

## The Yeosu Headquarters Temple Complex as a Center for Social Welfare and Humanitarian Aid

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**ABSTRACT:** As Ernst Troeltsch (1865–1923) noted, Christianity regarded the love of God and the charitable service to fellow human beings as necessarily united. The Cathedral Square of Siena, where one of the oldest hospitals in the world was built next to the cathedral, is one among several spatial examples of this principle. But this wholistic theology is also found in Eastern religions, both old and new. The theology of Daesoon Jinrihoe, the largest Korean new religion, is centered on the idea of “mutual beneficence,” and has generated an impressive network of charitable and social welfare activities, now expanding internationally from Korea. Like Cathedral Square in Siena, the Yeosu Headquarters Temple Complex of Daesoon Jinrihoe serves as both the spiritual and the social welfare center of the religion.

**KEYWORDS:** Daesoon Jinrihoe, Yeosu Headquarters Temple Complex, Kang Jeungsan, Park Wudang, Mutual Beneficence, Daejin International Volunteers Association (DIVA).

### *Reading Troeltsch in Siena*

One of the most famous 20<sup>th</sup> century books about religion is *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, published in 1912 (and translated into English by theologian Olive Wyon, 1881–1966, in 1931) by German theologian, historian and social scientist Ernst Troeltsch (1865–1923). The book (Troeltsch 1912, 1931) is often quoted today for its distinction between “church” and “sect.” However, this was not its main focus.

The main argument of Troeltsch was that Christianity was gradually transformed from a millenarian sect awaiting the imminent end of the world into a church with a strong social ethic, partially derived from Greek and Roman sources. The center of Christianity became love of fellow human beings, which

manifested in a number of charitable works that were perceived as integrated, rather than separated, from the Christian love of God (Molendijk 2018, 57). This ethos had a spatial dimension, and Christians built complexes that were at the same time sacred spaces and centers of charity and welfare.

I was reminded of this spatiality of Christian social teachings while visiting the Italian city of Siena in January 2018. In Siena, Piazza Duomo, or Cathedral Square, hosts both a magnificent cathedral and an institution called Santa Maria della Scala, which was part of the same complex. Santa Maria della Scala is one of the oldest hospitals in the world, but it was much more. The sick, if they were poor, were given free meals and treatments. Abandoned and neglected children found a home, clothing, and schooling. Meals were served to the poor three times a week, and girls in need received a dowry and help to find a suitable husband (Baron 1990).

Troeltsch may be a good guide in visiting Santa Maria della Scala, discovering its many spaces for prayer and meditation, and understanding that it was not separated from the cathedral. The question whether it was a religious or charitable space does not make sense: it was both. There was no special separation between religion and social welfare in Medieval Siena, and pilgrims came to visit both a sacred space and a unique social institution.

### *Daesoon Jinrihoe and Social Welfare*

While it is well possible that Christians invented the modern hospital, with Santa Maria Nuova in Florence as a credible competitor of Siena's Santa Maria della Scala for the title of the oldest such institution in the world (Park and Henderson 1991), only a Eurocentric prejudice would claim that only Christians were able to build spaces that at the same time were deeply sacred and provided social welfare services. This happened in most other religions. Buddhist temples provided a range of social services in the past, and continue to do so today. For example, in Japan as early as in 593 CE, "a large Buddhist temple called Shitennoh-ji was completed [...] by Prince Shotoku [574–622] and had attached to it a hospital, dispensary, orphanage and almshouse" (Iwasa 1966, 241). It has been claimed that India had its first institutions similar to hospitals roughly at the same time as Europe (Agrawal and Goyal 2011).

New religions in Eastern Asia continue this tradition, and some of them have created impressive systems of social welfare. One example is Daesoon Jinrihoe, the largest Korean new religion, which recognizes, as the incarnated Supreme God, Kang Jeungsan (1871–1909). Kang himself created an integrated sacred and social space with the Donggok Clinic, where he cured both physical and spiritual illnesses, and where he passed away in 1909.

