

# Daesoon Thought as the Source of Daesoon Jinrihoe's Social Work

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## Abstract

Both in Korea and internationally, many know and appreciate Daeseon Jinrihoe for its social work in the three main areas of education, social welfare and health care, and charity aid. The article surveys Daeseon Jinrihoe's activities in these three areas and proposes a comparison with the charitable and ecological work performed by the Taiwanese Buddhist charity (and new religious movement) Tzu Chi, the peace activities of Soka Gakkai, and the projects developed in Bhutan to implement the policy of Gross National Happiness. Tzu Chi is mostly known for its massive recycling activities, but in fact its view of charity and ecology is based on a specific Buddhist theology. Soka Gakkai's vision of peace relates to its interpretation of Nichiren Buddhism. Gross National Happiness in Bhutan is a project promoted by the government, but scholars who have studied it have concluded that it is deeply rooted in Drukpa Kagyu, the dominant school in Bhutanese Buddhism. Similarities are noted, as well as differences with the Western Christian and post-Christian approach to charity, which is largely based on an affirmation of the self. Daeseon Jinrihoe's social work shares with the Buddhist cases studied in the article the idea that the self may deceive (self-deception) but appears to be inspired by the unique principle of Sangsaeng, and by the idea that the root causes of social problems are grievances accumulated through thousands of years and in need of being resolved.

**Keywords:** Daeseon Jinrihoe; Kang Jeungsan; Haewon; Boeun Sangsaeng; Guarding Against Self-Deception; Buddhist Social Work.

## Daesoon Jinrihoe's Three Areas of Social Work

During the last few years, I have visited repeatedly Daesoon Jinrihoe's temples and social work institutions in South Korea. While the temples, and the Yeosu Headquarters Temple Complex in particular, are the living heart of this large Korean new religion, many Koreans (and, increasingly, non-Koreans) now know Daesoon Jinrihoe mostly because of its impressive social work. This work is not intended as a form of assistance to Daesoon Jinrihoe devotees in need only; in fact, most of those who benefit from it are not members of the religion.

Daesoon Jinrihoe pledges to devote 70% of its financial resources to social work. Even critics believe that it does keep this pledge (Jorgensen 2018, 377), which explains the good reputation the religion has acquired among South Koreans in general, including those who are far away from its theology and worldview. By 2014, yearly expenses for Daesoon Jinrihoe's social work had reached the impressive figure of \$680 million (AADDJ 2017, 73).

This social activity includes what Daesoon Jinrihoe calls the "Three Major Works," education, social welfare, and charity aid.

### Education

Daesoon Jinrihoe likes to quote the words of its third leader, Park Wudang (1917–1995). He stated that,

it is our goal to provide a well-rounded education characterized by the cultivation of morality and a law-abiding spirit, and additionally enable students to develop sound minds and bodies. Thus, we should put much effort into raising talented people who will meet the demands of this age and make contributions to the public and to national interests (Daesoon Jinrihoe 2020).

This goal was never foreign to Daesoon Jinrihoe and its predecessor organizations. One century ago, they were already fighting illiteracy, which at that time was widespread in Korea. More recently, Daesoon Jinrihoe has established an accredited university and six high schools (Daejin High School, Daejin Girl's High School, Bundang Daejin High School, Daejin Design High School, Ilsan Daejin High School, and Busan Daejin High School of Electronics and Telecommunications).

One unique institution is the Daejin Youth Training Center, opened in March 2013. It is both a physical place, i.e., a building capable of accommodating some 200 persons, and a set of programs that include youth camps and religious-cultural field trips. It also

offers two certified training courses for adolescents, “Empathy and Sharing,” training the youth to become volunteers in various fields, and “Daejin Futsal (Indoor Soccer) Class.” The “Empathy and Sharing” program cooperates with other Daesoon Jinrihoe institutions. For example, participants can learn how to take care of the elderly and help them with their wheelchairs.

Daejin University in Pocheon City has an atmosphere that is both Korean and international. It is becoming more cosmopolitan, as the number of students who are not members of Daesoon Jinrihoe or come from abroad continue to increase. It also maintains two campuses in Mainland China, in Harbin and Suzhou, where some Korean students also study, supported by Daejin University scholarships. On the other hand, it maintains its roots in Daesoon values, and members of the religion are especially proud of it. It is also a local university, which exists in conversation with the institutions of Gyeonggi Province and Pocheon City. One of its most ambitious projects is the Gyeonggi-Daejin Techno Park, established in 2003 in cooperation with the province and city governments and with the approval of the South Korean Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Energy, to boost the growth of local industry.

