

**Problems in Researching Korean New Religions:  
A Case Study of Daesoon Jinrihoe**

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**ABSTRACT:** From the birth of Donghak in 1860, some 500 new religions have been established in Korea. More than 100 of them were, or are, part of the “Jeungsanist” family, which recognizes Kang Jeungsan (1871–1909) as the incarnated Supreme God. Korean scholars have tried to identify common features of both Korean new religions and “Jeungsanism.” Kang Don-Ku and others have criticized this approach, claiming that generalizations should be based on a sufficient number of ethnographic studies of single new religions, which are still lacking. Worse still, some studies of Korean new religions are based on hostile accounts published by rival religionists rather than on primary sources. The article discusses problems on studying Korean new religions, and criticizes the article by John Jorgensen on Daesoon Jinrihoe, the largest Jeungsanist religion, published in the 2018 Brill’s *Handbook of East Asian New Religious Movements*, as a somewhat typical example of these problems.

**KEYWORDS:** Korean New Religions, Kang Jeungsan, Jeungsanism, Daesoon Jinrihoe, John Jorgensen.

*Introduction*

Half of the Korean population professes a faith, whereas the other half does not. Those who claim a faith can be divided into two groups: devotees of Western religions and devotees of Eastern religions. A unique feature of Korea’s religious demographics is that religious Koreans and non-religious Koreans, as well as adherents of Western religions and adherents of Eastern religions are all

represented in similar numbers. Religious demographics of this nature have been described as an unprecedented phenomenon in the history of world religions (Kang 2001, 15–6). Obviously, studies of the religious landscape of Korea are of special interest for scholars of religion.

However, detailed ethnographic studies of specific Korean religions remain scarce. Sources are often insufficient, and archival research has been neglected. A few scholars have tried to draw attention to the need of resolving this problem. Among them is Kang Don-Ku (강돈구, 1955–), who has been the only two-time (2005–2007 and 2011–2013) president of the Korean Association for Religious Studies, and currently teaches at the Department of Religious Studies in the Academy of Korean Studies (see Kang 2011a, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2017a, 2017b). Kang is a renowned scholar of Korean new religions, and has criticized studies that have ignored the primary sources and the archives, and relied almost exclusively on secondary materials.

Kang insists that several scholars did not approach Korean new religions in their own terms. Rather, they tried to adapt the conventional methodology used to study traditional religions, which led to a misinterpretation of Korean new religions. Kang also believes that studies of specific new religions (often called “religious orders” in Korea) should be carried out before generalizing on Korean new religions, and that this is an urgent issue in Korean academic circles (Kang 1987, 222).

Kang encouraged other scholars to participate in a systematic study of the Korean new religions. The project resulted in *A Study of Korean Religious Orders*, first published by the Academy of Korean Studies in 2007 and which went through 11 editions until 2018 (Academy of Korean Studies 2018). Despite these efforts, research on Korean new religions based on primary sources is still in its infancy (Yoo 2014, 108–9 and 116–19). The new religions keep being compared to established religions such as Buddhism or Christianity, at the risk of unavoidable distortions.

Modern Korean new religions started blooming in 1860, when Choe Je-u (崔濟愚, 1824–1864) founded Donghak (Eastern Learning). It is estimated that approximately 150 to 500 new religions have been established since that time. The exact number is hard to calculate. Yoon Yee-Heum estimated it between 150

and 200 (Yoon 1987, 180) while Kim Hong-Cheol mentioned 500-odd orders (Kim 1998, 1).

One of the largest Korean new religions is Daesoon Jinrihoe (Fellowship of Daesoon Truth). It traces its origins back to Kang Jeungsan (姜甌山, 1871–1909), and its headquarters are in Yeosu, Gyeonggi Province. Daesoon Jinrihoe is exceptional for its rapid growth in a short period of time, and Kang Don-Ku estimates that at one point it became one of the four major religions in Korea, alongside Buddhism, Protestantism and Catholicism (Kang 2011b, 238).

This religious order currently enjoys a good reputation due to its active engagement in charity and relief, social welfare, and education, wherein it claims it spends over seventy percent of all its collected donations. For this reason, Daesoon Jinrihoe is now viewed more positively in Korea, thanks to its social contributions, than the other religious orders with which it is frequently compared (Introvigne 2017). However, intentionally distorted views and materials on Daesoon Jinrihoe are also frequently circulated.

The reasons for this criticism vary, but can be summarized as follows. First, all religions in the lineage of Kang Jeungsan, commonly referred to as “Jeungsanist,” were condemned as pseudo-religions due to their promotion of the Korean national identity during the Japanese colonial period. This also happened to other Korean new religions (Lee 2016). As a result, some of this bias lingered in Korean media even after the liberation. Second, the Korean religious market is dynamic (Yoo 2014), and there is an obvious competition between different religions. Because of its rapid growth, Daesoon Jinrihoe was perceived as a competitor and criticized both by Christians and by members of rival Jeungsanist religions. Third, the order that eventually assumed the name Daesoon Jinrihoe underwent several previous name-changes, as well as structural changes.