Kang performed in the Donggok Clinic a special set of rituals known as “the Reordering Work for the Clinics of All Nations,” which is described by Daesoon Jinrihoe as follows:

In 1908, He [Kang] built Copper Valley (Donggok) Clinic and carried out the Reordering Work for the Clinics of All Nations to save humanity from all diseases. He said “with this Work I will revive the dead, allow the blind to regain their sight, allow the crippled to walk once more, and clear away all diseases.” He further added, “Those who receive ‘Descending Spirit’ from Heaven will be able to cure the sick with merely a touch or even a glance. In the future, the ‘Descending Spirit’ from Heaven will come down to you. Therefore, you should sincerely devote yourselves in cultivation” (Daesoon Jinrihoe 2017, 20).

These are prophetic words about a better world, an earthly paradise promised for the future. But they also indicate that hospitals and clinics were important for Kang, and he asked his disciples to approach them with care and love.

In Daesoon Thought, the omniscient and omnipresent Supreme God, who incarnated as Kang Jeungsan, presides over three realms: Heaven, Earth, and Humanity. God’s Reordering Works of Heaven and Earth performed by Kang Jeungsan—“many” of which took place at the location of Donggok Clinic, including the potential “curing of all forms of disease in the world” (Daesoon Jinrihoe 2017, 20)—are supposed to rectify disorders that accumulated over thousands of years. Although God, i.e. Kang Jeungsan, did complete this truly global Work, humanity should cooperate by practicing the principle of reciprocating favors out of gratitude (*Boeun sangsaeng*).

The key principle of Daesoon Jinrihoe is “the resolution of grievances for mutual beneficence” (*Haewon sangsaeng*). It is both a religious and a social principle. It deals with the whole universe and with cosmic grievances to be resolved, yet at the same time it calls for overcoming widespread human grievances and for a concrete mutual beneficence through social welfare (Kim 2017).

Park Wudang (1917–1995 in the lunar calendar used by the movement, or 1918–1996 according to the solar calendar) succeeded in the religious orthodoxy recognized by Daesoon Jinrihoe after Kang Jeung-san and Jo Jeong-san (1895–1958). One of his major achievements was the building of the magnificent Yeosu Headquarters Temple Complex. At the same time, Park Wudang put the principles of *Haewon sangsaeng* and *Boeun sangsaeng* into practice, by making the Yeosu Headquarters the center of an impressive network of Daesoon Jinrihoe’s social welfare activities.

Daesoon Jinrihoe believes that among living beings there is a type of symbiotic relationship known in biology as “mutualism.” Two organisms interact in such a manner that both parties benefit, such as when bees produce honey:

Flowers benefit from the cross pollination that occurs when honey bees fly from flower to flower, and honey bees benefit from the large variety of essential nutrients that they acquire from pollen. There is a certain beauty in this relationship, yet, in truth, no altruism is taking place. Anthropomorphically speaking, bees do not awake one day and think, “We should do something nice for those flowers over there by moving their pollen around for them.” Nor are the flowers then moved to politely offer, “Keep some pollen for yourselves. You’ve more than earned it.” Both parties are in it for themselves, but they benefit each other as a ‘happy coincidence’ (Daesoon Jinrihoe 2017, 11).

Mutualism is a natural law, and already has several beneficial effects. However, “mutual beneficence” goes much further, as it requires “both parties to be motivated by pure intentions to benefit one another” (Daesoon Jinrihoe 2017, 11). Conversely, when “mutual beneficence” is practiced with sincere heart, its benefits for society are much greater than those of mutualism.