The history of Daejin University dates to 1984, when Park Wudang established the Daejin Hakwon educational foundation. Plans for the university were set in motion in 1989. Government approval was secured in 1991, and Daejin University was inaugurated in 1992. Since then, it has won numerous awards, including as a top-ranked university in South Korea (2006) from the point of view of a comprehensive academic assessment of its activities in 2005, and as one of the top ten South Korean universities in the field of intellectual property (2015, Korean Intellectual Property Office). It includes, after a reorganization in 2016, 5 graduate schools, 5 colleges, 9 divisions, and 26 departments. It has signed Memorandums of Understanding with several universities and institutions throughout the world.

As it is common in Eastern Asia, Daejin University defines its strategies through slogans. One is “Humanities education based on benevolence and righteousness,” which is strictly connected with the principles of Daesoon Thought. The second, which is self-explanatory, and alludes to the fact that today many college graduates remain unemployed, is “Practical education with focusing on employment.” The third is “Creating smart campus,” a commitment to state-of-the-art digital services, which however does not forget the importance of ecology in Daesoon Thought and calls for an eco-friendly environment. In fact, one of the most important international events co-organized by Daejin University was the Inaugural Yeosu Eco-Forum, held on October 3–5 2019 in Yeosu City. The fourth is “Strengthening the brand of global Daejin,” and alludes to the DUCC (Daejin University China Campus) project in Mainland China, and other projects abroad that may develop in the future.

Private higher education is expensive in South Korea, and in 1976 Daesoon Jinrihoe

launched the Daesoon Scholarship Foundation. This corresponds to an idea of Park Wudang himself, and includes several different scholarships for excellent students whose families have limited financial resources. As of 2015, \$43 million had been invested in such scholarships.

### **Social Welfare and Health Care**

Daesoon Jinrihoe's social welfare work includes three sectors: community, welfare, and medical. Community works include cleaning the streets and natural areas, assisting poor farmers, helping in finding missing children, and promoting campaigns for traffic safety and for the respect of the elderly.

With deep roots in the Korean tradition, elderly welfare 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 (AADDJ 2017, 81).

In practice, this unique system works through seven programs: leisure and dementia prevention, medical treatment and rehabilitation, cultural services, counseling services, nutritional support, family support, and sanitation service. For leisure, the elderly are offered classes in appreciating and producing movies, singing, music, origami, and pottery, as well as games, outings, and birthday celebrations. Dementia prevention works through physical exercise, laughter therapy, block building, puzzles, and drawing. Feast days are celebrated through cultural events, special meals, picnics, and performances.

The principle of the "homelike atmosphere" is what mostly impressed me when I visited Daesoon Jinrihoe's social welfare facilities, and is deeply connected with Daesoon Thought. 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 life of the community. 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 benefit 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 South Korea to study how the Unit Care System is implemented by Daesoon Jinrihoe.

The Daejin Medical Foundation dates 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 Daeseon Jinrihoe, medical care is offered to anybody who qualifies for admission, irrespective of religious affiliation. The hospital is based both on Western and Oriental medicine, and includes departments of surgery, orthopedic surgery, neurosurgery, chest surgery, plastic surgery, obstetrics and gynecology, pediatrics and adolescent medicine, ophthalmology, otolaryngology, dermatology, as well as centers for oncology, cardiovascular medicine, gastroenterology, hepatology, rehabilitation, the treatment of thyroid disorders, dentistry, an Emergency Medical Center, a Health Promotion Center, and a 24-Hours Stroke Center. An International Healthcare Center, established in 2012, cater to patients who speak several languages different from Korean. Two other hospitals, Dongducheon Jesaeng Hospital (1,500 beds) and Goseong Jesaeng Hospital (500) are currently being constructed.

Just as other activities of Daeseon 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 ethnic Koreans and others living in poor conditions in Kyrgyzstan.

## Charity Aid

Park Wudang taught members of Daeseon 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” (AADDJ 2017, 75). He founded the Daeseon Men’s Association and the Daeseon 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 education and health care, Daeseon 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 as well, 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. In 2019, Bundang Jesaeng Hospital established a sistership with

Vietnam's Hanoi Tumor Hospital, and in the same year the authorization allowing DIVA to operate in Vietnam was renewed for another three years.

The activities abroad do not mean that DIVA stopped taking care of the poor in its core area of the Gyeonggi Province. Free meals are provided to needy families in Yeosu and Pocheon City, together with clothing, coal and other supplies for heating, medicines, and school supplies for the children. DIVA volunteers, when visiting the poor and the elderly, also check on their health and fitness, and refer them to public health officials when needed. DIVA also supports festivals promoting the local culture.