Daesoon Jinrihoe regards itself as the heir of Mugeukdo, established in 1925, and Taegeukdo, founded in 1950. The name Daesoon Jinrihoe has been used since 1969. As it often happens in the history of religions, each of these passages was accompanied by dissension and schisms (Introvigne 2017). As a result, accurate information on the order has not always been easy to access even for insiders, not to mention outsiders. We acknowledge that studying Daesoon Jinrihoe is not an easy task. On the other hand, the study is necessary, precisely

because Daesoon Jinrihoe is one of the largest, if not the largest, new religion in Korea (Baker 2016, 1–2).

Korean scholars of new religions have often been unable to recognize these problems themselves. They have taken at face value accounts of Daesoon Jinrihoe produced by its religious competitors. This is a delicate as well as a key point: accounts of a new religion by rival religionists are interesting for understanding the latter's point of view, but cannot be considered as reliable sources for studying the religion they criticize. And the situation becomes even worse when, through Korean scholars, biased accounts reach scholars overseas, who have an interest in Korean religions but should overcome a language barrier.

In this paper, we discuss an article by John Jorgensen, included in the valuable *Handbook of East Asian New Religious Movements* (2018), edited by Lukas Pokorny and Franz Winter (Jorgensen 2018a). Our aim is not to engage in destructive criticism, but to emphasize how this article is an example of the erroneous perspectives often encountered in studies of Korean new religions, and this even if Jorgensen has an excellent knowledge of the Korean language and religious history.

In the second paragraph, we discuss some general problems in the study of Korean new religions in general and Jeungsanist religions in particular. In the third, we offer some specific criticism of Jorgensen's article.

### *Some General Problems*

#### A. The Study of Korean New Religions

A traditional approach by Korean scholars of religious studies has insisted that Korean new religions share six common characteristics: an integration of doctrines from Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, and Christianity; a relationship with shamanism; a nationalist faith in the Korean people as the chosen people; the idea that an earthly paradise will soon be established; messianic beliefs; and an emphasis on apocalypticism. Yet, Kang noted that these are not necessarily common characteristics in all Korean new religions, and even if they were, they would not constitute “unique or ingenious” factors embedded in Korean new religions (Kang 1987).

For example, the integration of doctrines from different religions can be found in any number of other religions as well. Accusations of “syncretism,” a contested category in itself, may easily lead to value judgements. The other five “common features” of Korean new religions also appear in both Korean *old* religions and non-Korean new religions (with the messianic role of Korea replaced by the messianic role of the United States, Japan, or other countries). Most importantly, according to Kang, it was too early to generalize about Korean new religions when accurate studies of the single largest new religions were still lacking (Kang 1987, 201–7).

Kang struck Korean academic circles with this criticism in 1987, more than thirty years ago, but the situation remains very much the same. Most books and dissertations published today still list these “assumed” common characteristics of Korean new religions, then proceed to explain the “uniqueness” of the religious order they discuss. Whether the generalization is really accurate is rarely examined.

A good example of these problems is the often-repeated theory that *all* Korean new religions include the concepts of the Great Opening, the Later World, and mutual beneficence. The Great Opening and the Later World are seen by scholars as closely related ideas, based on a circular view of history (循環史觀) and perception of destiny (時運觀) (Cha 2013, 221–24).

It is generally argued that ideas about the Great Opening and the Later World are based on an “organic” worldview, and appeared at a time of widespread dissatisfaction with the existing social hierarchy, when the desire for liberation also included the aim of “resolution of grievances.” The Great Opening and the Later World were meant to achieve the harmonious integration of all ideologies and religions, as well as support the dream of an earthly paradise, which would soon appear and restore human identity and integrity. This earthly paradise will bring abundance, peace, prosperity, and redemption, both in spiritual and mundane terms. Korea, as a leading country, will guide all humankind to this ideal world (Ro 1989; see also Kim 1994, 12 and 71–2; Ryu, 1996, 138–39; Ro 2003, 64–6; Kim 2012, 12–39; Park 2012b, 44–55; Yoon, 2012, 173–75).

However, what is missing in these reconstructions is that the concept of Great Opening of Donghak (Eastern Learning) and the family of new religions

originating from Donghak, known as Cheondoism, is based on a circular view of history and perception of destiny that is not shared by other new religions, including Daesoon Jinrihoe. An “organic” worldview is common in Eastern religions and culture, rather than being a unique characteristic of Korean new religions. The concept of “resolution of grievances” is common in some Jeungsanist religions, but not in other Korean new religions.