On the other hand, the biological sphere, ruled by mutualism, and the human sphere, ideally ruled by mutual beneficence, are strictly related. Mutual beneficence requires a respect and love for nature. Ko Young Woon regards Daesoon Jinrihoe as an ecological religion:

Sangsaeng, mutual beneficence of all life, leads human beings and nature to grow with each other in yin-yang harmony. The correlative cosmology of the opposite elements of yin and yang is developed in the patterns of diversity-in-unity and unity-in-diversity. The serial relationship of the patterns is that of the life and nature of the universe. By way of this close connection between the images of yin and yang, Daesoon presents the idea of mutual transformation in the process of the development of the cosmos. “The key of Daesoon thought is to make peace. The peace of humankind is to realize the infinite truth of the Way by embracing, respecting, and loving others. The Way is the initiation of the universe and leading the change of life and growth.” From the view of this correlative cosmology, human

beings and nature respect and support each other, whereby natural worlds continue to produce their sources for the human world, and humans protect and love nature. For the ecological view of Daesoon, mutual beneficence is the ultimate principle to practice the peace and harmony of human and natural worlds (Ko 2016, 79).

This is also connected with the water-fire relation, which in Daesoon Thought corresponds to the relation between *yin* and *yang*, as “water comes from fire and vice versa” (Ko 2016, 79).

The Yeosu Headquarters (which I visited repeatedly: what follows is largely based on personal observation and interviews) oversee a global Daesoon Jinrihoe network in three major activities: charity, social welfare, and education, to which Daesoon Jinrihoe claims to consecrate over 70% of its financial resources, with yearly expenses that by 2014 had reached \$ 680 million (Daesoon Jinrihoe 2017, 73). All these activities have now a global outreach. For example, the number of foreign students at Daesoon Jinrihoe’s Daejin University in Pocheon City is continuously increasing, as is the number of academic international exchanges, with Daejin University professors and graduate students lecturing and presenting in academic conferences throughout the world.

Providing health and social welfare services is an integral part of mutual beneficence. With deep roots in the Korean tradition, providing for the elderly is a special priority of Daesoon Jinrihoe. Daesoon Jinrihoe operates a geriatric hospital (capacity: 140), elderly nursing facilities (170) and an elderly welfare center (30). The nursing facilities are based on the principle of the Unit Care System, defined as

an elderly nursing unit with multiple rooms to accommodate patients individually; thereby providing them with increased privacy and protection. One unit includes eight to twelve single rooms and a large living room with a homelike atmosphere (Daesoon Jinrihoe 2017, 81).

The principle of the “homelike atmosphere” is what mostly impressed me when I visited Yeosu’s social welfare facilities, and is deeply connected with Daesoon Jinrihoe’s theology. It is important that the sick and the elderly do not feel marginalized in an asylum-like atmosphere, but perceive themselves as active participants in the *Haewon sangsaeng* mutual exchange. Daesoon Jinrihoe has built hospitals that do not look like hospitals and nursing homes that do not look like nursing homes. This is appreciated by those who benefits of their services, but also by the Korean National Health Insurance Corporation, which from 2013

has consistently awarded its highest score to Daejin Elderly Nursing Facilities. Specialists from China and Vietnam also came to Yeosu to study how the Unit Care System is implemented.

The Daejin Medical Foundation dates back to 1991. Daesoon Jinrihoe's main hospital, Bundang Jesaeng Hospital, was built in 1998. It has currently 31 departments and 760 beds. The Daejin Welfare Foundation started its activities in 2007. In 2009, the Daejin Medical Care Institute was established. The Korean National Health Insurance Service recognized it as an A-level institution in 2012.

The Bundang Jesaeng Hospital has been certified by Korean medical authorities as a reliable, leading institution, equipped with modern, cutting-edge medical diagnostic and treatment systems. The hospital uses volunteers to provide a better and wider range of services. While volunteers are mostly members of Daesoon Jinrihoe, medical care is offered to anybody who qualifies for admission, irrespective of religious affiliation. Two other hospitals, Dongducheon Jesaeng Hospital (1,500 beds) and Goseong Jesaeng Hospital (500) are currently being constructed.