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 with the Ministry of Government Administration and Home Affairs (AADDJ 2017, 77).

### **“Buddhism in Action”: Tzu Chi, Soka Gakkai's Peace Programs, and “Gross National Happiness” in Bhutan**

We often hear the argument that Asians converted to Christianity because they were impressed by the social and charitable work both Catholics and Protestants did in the region, and realized that social work was a field where followers of traditional Asian religions were not as active as Christians. Ironically, in Europe we often meet people who converted to Buddhism, or joined Asian religious movements, claiming that the Christian churches today look more like secular charities or large bureaucracies, and lack the deeper sense of self-cultivation one can find in Asian religions.

That only Christians cared for charitable work is largely missionary propaganda. 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). On the other hand, it is true that in Europe the Catholic Church, followed after the 16th century by its Protestant counterparts, was primarily responsible for a massive network of hospitals, orphanages, and institutions for the poor and the elderly, at a time when there was no public welfare system.

Some scholars believe that, in fact, the decline of organized religion in Western Europe happened because the states transferred to themselves the welfare activities once monopolized by the Christian churches:

As governments gradually assume many of these welfare functions, individuals with elastic preferences for spiritual goods will reduce their

level of participation since the desired welfare goods can be obtained from secular sources (Gill and Lundsgaarde 2004, 399)

In other words, “weak” believers joined, or remained in, the Christian churches mostly because of the welfare services they offered, and when welfare was largely transferred to the state simply walked away from Christian institutional religion. This theory is contested by others, who believe that the fact that secular states came to control a higher percentage of schools was more important than welfare for explaining the decline of religion in Western Europe (Franck and Iannaccone 2014). In fact, both schools and health care-charitable institutions were for centuries a church monopoly in Europe.

In the twenty-first century, the situation has changed in Asia too. Buddhist movements such as Soka Gakkai are very active in social and political issues. Daeseon Jinrihoe is in itself evidence that non-Christian movements have developed impressive networks in the fields of both education and welfare. Daeseon Jinrihoe is not unique, and I want to propose here a comparison with a new Buddhist movement from Taiwan, Tzu Chi, a large and globalized Buddhist movement born in Japan, Soka Gakkai, and the different institutions promoting in Bhutan what the local government calls “Gross National Happiness.” I selected these three examples because I have visited Tzu Chi’s facilities in Taiwan, Soka Gakkai’s main centers in Japan, and Bhutan.

## **Tzu Chi**

Tzu Chi, founded by the female Buddhist master Cheng Yen, is currently one of the largest Buddhist charities in the world (Yao 2012). It is well-known in Taiwan and beyond for its recycling activities, which are both ecological (for example, Tzu Chi recycles millions of plastic bottles every year) and charitable, because the recycled products, everything from clothing to shoes to furniture, are either distributed to the poor or sold to benefit them. As of 2016, Tzu Chi operated 548 main recycling stations and 10,204 “recycling points” in 16 different nations (Tzu Chi 2017, 110). Tzu Chi also operates two hospitals and a university.

The story of how Tzu Chi was born is particularly interesting. Master Cheng Yen sees as its foundational event her meeting in the mid-1960s, when she had just been ordained as a Buddhist nun, with three Catholic nuns from an order called the Sisters of Saint Paul of Chartres. Reportedly, the nuns tried to convert Master Cheng Yen to Catholicism. They eventually gave up, but the Buddhist nun was impressed by the usual missionary argument, that

Buddhist disciples only seek to prepare for life after death and do not perform actual deeds that deals with the problem of society. They [the



Catholic nuns] claimed that they rarely saw Buddhists doing what benefits society as a whole and that there were no Buddhists who built hospitals and schools the way the Christians did (Yao 2012, 65).

There was a reason why Master Cheng Yen was receptive to this argument. She was already a somewhat anomalous Buddhist nun, and had experienced some trouble being ordained, because she found traditional Taiwanese nuns were fixed in “traditional female roles,” while she wanted both to be a nun and to engage in an active life “to serve the needs of a wider population” (Yao 2012, 60). She “became convinced that Buddhists should perform charitable acts just like Catholics” (Yao 2012, 66), which eventually led to the foundation of Tzu Chi.