It may be generally true that Korean new religions typically carry the intention of integrating all ideologies and religions into one. However, Choe Je-u, the founder of Donghak, denounced the religions and cultures of the West and Japan (Kallander 2013). Awaiting an earthly paradise and emphasizing human identity and dignity are not unique features of Korean new religions either. And that Korea would emerge as a leading nation and guide the world is an idea that has been actively discussed in some Korean new religions only, particularly in the Jeungsanist family (Kang 1985, 305–6; Kang 1987, 206; Yoon 1985; Park 2012a, 70–1; Cha 2013, 223).

Kang’s comments remain crucial here. To come to conclusions about Korean new religions, the collection and analysis of primary sources of the individual religious order each scholar is researching should be a priority. However, several scholars who have researched Korean new religions seem to have neglected it entirely. As a result, inaccurate details have been perpetuated, repeating the conclusions of previous research without double-checking its validity. Such misinformation on Korean new religions has also been passed to scholars abroad.

## B. The Study of Jeungsanist Religions

These problems apply to the study of all Korean new religions. The Jeungsanist lineage, which includes the largest number of Korean new religions, is a prime example. In fact, in world religious history, it is rather uncommon to find a religious lineage that had already divided itself into more than sixty factions in its first fifty years of existence (Yoon 1991, 115) While new Jeungsanist factions continue to appear, even in recent times, the oldest Jeungsanist orders strive to maintain their own stances on matters related to their object of faith, scripture, doctrinal system, and cultivation practices (Kim 1992, 395–98; Lee 2012, 124).

Goh Pan-Lye (고판례, 1880–1935), a female disciple of Kang Jeungsan, founded the first order, Seondogyo (Immortal Taoism), in 1911. Among the disciples of Kang Jeungsan, she was known as *Subu* (수부, 首婦, “head lady”), but the scope of this title is contested. Some orders go so far that they make Goh Pan-Lye a divine incarnation equal to Kang Jeungsan, while others, while not denying her historical role, note that there were two different *Subu* in Kang Jeungsan’s early circle. They argue that one day before dying, Kang appointed a second *Subu*, Mal-Sun (김말순, 1890–1911), a daughter of one of his leading disciples, Kim Hyeong-Ryeol (김형렬, 1862–1932), and performed with her a mysterious religious ritual. Mal-Sun died young, at age 21, and did not play a role in Kang’s succession.

Goh’s lineage went into an enormously complicated sequel of schisms. Goh’s relative, Cha Gyeong-Seok (차경석, 1880–1936), became the leader of her branch, which he called Taeulgyo and ruled in an authoritarian way, greatly limiting the role of Goh, who finally left him and established a small separate group, which used again the name Seondogyo, in 1918. Cha established Bocheonism, which for a short period became the largest Korean new religion and possibly the largest religion in Korea. Kim Hyeong-Ryeol first promoted Kang Jeungsan’s widow, Jeong (정치순, 1874–1928), as the master’s successor, then claimed to have received a heavenly revelation and established an independent order, Maitreya Buddhism.

Goh eventually joined forces with Lee Sangho (이상호, 1888–1967), who recognized her as Kang’s successor. Lee Sangho, a former member of Bocheonism, with his brother Lee Jeongnip (이정립, 1895–1968), established various organizations and finally Jeungsangyo Headquarters. The Lees were the first and second patriarchs of Jeungsangyo Headquarters and were succeeded by Hong Beom-Cho (홍범초, 1935–2001), who was murdered on October 25, 2001, as the third patriarch. One former member of the Lee brothers branch, Ahn Un-san (안운산, 1922–2012), established Jeung San Do, which eventually grew into the second largest Jeungsanist branch after Daesoon Jinrihoe and is currently led by Ahn’s son, Ahn Gyeong-jeon (안경전, 1954–).

What eventually became the largest branch originated with Jo Cheol-Je, known to his disciples as Jo Jeungsan (趙鼎山, 1895–1958). Jo was not a direct disciple of Kang Jeungsan, but claimed to have received a revelation from him in 1917.

Having been recognized as Kang's successor by several members of Kang's family, he organized his order as Mugeukdo in 1925. After problems due to the Japanese occupation and the war, he reorganized it as Taegeukdo, and died in 1958. Divisions among Jo's disciples led to the foundation of Daesoon Jinrihoe in 1969 by Park Wudang (박우당, 1917–1995 according to the lunar calendar normally used by the movement, or 1918–1996 in the solar calendar), while the name Taegeukdo remained with the faction lead for a short period of time by one of Jo's sons, Jo Yongnae (조영래, 1934–2004).

There have been several attempts to unify the various Jeungsanist new religions (Hong 2001). Different attempts were led by Lee Sangho in 1926, his brother Lee Jeongnip and Yoo Dongnyeol (유동렬, 1879–?) in 1945, Lee Jeongnip again in 1955, and Hong Beom-Cho in 1971 (Kim forthcoming). However, all these attempts failed. The Jeungsanist orders were too different between each other, and each leader wanted to merge all groups into his or her own. In the meantime, the cult of the mythical first king of Korea, Dangun, had been introduced in the institutional belief system of some Jeungsanist groups as a consequence first of the Japanese occupation and later of the presence of the United States military. The Jeungsanist identity had become confused and, despite the perceived necessity of unifying different doctrines and orders, these ecumenical attempts hit a wall of irreconcilable differences (Yoon 1987, 205–6; Cha 2014, 59–60).