Just as other activities of Daesoon Jinrihoe, health care is going through a process of globalization. In August 2015, the International Medical Volunteer Corps was launched, to offer medical services to Koreans and local people living in poor conditions in Kyrgyzstan.

Certified programs to train young people as effective volunteers for Daejin Medical Care Hospital are offered by Daejin Youth Center. More generally, the mission of the Youth Center, which was established in 2014, is to empower young people to become future responsible leaders of their country. Programs for children are also part of Yeosu Headquarters' activities.

Park Wudang taught members of Daesoon Jinrihoe to “do your best to give love and hope to people neglected from society by helping them to rehabilitate and begin new lives on their own” (Daesoon Jinrihoe 2017, 75). He founded the Daesoon Men's Association and the Daesoon Women's Association in 1981, both having within their respective mandates to assist the needy, the disabled, the orphans, and to offer relief to the victims of the floods, which are frequent and ruinous in Korea.

Not unlike health care, Daesoon Jinrihoe's charity is being globalized as well. Humanitarian aid started being brought to Kenya and Ethiopia in 2009. Daejin

International Volunteers Association (DIVA) was founded in 2013. Originally, it operated in Korea by delivering food and medicines to the elderly's homes, and helping them with home repairs. Soon, DIVA started operating in Mongolia and Vietnam, to the benefit of both the elderly and disadvantaged children. DIVA's activities in Vietnam include assistance to Vietnamese medical practitioners to improve their services, health care education classes, first aid education, cultural exchanges, scholarships offered to Vietnamese students from low-income families, and a Korean Language Center at Hanoi Nguyen Trai University. Daesoon Jinrihoe is proud to report that DIVA

was selected as one of the outstanding volunteering organizations of 2014 in Gyeonggi Province. It was also chosen as a Designated Donation Body by the Ministry of Strategy and Finance in 2015. Next year, it was registered as an NGO in the Ministry of Government Administration and Home Affairs (Daesoon Jinrihoe 2017, 77).

### *Conclusion*

From this short survey of Daesoon Jinrihoe's social welfare activities, two aspects emerge as particularly important. The first is that social and charitable services are provided *by* Daesoon Jinrihoe devotees *to* a constituency that consists in its majority of persons in need who are not members of the religion. There is an "internal globalization" at the level of Daesoon Jinrihoe theology, expressed by the universal scope of the principle of *Haewon sangsaeng*, which is now manifesting itself as "external globalization," in the shape of humanitarian aid to people of several diverse countries and religions (see Bae and Kim 2018).

The second important aspect is the key role of the Yeosu Headquarters. That so many social welfare institutions are located within the Yeosu Complex is not coincidental, nor does it serve only a practical purpose. The globalization of social welfare is not separated from globalization of spirituality in Daesoon Thought. A major step towards the latter globalization was achieved in June 2018 in Taiwan, where Daesoon Jinrihoe, Cao Dai from Vietnam and Weixin Shengjiao from Taiwan signed a "Joint Memorandum of Understanding" for further mutual cooperation, including through joint events abroad, inaugurating an Association of East Asian New Religions (Daesoon Jinrihoe 2018). Weixin Shengjiao strongly believes in a universal resolution of grievances, which inspires a vast array of charitable services (Chang 2017), and from its very beginning Cao

Dai's Holy See of Tay Ninh included institutions for "social work and charity services," which functioned as "a true welfare and social agency" (Blagov 1999, 96). New religions with very different theologies have forged an alliance, recognizing each other as kindred spirits in a passionate search for a better and more compassionate world, free of grievances and hate.

As for Daesoon Jinrihoe, the Yeosu Headquarters Temple Complex is the center of the religion. It offers to the believers deep spiritual experiences and esoteric rituals. At the same time, it serves as the pulsating heart of an international network of social welfare activities. Under the principle of *Haewon sangsaeng*, the two spheres are not separated. Like Piazza Duomo in Siena, the Yeosu Headquarters offer a holistic experience catering to the spirit, the heart, and the body at the same time.

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