Master Cheng Yen proposes a radical approach to Buddhism, which is critical of Soka Gakkai (discussed in the next sub-paragraph) and other groups in the *Lotus Sutra* tradition, to which Tzu Chi is sometimes compared by scholars. They do engage in social activities, but also teach the importance of chanting and reciting sutras. Master Cheng Yen disagrees, and claims that,

There would be no cause and effects if we eliminated bad karma by chanting sutras. Being human, we will all die someday; you must get off the bus at the station that corresponds with the mileage you paid for when you bought your ticket. You should help others before it is too late (quoted in Yao 2012, 101).

For Tzu Chi, traditional Buddhist practices such as temple worship, prayer, and chanting are not important, while the key to Buddhism is altruism and good deeds:

The real function of morning prayer is to be watchful of one's behavior at the beginning of the day, and night prayer is for self-examination at the end of the day. As long as one does these two things each day, one does not necessarily need to practice other forms of religious prayer (quoted in Yao 2012, 93).

Master Cheng Yen teaches a way of salvation she calls *xing jing*, “acting according to Buddhist teachings,” which in Christian terms one could see as similar to the Catholic “salvation through works” as opposed to the Protestant *sola fides*, the salvation through faith only. Giving alms and serving as volunteers in hospitals and recycling activities is the basis of altruism, and altruism according to Tzu Chi is the core teaching of Buddhism.

This is not to say that self-cultivation is not important in Tzu Chi, but it is seen in moral rather than religious terms. The Ten Precepts of Tzu Chi indicate what one should not do and forbid

- (1) killing any sentient being;
- (2) stealing;
- (3) sexual misconduct;
- (4) false speech;
- (5) drinking alcohol;
- (6) smoking or chewing betel nut;
- (7) gambling, which also includes playing the lottery and involvement in the stock market;
- (8) acting against parents' wishes or being ungrateful to them;
- (9) breaking the traffic laws;
- (10) attending or participating in political demonstrations or anti-government activities (quote in Yao 2012, 92).

While the Ten Precepts include a conventional Taiwanese morality and express Tzu Chi's support for Taiwan government's campaigns, including those against chewing betel nut, dangerous driving, and compulsive gambling, they also try to prevent members from wasting money that can be better employed to support the movement's charitable activities.

Yet, Tzu Chi is by no means a purely secular organization. Some see Tzu Chi mostly as just a pro-ecology and charitable group, but Taiwanese scholar Yao Yu-Shuang has described it as a full-fledged new religious movement. While casual visitors may be mostly told about the social work, Tzu Chi defines its activity as "putting the Buddha's teaching into action," although adding that its charitable activities do not serve any proselytization purpose (Tzu Chi 2017, 124–125). Yao found that those who devote their lives to Tzu Chi regard Master Cheng Yen as "the embodiment of Guan Yin" (Yao 2012, 164) and regard her interpretation of Buddhism as normative.

### **Soka Gakkai**

Soka Gakkai is believed to be the largest Buddhist movement in the world, with some twelve million members worldwide (McLaughlin 2019). It has been successful in several Western countries, particularly in Italy, where it had in 2019 more than 90,000 members (Introvigne 2019). Soka Gakkai was born in Japan in 1930, and its two founders, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (1871–1944) and Josei Toda (1900–1958), experienced the tragedy of World War II. Because of their pacifist attitude and opposition to Japanese militarism, they were arrested, and Makiguchi died in jail. Like most Japanese, Toda went through the deep trauma of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. When, from the teaching of the *Lotus Sutra* in the tradition of the Japanese monk Nichiren Daishonin (1222–1282), Soka Gakkai expanded its scope to social activism,

not surprisingly Toda's first campaign was for nuclear disarmament, a theme that has remained crucial for the movement to this day (ŠorytĚ 2019).

Based on personally lived tragic events and the deep Buddhist perception of the world, already since 1957, his second leader President Toda, who died in 1958, had started an active anti-nuclear campaign. The same year, he issued his first declaration calling for the total abolition of nuclear weapons, grounded in his convictions as a Buddhist. When, in 1958, Daisaku Ikeda succeeded Toda as President of Soka Gakkai, the fact that the fight against atomic weapons was not humanitarian or secular only, but was grounded on Buddhist values, became even more clear.

The same year 1958, Ikeda had published a text called "A Way Out of the Burning House," based on a Buddhist parable, and very interesting for understanding the basis of Soka Gakkai's social activism. The "burning house" was our world, threatened by "unprecedented dangers." Ikeda found the "way out" in the Buddhist text that is at the very center of Soka Gakkai's religious experience, the *Lotus Sutra*.

According to that parable, a wealthy man's house suddenly catches fire but, because the house is very spacious, his children who are inside remain unaware of the danger in which they are placed and show neither surprise nor fear. The father then finds ways to entice them to come out of their own accord, thus enabling all to exit the burning house unharmed (Ikeda 2019, 4).