After the explosive segmentation in such a short period of time, the question can be legitimately asked whether a single “Jeungsanism” exists at all. Answering this question presupposes a difficult work of research. Collecting the primary sources of each order one by one, understanding the reasons for the emergence/schism of each group, and impartially researching the segmentation process are all challenging tasks. Their different objects of faith, doctrines, and cultivation practices took shape through long processes. Often, scholars have not been attentive enough to the complexity of these issues.

The most important studies conducted by scholars in the field of Korean religions since 1990s are: *Encyclopedia of Korean Culture* (The Academy of Korean Studies 1991), *Encyclopedia of Korean Religious Culture* (The Institute of Korean Religion and Society 1991), *General Survey of Korean New Religions* (Yi 1992), *A Survey Report on Korean New Religions* (Research Group on Korean Religion 1996), *Rites and Proprieties of Korean Religions* (Ministry of



Culture and Sports 1996), *A Survey Study on Korean New Religions* (The Institute of Korean Religion and Society 1997), *The Idea of the Great Opening of Ethnic Religions and the Future of Korea* (The Association of Korean Native Religions 2004), *A Study on the Idea of the Great Opening in the Later World* (Kim 2004), *Religious Pluralism and Utopia in Modern East Asia* (Jang 2011), and *New Religions and the Idea of the Great Opening* (Yoon 2017).

*A Survey Report on Korean New Religions* (Research Group on Korean Religion 1996) is the most notable work. The project took four months to be completed, between August and November 1996, was conducted by the Korea Institute for Religion and Culture, and resulted in an official publication produced with the support of the South Korean Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism. One year after this material was published, Wonkwang University's Institute of Religions published *A Survey Study on Korean New Religions* (The Institute of Korean Religion and Society 1997), with the support of the same Ministry. The Ministry maintains an active interest in publishing surveys of Korean religions, but its most recent publications simply compile older sources and are not based on new empirical research.

Several recent descriptions of “Jeungsanism” are still based on *A Survey Report on Korean New Religions*, a book published 22 years ago. They invariably list, as the primary object of faith of “Jeungsanism,” Kang Jeungsan, the Supreme God who descended to Earth for the salvation of the world. Yet, in addition to Kang, other objects of faith in the Jeungsanist orders include Korean progenitor-gods such as Hwanin, Hwanwung, and Dangun, civilizational giants like Confucius, Buddha Shakyamuni, or Jesus, ancestral spirits, historical figures such as Choe Je-u, the Jesuit Catholic missionary to China, Matteo Ricci (1552–1810), and the Korean Buddhist monk Jin-Muk (진묵, 1562–1633), and the founders of the different religious orders themselves. In other words, a wide variety of religious figures appear as objects of worship at some level or another (Research Group on Korean Religion 1996, 143–44).

This is a very general description, similar to those that try to identify a *genus* Christianity encompassing the *species* Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodox Churches, and Protestantism. Obviously, there are common features, but it would be wrong to say that all Christians share the Catholic and Orthodox veneration of the Virgin Mary, since the Protestants don't. Similarly, the objects of faith and worship in the Jeungsanist religions also vary greatly. In general, they consider

Kang Jeungsan as the main object of worship, but how his figure is defined and perceived is not the same in the different orders. Some religious orders worship Hwanin, Hwanwung, Dangun, Choe Je-u, Matteo Ricci, or the Venerable Jinmuk, but in different combinations and ways. There are orders that venerate these figures partially, or fully, or not at all. Defining “Jeungsanism” *en bloc* is ultimately impossible (Cha 2014, 65–7).

Kang Jeungsan’s divine title raises another issue. *A Survey Report on Korean New Religions* claims that Kang Jeungsan is worshipped as the Jade Emperor or the Supreme God of the Ninth Heaven (Research Group on Korean Religion 1996, 141). Nonetheless, according to a survey conducted by Hong Beom-Cho in the early 1980s, the divine titles attributed to Kang Jeungsan by various Jeungsanist branches include the Supreme God of the Ninth Heaven, the 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上帝, which may in fact be shortened as the Supreme God of the Ninth Heaven), the Supreme God Presiding Over Heaven (統天上帝), the Jade Emperor (玉皇上帝), the Supreme God of the Nine Palaces, Heavenly Dao and Boundlessness (九宮天道無極上帝), Jeungsan Holy Lord the Supreme God (甌山聖王上帝), the Lord of Heaven (天主), and fifty-odd more (Hong 1982, 283–85). This problem is not unique to Jeungsanism, as evidenced by the different titles attributed to Jesus Christ in the various Christian traditions.

