contemporaneous popularity. He then brings the reader into the present, pointing out that these same figures are now "bleached" of their earlier associations, seen mainly as the "cute" and "cool" mascots of the various wards that sponsor the floats. One important intervention Tsukahara makes in this chapter is noting the ways

in which anthropologists and folklorists tend to overlook durable artifacts produced on commission by professionals due to a tendency to emphasize the creators' intentions, rather than the emotions and actions that these artifacts inspire in the people viewing and using them. As he observes, these figures were created more than a century ago, yet people's understanding of them has not remained static.

In Chapter 3, Elisabetta Porcu reflects on Gion Matsuri as a "contested zone" by exploring multiple layers of the festival and the interactions between different societal actors, such as neighborhood communities that sponsor floats, the local government, businesses, the tourism industry, and the economy. Through her ethnographic work, she focuses on the struggle between different actors around the reinstatement of the "*ato matsuri*" in 2014 and the negotiation between religious and secular boundaries. In particular, the debate over the reinstatement of the *ato matsuri* was between those who saw it as a ploy to restructure the festival for the sake of tourists and those who saw it as a "return" to the "original" version of the festival—and saw tourism and faith as "integrated rather than conflicting forces" (70). Porcu's chapter offers a fascinating case study in conflicting local interpretations of and motivations for *matsuri*.

In Chapter 4, John Breen explores the Sannō Festival. While Hiyoshi Shrine (and some previous scholarship) presents the festival as ancient and immutable, Breen argues that the festival in its current form is a product of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This chapter, perhaps more than any other in the volume, is interested in debunking myths of unbroken transmission, carefully piecing together all the different texts of the festival to chart the ways that the festival—and even the identities of the enshrined deities—have shifted over time, as well as the historical context for each of these shifts.

In Chapter 5, Michael Dylan Foster introduces the reader to the Namahage of Akita Prefecture in three different guises—as a "private" ritual performed by and within a small community, as a "public" performance at a shrine festival, and as a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity item. In particular, he explores the ways that "religion" is articulated in each of these iterations of the "same" tradition and how that concept of religion is tied to concepts of community and intended audience. He coins the term "*brönirism*" to conceptualize notions of change and deviation within different iterations of the "same" tradition, focusing not on the "authenticity" of the iteration but on the meanings and intended audience of each iteration. Foster suggests that "with the different iterations of Namahage, we are actually witnessing not loss, but rather a sort of generation or proliferation of new forms, or at least new contexts in which old forms can mutate, expand, and evolve" (155).

In Chapter 6, Scott Schnell considers the rituals performed around bear hunts by the *matagi*, a specific group of hunters known for their intimate understanding of and relationship to mountainous areas. He highlights the way that *matagi*'s identities are defined by their (both physical and metaphorical) boundary crossing, which leads them



to occupy roles as mediators between the domesticated human and untamed natural/spiritual realms. Schnell argues that the rituals the *matagi* perform “both reflect and encourage reciprocal relationship with other species, and the recognition of one’s own place within an interdependent network” (166), but also legitimize their activities. Schnell’s work on the often-overlooked *matagi* is ground-breaking, and his careful attention to the way that demographic shifts are impacting the *matagi* and their rituals is especially deft.

In Chapter 7, Yagi Tōru analyzes year-end rituals that are unique to the Kyoto area, arguing that they tend to focus on purification of the participants and prayer for good fortune and good harvest in the coming year. This chapter is somewhat of a departure from the rest of the volume (discussed in more depth below) in that Yagi is primarily interested in “age-old regional beliefs” and focuses on the “folkloric significance of the events themselves and what this reveals about the underlying beliefs of the participants” (196). Much of the chapter is devoted to interpreting the symbolism and timing of various festivals, drawing both from historical documents and ethnographic fieldwork, although Yagi does note some differences in how the rituals may be interpreted in the contemporary world.

