
EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

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To be at the beginning of a new scholarly venture – which the establishment of the *Journal of Daesoon Thought and the Religions of East Asia (JDTREA)* undoubtedly is – is a wonderful thing, as the quality of newness creates possibilities that more venerable bodies and publications cannot aspire to. My own journey to becoming Editor in Chief, an honour that I am grateful to acknowledge, began when I attended the “Religious Movements in a Globalized World: Korea, Asia, and Beyond” conference of the Centre for Studies on New Religions (CESNUR), an independent institute based in Turin, Italy from 5-10 July 2016. My partner Donald Barrett and I had been to several CESNUR conferences and were highly enthusiastic about visiting South Korea for the first time and being hosted by the Korean new religion Daesoon Jinrihoe, at Daejin University’s campus outside of Pocheon City near the North Korean border.

The conference was an excellent academic meeting, and Don and I were among old friends and making new friends all the time. The focus of the conference was very much on the struggle for legitimacy in the spiritual marketplace of a range of Korean new religions. My amateur status in terms of the study of Asian religions was something I was willing to admit, every step of the way. It was perhaps a happy accident that the paper I delivered at the conference, “Cult Stereotypes in *Signs and Wonders* (1995),” concerned a British television series that focused on a group that strongly resembled the Unification Church, certainly the best-known Korean new religion in the West at the time.

In addition to Daesoon Jinrihoe, the Unification Church and Won Buddhism hosted us during the tour of religious sites that followed the conference proper. We were fascinated to learn of these faiths and provoked to learn about less well-known Korean new religions that were represented among the delegates, such as Victory Altar, a group that had been on my radar since attending CESNUR at Aletheia University in Taiwan with Donald in 2011, where we met representatives of the Neo-Human Institute, the philosophical arm of what later emerged as Victory Altar.

The first issue of the *Journal of Daesoon Thought and the Religions of East Asia* contains a range of articles by distinguished scholars, including Massimo Introvigne (Centre for the Study of New Religions, Turin), Patrick Laude (Georgetown University), Susan Palmer (Concordia University) and Jason Greenberger (Daejin University), Pochi Huang (Huaan University, Taiwan), David W. Kim (Australian National University), and our revered and greatly missed late colleague, Liselotte Frisk (Dalarna University, Sweden). I am proud to have been appointed editor and to have had the chance to oversee the production of such a strong and diverse collection of cutting-edge scholarship.

I am very grateful to Bae Kyuhan, Lee Gyungwon and Jason Greenberger, from Daejin University, and to all the scholars who have joined the international Editorial Board of this exciting new academic journal. I have confidence that we will produce much valuable scholarship, and look forward to a time when we might all gather again in South Korea to celebrate its contribution to the contemporary religious world, and to share ideas and possibilities with sympathetic and creative colleagues. I end on a personal note; my partner Donald died in February of 2021 and it will be eternally a regret that when I next visit Korea he will not be with me to share the adventure.

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