Similarly, problems are also found in the interpretation of Kang Jeungsan’s authority and work. For the Jeungsanists, the Reordering Works of Heaven and Earth are the most crucial holy exercises that he performed for the benefit of the whole universe. Before undertaking those works, it is reported that Kang Jeungsan practiced Holy Works in the Daewon-sa (Great Court) Buddhist Temple, for 49 days, without eating or resting. The sacred works in Daewon-sa can be interpreted in two ways. First, it can be argued that in the temple Kang attained enlightenment through self-cultivation, and acquired the power needed to carry out the Reordering Works of Heaven and Earth (Lee 1947, 93). The second interpretation is that at Daewon-sa he judged the divine beings to establish a foundation needed for carrying out the Reordering Works and opening the Dao of mutual beneficence (Park 2007, 88–107).

Both Jeungsangyo Headquarters and Jeung San Do maintain the former position, while Daesoon Jinrihoe affirms the latter. To be able to perform the

Reordering Works, one should be endowed with the supreme authority of presiding over Heaven and Earth. Whether this authority was given by Heaven to Kang Jeungsan as an answer to his petition, or was something innate to him, is a question that has profound theological implications. It defines the nature and scope of Kang Jeungsan's divinity. The positions of the different orders are not the same, and should be closely examined. However, current research often presents only the position of Jeungsangyo Headquarters and Jeung San Do, as if it was shared by all the different branches of Jeungsanism (Research Group on Korean Religion 1996, 140).

The description of cultivation methods may in turn become a source of controversy. For example, *Rites and Propriety of Korean Religions* (Ministry of Culture and Sports 1996, 434–36) presented the incantations that are chanted in some of the new religions derived from Kang Jeungsan, including the Tae-eul mantra and eleven others. Although reciting incantations is a key practice of all Jeungsanist religions, it varies from one religion to another in terms of the specific method of recitation and even the verses of the incantations themselves. Although incantations such as the Tae-eul mantra and the Wunjang mantra are shared by most groups, both the methods of recitation and the contents are not the same (Cha 2014, 68–71). Few studies seem to have understood these nuances.

Lastly, it is often argued that the system of thought of “Jeungsanism” is built on concepts such as the “mutual beneficence” or the “resolution of grievances for mutual beneficence,” yet, only roughly half of the Jeungsanist orders have adopted these ideas. Seondogyo, the first order founded by Goh Pan-Lye after Kang Jeungsan's death, did not include these ideas among its doctrines. Nor were they present in Kim Hyeong-Ryeol's Maitreya Buddhism. On the other hand, Daesoon Jinrihoe, Jeungsangyo Headquarters, and Jeung San Do have all accepted the ideas of “resolution of grievances,” “mutual beneficence,” or their combined formula, “resolution of grievances for mutual beneficence.” However, the three orders have different interpretations of these theories. It is incorrect to attribute these concepts to “Jeungsanism” as a whole, although few researchers only seem to have spotted the problem (Cha 2014, 72–87).

Western scholars are well aware of these difficulties. Jonathan Z. Smith (1938–2017), for example, argued that there is no single “Judaism,” but a plurality of “Judaisms,” including inter-testamental Judaism, post-biblical

Judaism, early and late Judaism, Hellenistic Judaism, and so on, while generalizations about a supposedly monolithic Judaism would distort the subject in a vain search for a sameness that never existed (Smith 2004, 20–2). Korean scholars noticed the same problems when trying to construct a single category of “Protestantism” (Oh 1990, 111), yet they failed to take these discussions into account when dealing with their own indigenous phenomena such as Jeungsanism. Most descriptions of Jeungsanist religions randomly draw bit and pieces from each order to build a supposedly general category, whose features are not found in any of the main organizations. It is true that primary sources are tedious, but it is also true that secondary sources are often inaccurate.

### *Problems with Jorgensen’s Article*

The *Handbook of East Asian New Religious Movements* is a very valuable book. Most of its articles are accurate and informative. It reflects the point of view of scholars who know the respective languages and specialize in Japanese, Chinese, Vietnamese, or Korean religions, rather than engaging in a dialogue with international scholars of new religious movements (who normally do not speak nor read East Asian languages). It is, of course, a legitimate choice. However, we believe that the works of both categories of scholars should be considered when dealing with new religious movements. A Sinologist may have a perfect knowledge of the Chinese language, yet lack the comparative perspective and methodological experience in studying new religions and their opponents that scholars who have studied for years new religious movements and anti-cult opposition all over the world may offer. Conversely, the latter scholars need to dialogue with colleagues who understand the local languages and contexts.

The same discussion took place, years ago, in the field of art history. As it became more and more evident that new religious movements such as Theosophy and Spiritualism had a decisive influence on the birth of modernist art, art historians at first dismissed contributions by religious scholars who did not “speak the language” of art history. They realized later that cooperation was needed, since without a global and comparative approach to new religious and esoteric movements how exactly these groups influenced fathers of modernist art such as Wassily Kandinsky (1866–1944) or Piet Mondrian (1872–1944) could not really be assessed (Spretnak 2014; Introvigne 2016).