In Chapter 8, Andrea Giolai examines the Kasuga Wakamiya Onmatsuri, countering the narratives of a festival largely unchanged since time immemorial. Giolai instead approaches the “fractal” features of the festival to examine the dissonances and inconsistencies—such as the erasure of Buddhist institutions and influences in the contemporary narrative of the festival’s founding—that appear in linear narratives of the Onmatsuri. He uses the metaphor of the fractal to visualize the complex interplay between the constituent “parts” of the festival and the whole, arguing that “access to any of these aspects simultaneously provides access to the large-scale dimension of the entire matsuri” (225), creating “the feeling of being part of an event (the *whole*) contained in the space of a single moment (a *part* of that whole)” (240–241). He argues that the longevity and ritual efficacy of the festival hinge upon the generation and circulation of “atmospheres of the past,” referring to “the felt evocation of complex systems of feelings enabled by ‘ostensive signs’ such as the costumes in a parade, the music performed, or the ritual symbols displayed” (238).

In Chapter 9, Susanne Klein focuses on how demographic change has affected two different ritual performance groups in Niigata Prefecture. Klein illustrates the way that these groups are torn between a desire to faithfully transmit the practices that they identify as being unchanging since time immemorial and the pragmatic need to cope with a declining and greying population. Klein skillfully and empathetically engages with her participants’ claims that their tradition is unchanging even as she teases out the changes that have occurred, sometimes because of conscious decisions by the caretakers of those traditions. Ultimately, she positions the groups as intending to both reproduce

the past and connect that past to the future through transmission of their practice to the next generation.

The final chapter is a photographic essay by Ogano Minoru, a professional photographer (mainly of trains) who has a passion for photographing festivals. His photographic essay is accompanied by an introduction by his friend and collaborator, Michael Dylan Foster, who introduces the reader to both Ogano and his work.

As a whole, the volume feels tightly knit, with most of the pieces in conversation with each other. The volume is also beautifully put together and it includes color photographs, which vibrantly depict the festivals being discussed. Unfortunately, the color photographs put the price of the paperback at a hair-raising \$84, far out of the price range of many readers.

For those readers who might be geared toward teaching, Porcu and Foster's chapters might be particularly generative for a lesson about touristic consumption (and community marketing) of religious traditions, while Schnell and Klein's chapters could open some compelling conversations about demographic shifts in rural areas and community-transmission of religious practices. Tsukahara's chapter would also teach well in a class on religion and nationalism in Japan, given his approach to the "bleaching" of nationalistic figures into "cute" mascots. Additionally, Foster's *brönirism* is an especially helpful conceptual framework for thinking about change within rituals and practices without labeling that change as necessarily a "degradation" of the "original" practice.

One commendable aspect of this volume is the engagement with and translation of Japanese scholarship. Notably, one of the chapters (Yagi) is a translation of a portion of a previously published Japanese monograph, one chapter (Tsukahara) was written for the volume but translated from Japanese, and the final photographic essay (Foster and Ogano) is co-written/translated by Foster. Ogano's work, especially, provides an alternative viewpoint on *matsuri* that would be likely overlooked in many other academic volumes.

Unfortunately, one minor point I must raise is that the Yagi chapter feels slightly out of step with the rest of the volume—perhaps as it is the only piece not written for the volume specifically, but in large part due to its approach. While the other pieces are careful to track historical change in *matsuri*, Yagi's piece draws on historical material mainly to explain contemporary practices. Perhaps these practices and their meanings have remained largely static over hundreds of years, but this approach stands out in a volume that otherwise devotes a large amount of page space to proving that *matsuri* are constantly changing and evolving. However, this is a minor point, and is more than outweighed by the increased accessibility of Yagi's work for non-Japanese-speaking audiences.

On the whole, this is an excellent, tightly-knit volume that provides a wide range

of case studies of continuity and change in *matsuri* and will serve both teachers and researchers of Japanese religion well.

# Call for Papers

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