Coming out of the burning house, here, involves something more than a mundane strategy. The children trapped into the burning house need a conversion of the heart, which goes beyond politics and is rooted in spirituality. Soka Gakkai Buddhists believe in the possibility of an inner transformation of individuals. We can change ourselves not only by ceasing hostile acts, but orienting our existence toward saving lives, thus transforming our societies at their core.

In 1996, Ikeda founded the Toda Institute for Global Peace and Policy Research. Since 1983, on January 26, including in 2020, in commemoration of the creation of Soka Gakkai, Ikeda wrote every year a Peace Proposal to the United Nations. 2020 was a significant year, as Soka Gakkai celebrated the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its founding and the 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of Soka Gakkai International, and of course the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of World War II. In his 2020 message, Ikeda discussed the situation of multilateral treaties for nuclear disarmament, noting both stalemates between United States and Russia, and signs of hope (Ikeda 2020).

Ikeda's Peace Proposals demonstrate a very good understanding of the political dynamics of the world and the United Nations as a universal organization *per se*. This was confirmed when, in 2006, Ikeda wrote a detailed proposal for a reform of the United Nations. He wrote it cautiously, trying not to challenge directly the members of the Security Council. However, the text makes it clear that without a deep reform of how the United Nations work, its noble humanitarian aims cannot be achieved.

The 2006 proposal for United Nations reform should be read together with what is perhaps the most important text by Ikeda on Soka Gakkai's core theme of nuclear disarmament, the 2009 five-point plan for nuclear abolition. In this text, Ikeda went back to the very roots of Soka Gakkai, remembering that,

Just over 100 years ago, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (1871–1944), the founding president of the Soka Gakkai, proposed a new mode of competition, “humanitarian competition”—in which “by benefiting others, we benefit ourselves”—as a means of overcoming conflict among nations. He called on each state to engage in a positive rivalry to contribute to the world through humane action, in order to spread the spirit of peaceful coexistence and build a truly global society (Ikeda 2009, 33).

The world is of course not close to global nuclear disarmament and peace, although Soka Gakkai's efforts did result in some international documents and recognition. Yet, Ikeda's vision is based on a humanistic Buddhism, teaching devotees never to lose hope. In his 2019 and 2020 Peace Proposals, Ikeda places nuclear disarmament within a larger framework based on “people-centered multilateralism,” going beyond the concept of national security, a “global compact on refugees,” and efforts to fight climate change. There is a clear sense that the campaign for disarmament cannot be disassociated from a wider global effort for peace, solidarity, ecology, and justice. Ikeda invites to “cultivate a mutual recognition of this pathology [of ‘peacelessness’] and join in search of a cure. In other words, we must develop a common vision for a peaceful society” (Ikeda 2019, 6).

Ultimately, Soka Gakkai invites us not to lose hope:

The darker the night, the closer the dawn: now is the time to accelerate momentum toward disarmament by taking the present crises as an opportunity to create a new history. To this end, I would like to propose three key themes that could serve as a kind of scaffolding in the effort to make disarmament a cornerstone of the world in the twenty-first century: sharing a vision of a peaceful society, promoting a people-centered multilateralism and mainstreaming youth participation (Ikeda 2019, 2).

Once again, this effort is grounded on Buddhism.

Our sense that the sufferings of others bear no relation to us, the distaste we might even feel, was admonished by Shakyamuni as the arrogance of the young, the arrogance of the healthy, the arrogance of the living. If we reconsider that arrogance in terms of the connections of the human heart,

we can clearly see how the apathy and lack of concern arising from arrogance actually deepens and intensifies the suffering of others (Ikeda 2019, 9).

Conversely,

our efforts to empathize with and support those struggling with difficulties help weave networks of mutual encouragement, giving rise to an expanding sense of security and hope. The focus of Buddhism is not confined to the inevitable sufferings of life, but takes in the reality of people confronting various difficulties within society. Thus, we find within the canon of Mahayana Buddhism (The Sutra on Upāsaka Precepts) encouragement to build wells, plant fruit trees and build water channels, help the old, the young and the weak to cross rivers and console those who have lost their land. This urges us to recognize that we are likely at some point to experience the suffering that afflicts other people—that there is no happiness which is our sole possession, no suffering that remains entirely confined to others—and to strive for the welfare of both self and others. In this, the essential spirit of Buddhism is expressed. Taking as one's own the pains and sufferings of others is exactly the philosophical wellspring for the SGI's [Soka Gakkai International's] activities as a faith-based organization (FBO) as we work to address global challenges. . . (Ikeda 2019, 10).