The article “Taesunjilhoe” in the *Handbook of East Asian New Religious Movements* largely relies on a text Jorgensen wrote at the beginning of our century (Jorgensen 2001). There is nothing wrong with it, and scholars frequently use their own previous articles as sources. However, one may legitimately wonder whether at least in parts of his article Jorgensen simply cut and pasted from his old article, without considering the literature published between 2001 and 2018. That the article was composed somewhat in haste is suggested by other details, too. There is a reference to “Kim 1980” (Jorgensen 2018a, 369), yet no text of an author whose last name is Kim published in 1980 is mentioned in the bibliography.

Some historical details do not appear to be supported by the sources. Jorgensen states that “Kang’s father participated in the [Donghak] rebellion.” He adds that Kang himself was involved in, or taught, “a progression of religions” going from Seohak (Western Learning, i.e. Catholicism) to Donghak, Namhak, or Southern Learning, taught by the famous Korean scholar of the *Jeong-yeok* (*The Corrected Book of Changes*, a revised Korean version of the Chinese classic *I Ching*), Kim Il-Bu (김일부, 1826–1898), and Bukhak (Northern Learning, Kang’s own teaching), and that Kang Jeungsan “was enlightened during a massive storm at a monastery on Mount Moak” (Jorgensen 2018a, 361).

These statements are presented as if they were obvious and uncontroversial in the historical research about Kang. But they are not. Most historians of Kang would agree that there is no solid evidence that his father actively participated in the Donghak uprising of 1894. That Kang was enlightened at a monastery on Mount Moak is reported by Jeung San Do but is not accepted by Daesoon Jinrihoe. The sequence Seohak-Donghak-Namhak-Bukhak is based on an account that is accepted only by the Five Regions Buddhism, another Korean new religion. Five Regions Buddhism was established by Kim Ch’i-in (김치인, 1855–1895), who claimed to be Maitreya himself. After he died in 1895, the order divided into several factions. Of this group, only a few people who live in South Chungcheong Province and study the *Jeong-yeok* remain in existence today. “Bukhak,” in their teachings, does not refer to the teachings of Kang Jeungsan but to the science and philosophy imported to Korea from Qing China.

Elsewhere, Jorgensen repeats slander coming from Daesoon Jinrihoe’s most bitter competitors, Jeungsangyo Headquarters and Jeung San Do. He reports that Jo Jeongsan “made Kang’s sister [Seondol, 선돌, ca. 1881–1942, although the

name is not supplied] his concubine” (Jorgensen 2018a, 363). The authors he quotes in turn derive this story from Jeungsangyo Headquarters sources, i.e. from controversial publications produced by a religious competitor. Indeed, the 1977 book *History of Jeungsangyo*, published by Jeungsangyo Headquarters and written by Lee Jeongnip, claimed that Kang’s sister was one of seven young women Jo Jeongsan took as concubines (Lee 1977, 143). Lee Jeongnip, however, was not a neutral historian. He was the second patriarch of Jeungsangyo Headquarters, an angry rival of Jo Jeongsan’s orders, with a vested interest in discrediting Jo’s sexual mores and claiming that the only “orthodox” Jeungsanist branches were those established by himself and his brother, Lee Sangho. Lee Jeongnip had started spreading rumors against Jo Jeongsan in 1936, trying to incite Japanese authorities to crack down on Mugeukdo, and continued ever since (Park 2013, 141–42).

Reliance on sources produced by rival religious orders (or derived by these) is also apparent in Jorgensen’s claims that Daesoon Jinrihoe devotees believe that Korea’s liberation from Japan (August 15, 1945) was achieved because on July 3, 1945 Jo Jeongsan’s followers performed a ritual, chanting the Tae-eul mantra and flapping blue and red flags, and that, after Japanese suppression, Jo “secretly revived his religion” in 1942 and changed its name from Mugeukdo to Taegeukdo (Jorgensen 2018a, 364), a change that in fact only occurred in 1950.

Admittedly, the history of Daesoon Jinrihoe underwent many ups and downs and internal disputes occurred many times. Two cases include the transition period from Taegeukdo to Daesoon Jinrihoe in 1968, and the internal controversies in the order in 1999 and beyond. The more recent divisions (and reconciliations) are not covered in Jorgensen’s article (while they are mentioned in both Korean- and English-speaking sources: see Introvigne 2013).

When he deals with the accusations traded between the various factions at the time of the separation between Taegeukdo and Daesoon Jinrihoe, Jorgensen accuses Park Wudang of “leading a terror campaign,” immorality, “embezzlement,” and even possibly causing “the death of seventy-six members” and escaping prosecution for this and other crimes by paying “huge bribes” and “buying off the gendarmes [...] with massive quantities of gold” (Jorgensen 2018a, 365). Nobody was prosecuted or found guilty by a court of law for these supposed crimes, and one would expect that, in a scholarly work, such serious accusations against the respected founder of a million-member religion would be

made only if they were backed by unimpeachable evidence. However, the only source quoted by Jorgensen is *The Tragedy of Daesoon Jinrihoe*, a propaganda book published by CSD in 2000 (CSD 2000).

CSD is an abbreviation of Chŭngsando chŏn'guk ch'ŏngnyŏn sindo yŏnhaphoe, "The National Youth Association of Jeung San Do," i.e. the youth movement of the arch-rival of Daesoon Jinrihoe among the Jeungsanist religions. This book is also used to reconstruct the events following the death of Park Wudang, with all developments after 2007, including the (partially successful) attempt at reconciling the different factions conveniently omitted. While, to attack Park Wudang, criticism by Taegeukdo is mentioned, another book published by the Jeung San Do's youth organization, *The True Colors of Daesoon Jinrihoe* (CSD 1996), is introduced to present the idea of "a pattern of alleged extortion, theft, embezzlement, and violence" (Jorgensen 2018a, 367), allegedly involving both Taegeukdo and Daesoon Jinrihoe.

Jorgensen himself report that "based on Pak's [Park Wudang's] explicit orders," Daesoon Jinrihoe "claims to silently endure even the grossest of slurs made by its upstart arch-rival," Jeung San Do, in accordance with the principle of "not creating new grievances," resorting to prayer rather than to lawsuits (Jorgensen 2018a, 365). Others, however, reacted. Hong Beom-Cho, the third patriarch of Jeungsangyo Headquarters, was not a friend of Daesoon Jinrihoe, but denounced Jeung San Do's book *The True Colors of Daesoon Jinrihoe* as "entirely baseless and falsified" (Hong 1991, 31–7).

Disputes among rival religious organizations are often bitter, and unfounded accusations are common. Jeung San Do itself has filed lawsuits, including in the United States, to protest accusations (coming from groups other than Daesoon Jinrihoe) of violence and involvement in the murder of Hong Beom-Cho and his wife (Jeungsando of America and Myung Sun Yoo 2014). Our main criticism of Jorgensen is, however, methodological. No scholar of new religious movements would publish an article about the Jehovah's Witnesses using the Catholic or Evangelical apologetic booklets against them as serious sources. These booklets may be studied as examples of how the criticism of "cults" operates, but are certainly not sources for studying the Jehovah's Witnesses.

Another problem with Jorgensen is that, at times, he also uses what he calls himself Jeung San Do's "heresiography" (Jorgensen 2018a, 366) for

reconstructing the doctrine of Daesoon Jinrihoe. He also uses Korean secondary sources, whose problems we have identified above. For example, he writes that Jo Jeongsan “is said to be Okhwang Sangje [the Jade Emperor]. Together with Kang Il-Sun [Kang Jeungsan] as Kuch’ön Sangye, they form ‘two divinities in one substance’ [...]. They were incarnated in Korea, but they are both still in command of the three realms” of heaven, Earth, and humankind (Jorgensen 2018a, 368). Jorgensen maintains that originally it was Kang Jeungsan who was identified with the Jade Emperor, but when Jo Jeongsan assumed this position Kang “retreated as a *deus otiosus*” (Jorgensen 2018, 364). He quotes the *General Survey of Korean Religions* (Yi 1992, 590) rather than primary Daesoon Jinrihoe sources. It would have been easy for Jorgensen to ascertain that Korean scholars such as Kang Don-Ku, Yoon Yong-Bok, and Ko Byong-Chul all suggested different interpretations (Ko 2007, 194–95; Kang 2011b, 246–47; Yoon 2013, 17–8).

We do not dispute that Daesoon Jinrihoe venerates Kang Jeungsan as the Lord of the Ninth Heaven and Jo Jeongsan as the Jade Emperor. But they do not enjoy the same divine status and are not “two divinities in one substance.” There is only one Supreme God, Kang Jeungsan Sangje. In a way, it can be said that both Kang Jeungsan and Jo Jeongsan “rule” the Three Realms, but only Kang Jeungsan as the Supreme God of the Ninth Heaven “presides” over the Three Realms (Daesoon Jinrihoe 2010, 98, 266, 271 and 314). These are by no means minor matters, as they involve the fundamental notion of God in Daesoon Jinrihoe, and should have been checked through the primary sources, rather than relying on faulty general surveys of Korean new religions.

### *Conclusion*

Summing up, the problem we find in Jorgensen’s article is that it largely relies either on sources produced by the most aggressive competitors of Daesoon Jinrihoe, Jeungsangyo Headquarters and Jeung San Do, or on Korean compilations that are in themselves problematic.