In his 2020 message, Ikeda also discussed the U.N. role on global natural disasters, and urged member states to “take joint and constructive action rather than just communicating a shared sense of crisis.” These look like prophetic words in view of the global coronavirus crisis, that hit the world days after the 2020 message was published.

Even in this case, this project was based on Buddhism, and on the Buddha's teachings that what causes evil is arrogance. The way out of evil is to experience the suffering of others as our own. This is, Ikeda wrote, “the essential spirit of Buddhism.” Ikeda is of course aware that in the international situation one can find ample cause for pessimism. He, however, mentions the example of Nichiren Daishonin, the originator of the Buddhist tradition to which Soka Gakkai belongs, when confronted with a deep national crisis in Japan in 1260.

At the time, the Japanese people suffered from repeated disasters and armed conflicts, and many were sunk in apathy and resignation. Society as a whole was permeated by pessimistic philosophies that despaired of the possibility of resolving challenges through one's own efforts, and many people's sole focus was on maintaining a sense of inner tranquility. Such ways of thinking

and acting ran entirely contrary to the teachings animating the Lotus Sutra, which call on us to maintain unyielding faith in the potential existing within all people, to work for the full development and flowering of that potential and to build a society in which all people shine in the fullness of their dignity. Nichiren's treatise urges an earnest confrontation with the challenge of how to spark the light of hope in the hearts of people beaten down by repeated disaster, how to mobilize social change to prevent wars and internal conflicts. He thus stresses the need to root out the pathology of resignation that lies hidden in the deepest strata of our social being, infecting us all: "Rather than offering up ten thousand prayers for remedy, it would be better simply to outlaw this one evil." His treatise calls on us to reject resignation in the face of our deep social ills and instead to muster our inner human capacities so that we may together meet the severe challenges of our age as agents of proactive and contagious change (Ikeda 2019, 13).

### **Bhutan's "Gross National Happiness" Project**

Tzu Chi and Soka Gakkai are private organization. Bhutan is a sovereign state, whose king Jigme Singye Wangchuck (born in 1955 and still alive, although he abdicated in 2006 in favor of his eldest son) coined in 1972 the expression "Gross National Happiness," stating that this was more important for his country than the Gross National Product.

He did more than launch a slogan, as he created a Gross National Happiness Commission that oversees several institutions throughout Bhutan. He also enlisted the help of the University of Oxford to promote the idea of Gross National Happiness internationally, particularly through the United Nations (Schroeder 2018).

Controversy followed. For some, Gross National Happiness is simply political propaganda. They point out in particular the problems Bhutan has had with its non-Buddhist minority of ethnic Nepalese in the South of the country, where the conflict of the 1990s generated more than 100,000 refugees, who either fled Bhutan or were forced out of it. Others believe that the policy has indeed achieved results, which by definition cannot be measured in economic terms, yet can sometimes be assessed objectively. For example, Bhutan has rapidly improved its education system and has been recognized as one of the eco-friendliest countries in the world. It also takes great care in controlling tourism, so that it can develop in a way respectful of both ecology and traditional cultural values.

The reason I mention here Gross National Happiness is that Bhutan is an officially Buddhist state and, as Canadian scholar Kent Schroeder emphasized in 2018 in one of the few Western books on the topic, the policy cannot be understood separately from Bhutanese Buddhism.

The values underlying the individual pillars of GNH [Gross National Happiness] are defined as distinctly Buddhist. [...] GNH constructs Buddhism as the core of the cultural values of the country. They provide the foundation upon which GNH rests (Schroeder 2018, 27).

How is this implemented in practice? On the one hand, Buddhism teaches to the Bhutanese a Middle Way path, where happiness lies in moderation and in being satisfied with a modest, yet harmonious life (Rinzin 2006). On the other hand, the institutions set up by the government are supposed to be continuously tested against Buddhist principles. They are not asked to create happiness, as Buddhism posits that only individuals can create happiness for themselves. In Schroeder's words,

GNH does not create happiness for individuals and society. Similar to the human development paradigm, the GNH framework creates enabling conditions that provide people with the ability to choose to live happy lives within their national context, where happiness is understood as fulfilling one's deepest human potential (Schroeder 2018, 27).

Ultimately, Bhutanese Buddhism teaches, nobody can really make another person happy. Happiness comes from inside, not from the outside. However, an appropriate context outside can create conditions where happiness can be cultivated inside.