This is not a problem of the *Handbook of East Asian New Religious Movements* in general, nor of his section on Korea. The latter covers seven Korean new religions, Donghak (Ch’öndogyo), Daejonggyo (Taejonggyo), Won Buddhism (Wönbulgyo), the Unification Movement, the Yoido Full Gospel



Church (Yöüido Sunbogüm Kyohoe), Dahn World (Tan Wöltü), and Daesoon Jinrihoe. In the other articles, we found a balanced use of primary and secondary sources, with a prevalence of primary sources published by each religious order. It is not even a problem of Jorgensen, as his second article published in the *Handbook*, about Daejonggyo (Jorgensen 2018b), relies mostly on primary sources. The editors put together an impressive collection of good articles. Our only criticism is their use of movements' names different from the ones they use themselves in the West, including "Taesunjillihoe" for Daesoon Jinrihoe. Coherence in the transliterations is important, but perhaps not at the expenses of understandability for the average English-speaking reader.

In the article on Daesoon Jinrihoe, Jorgensen did quote some primary sources, such as the 1969 *Introduction to Daesoon Jinrihoe* (Daesoon Jinrihoe 1969) and the 1974 edition of its sacred scripture (Daesoon Jinrihoe 1974). However, since some passages he quotes are also quoted in *A Comprehensive Survey of Korean Religion* and Lee Kang-Oh's *Catalog of Korean New Religions* (Lee 1992), a book with a clear bias against new religions in general, we can ask the question whether he really worked with primary sources directly.

The fact that he also largely ignores the more recent material (including Daesoon Academy of Sciences 2016; Daesoon Institute of Religion and Culture 2010, 2014) leaves, again, the impression that Jorgensen largely recycled his 2001 article, adding a short section on "Recent Developments," and this even though a large amount of new materials would have been easily available, including online. As a result, his text of 2018 has the same problems of the one he published in 2001, the most serious of which is its reliance on literature produced by competitors and rivals of Daesoon Jinrihoe, particularly Jeung San Do.

There are several quotes from the 2003 version of *Tojõn*, which is a main source of the article. This is the main sacred scripture of Jeung San Do, although the choice (possibly by the editors) to impose their own transliterations, and to ignore English language materials published by the orders themselves, led Jorgensen to ignore the 2016 English edition of this book, and the fact that Jeung San Do calls it *Dojeon* for the benefit of its Western audience (Jeung San Do 2016).

It would have been perfectly appropriate to use Jeung San Do's books in an article discussing the beliefs of this new religion. However, the article is about Daesoon Jinrihoe. It is often unclear whether what Jorgensen takes from the Jeung San Do scripture is presented as historical fact or a statement of doctrine. For example, Jorgensen attributes to Kang Jeungsan the teaching that in the Latter Word humans would live for 800 years (Jorgensen 2018a, 369), citing the 2003 Jeungsando's *Dojeon* and the usual *General Survey of Korean New Religions*, which attributes to "Jeungsanism" in general what are in fact peculiar doctrines of Jeung San Do.

In fact, Jeung San Do now teaches, based on words attributed to Goh Pan-Lye, that "in the Latter Heaven's Paradise of Immortality, people of great longevity will live twelve hundred years, those of middling longevity will live nine hundred years, and those of meager longevity will live seven hundred years" (Jeung San Do 2016, 991: *Dojeon* 11:207, 3). Be it as it may be, these teachings are not found in Daesoon Jinrihoe.

Academics discuss, in Korea and in the West, the deontological point whether a scholarly study of a religious movement should be submitted to the movement itself before publication, not for approval or censorship but for a dialogue in which facts can be checked and the group can be allowed to respond to allegations coming from hostile sources (Lee 2018, 132).

Norwegian historian William Brede Kristensen (1867–1953) insisted that, when the description of a religion differs from the assessments of its actual devotees, such portrayal is not a description of the religion but simply represents the scholar's state of mind and feelings (Kristensen 1955, 22). Ninian Smart (1927–2001) claimed that understanding other religions calls for sympathy and approaching them with an open mind. He quoted from a Native American proverb, "Never judge a person until you have walked a mile in her moccasins" (Smart 1989, 10).

The traditional model of study of the Korean new religions can be criticized as the sort of armchair anthropology that was common in bygone ages. Today, it would be inconceivable for a scholar of new religious movements to research them without interviewing their actual members (as well, of course, as examining the claims of their critics).

Daesoon Jinrihoe is not a secretive organization. It welcomes scholars from all over the world to its two research departments, the Daesoon Institute of Religion and Culture and the Department of Academic Affairs, and to the Daesoon Academy of Sciences, which is affiliated with Daejin University, a university founded by the order and which organizes a yearly scholarly conference, the World SangSaeng Forum, where most presenters are not members of Daesoon Jinrihoe. Each of these institutes, and the religious order itself, maintains extensive Web sites. Certainly, a good scholarly methodology would compare these primary sources with secondary sources and criticism. On the other hand, ignoring the primary sources and relying mostly on hostile accounts by rival religionists, and outdated studies produced decades ago, cannot but lead to serious mistakes.

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