### **Some Common Points**

Tzu Chi, Soka Gakkai, and the Bhutanese project of Gross National Happiness all belong to the category of humanistic or activist Buddhism. Soka Gakkai and Bhutanese Buddhism (Kumagai 2014), different as they are, give more importance to rituals such as chanting, prayer, and worship, while Tzu Chi is more radical in prioritizing social work. However, Soka Gakkai and the Bhutanese project for happiness give great importance to the principle of "Buddhism in action" in their social activities, and Tzu Chi, when examined more closely, appears to be a Buddhist new religious movement and not simply a charitable institution.

Both Soka Gakkai and the authorities presiding over the Gross National Happiness project in Bhutan regard interaction with the United Nations as important, with Ikeda directly addressing the internal problems of the U.N. and Bhutan trying to promote its project as a model through U.N. events. Tzu Chi also sought and achieved, in 2010, special consultative status at the United Nations' Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) (*Taiwan Today* 2010), a recognition Soka Gakkai International had obtained in 1983 (Soka Gakkai International 2010).

Soka Gakkai, whose leaders are at the origin of a political party, Komeito, currently part of the governing coalition in Japan, is more directly involved in politics than Tzu Chi, which however tend to support some governmental campaigns in Taiwan. Despite these differences, all these three projects have in common the core idea that Buddhism need to actively engage with the world's current problems and that to be a good Buddhist, meditation and chanting are not sufficient, but one needs to show compassion in practice, by working for the poor, ecology, and world peace.

## The Source of Daesoon Jinrihoe's Social Work: Daesoon Thought

In Daesoon Jinrihoe, all three major works of education, social welfare and charity aid rest on the foundation of *Sangsaeng*. The basic idea is that the world suffers because of grievances accumulated in both the human and the spirits' realm for thousands of years.

In Daesoon Thought, the universe has been created by Gucheon Sangje, the Lord of the Ninth Heaven, or the Supreme God. All beings exist only thanks to their relations with Sangje. He originally created a world of perfect harmony. Sangje's power to create and maintain harmony is expressed through the notion of *Noeseong* (Lightning and Thunder). Lightning comes from the two vital forces, yin and yang, and manifests itself as thunder. During the course of the millennia, this harmony was broken by the evil behavior of the creatures, and the lesser deities were not capable of restoring it. The crisis that developed in the Former World (*Seoncheon*), accumulating grievances and disorders, also extended to the world of divine spirits. Thus, they reported to Sangje, who decided to intervene personally.

Accepting their petitions, he started a "Great Itineration" (*Daesoon*) through the three realms of Heaven, Earth, and Humanity. Sangje descended to the West and arrived in Korea, where he dwelt in the great statue of the Maitreya Buddha in the Geumsansa Temple in North Jeolla Province. From there, he revealed himself to Choi Je-Wu (1824–1864), who founded an earlier Korean new religion, Donghak (Eastern Learning). Choe, however, was not able to overcome the corrupt system of state Confucianism, which led to his execution in 1864. Daesoon Jinrihoe believes that, after the failure of Choe's mission, Sangje incarnated as Kang Jeungsan (1871–1909) (DIRC 2016).

Daesoon Jinrihoe teaches that Sangje, incarnated as Kang Jeungsan, thus continued on earth his great Reordering Works of Heaven and Earth (*Cheonjigongsa*). Through this work, he rectified or adjusted the periodical order of the universe (*Dosu*). He reordered the world of divine beings, humanity, and the environment. He solved the grievances in the Former World and opened the way to the advent of a glorious Later World (*Hucheon*) (DIRC 2014, 12–13). The passage from the old to the new world is called *Gaebyeok* (Great Transformation), a traditional concept in Korean religion (Flaherty 2011). As we read in Daesoon Jinrihoe's main scripture, *The Canonical Scripture* (DIRC 2020),



Presiding over the Three Realms with great power, I will recalibrate the Degree Number of the Former World and open the destined pathway to limitless divine immortality in the Later World to establish a paradise (*Reordering Works* 1, 2).

God's Reordering Works of Heaven and Earth performed by Kang Jeungsan are supposed to rectify all the accumulated grievances and disorders. Although God, i.e. Kang Jeungsan, did complete this truly global Work, humanity should also cooperate. The way humans cooperate with the divine work is by practicing the twin principles of *Sangsaeng*, the resolution of grievances for mutual beneficence (*Haewon Sangsaeng*) and reciprocating favors out of gratitude (*Boeun Sangsaeng*). These are both religious and social principles. They deal with the whole universe and with cosmic grievances to be resolved, yet at the same time call for overcoming widespread human grievances and for a concrete mutual beneficence through social work.

Education itself in Daesoon Jinrihoe is based on *Sangsaeng*. Daejin University proclaims that its aim is,

to nurture capable people who will contribute to developing the nation and human society based on faithfulness, piety and conviction, which are founded on the principle of living harmoniously without any resentment, the aim of Daesoon Jinrihoe based on benevolence and righteousness (Daejin University 2020).

The "spirit" of Daejin University is expressed by three principles, faithfulness (*Seongsil*), piety (*Gyeonggeon*), and conviction (*Sinnyeom*). Seong refers to "truth" and "sincerity" and relates to guarding against self-deception and putting this principle sincerely into practice. *Gyeong* is more than religious piety, as it "refers to moving forward by following the movement of body and soul in line with [their] proprieties." *Sin* implies that projects should be carried out with an unchanged mind, without being distracted by greed and self-deception.

As for health care, Kang Jeungsan himself created an integrated sacred and social space with his Donggok Clinic, where he cured both physical and spiritual illnesses, and where he passed away in 1909. There, he performed 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” (AADDJ 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 regarded as part of his Reordering Work, and he asked his disciples to approach them with care and love.

Coming to charity aid, 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 honeybees 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’ (AADDJ 2017, 11).

Mutualism is a natural law, and already has several beneficial effects. However, *Sangsaeng* and “mutual beneficence” go much further, as they require “both parties to be motivated by pure intentions to benefit one another” (AADDJ 2017, 11). Conversely, when *Haewon Sangsaeng* and *Boeun Sangsaeng* are practiced with sincere heart, their benefits for society are much greater than those of mutualism. The biological sphere, ruled by mutualism, and the human sphere, ideally ruled by mutual beneficence, are regarded as strictly related, which explains the close connection between social work and ecology in Daesoon Jinrihoe.

## Daesoon Jinrihoe’ Social Work in Comparative Perspective

The social work performed by Daesoon Jinrihoe is an answer to the question how Asian traditional religious values may be made relevant to address social injustice and solve contemporary dramatic social problems. Daesoon Jinrihoe, however, believes that it has gone one step further with respects to other movements and projects, as from the teachings of Kang Jeungsan and his successors Jo Jeongsan (1895–1958) and Park Wudang, it has learned that the ultimate causes of all social problems lie in millennia of unresolved grievances. The ideas that these grievances may be resolved by cooperating

with the divine work started by Kang Jeungsan is the spiritual source of the impressive social work performed by Daeseon Jinrihoe.

Although Buddhism is not the only root of Daeseon Jinrihoe (Kim 2017), it is an important reference for Daeseon Thought. Daeseon Jinrihoe's social work has several features in common with Tzu Chi's principle of "putting the Buddha's teaching into action," Soka Gakkai's humanistic Buddhism, and the Bhutanese (Buddhist) concept of Gross National Happiness. They are different forms of what Yao calls "engaged Buddhism" (Yao 2012), and certainly Daeseon Jinrihoe is engaged Asian religion. Although propagation, edification, and cultivation are defined as the three "basic works," the "three major societal works" of education, social welfare, and charity aid are also regarded as fundamental, "to put [...] principles into practice" (Daeseon Jinrihoe 2020). Cultivation is inseparable from social work in Daeseon Jinrihoe.

Daeseon Jinrihoe, like other Korean new religions, is a millenarian movement, in the sense that it awaits the advent of a Latter World, an Earthly Paradise. This theme is common in Buddhism, and connected to prophecies about the advent of the Maitreya. Although millenarianism is less emphasized by Tzu Chi, Soka Gakkai, and Bhutanese Buddhism, at least in their more public presentations, it is not absent from the Buddhist classics they propose as reference texts. Master Cheng of Tzu Chi mentions the "Western World of Perfect Happiness," a "ultimately wonderful land," although it can be something existing outside our world rather than a transformed Latter World (Yao 2012, 81). "Deathless life," or at least longevity beyond our possible imagination, which will exist in Daeseon Jinrihoe's Earthly Paradise, is also discussed in the texts of the Drukpa Kagyu, the dominant school in Bhutanese Buddhism and the driving tradition behind the Gross National Happiness project (Ura 2014, 85). Soka Gakkai believes that, since the year 1052, we have entered the third age of humanity, known as *mappō*, and in this age the eternal Buddha incarnated in Japan as Nichiren Daishonin, opening the way to a final release of human suffering through rebirth (McLaughlin 2019, 9).

A common feature of Daeseon Jinrihoe, Tzu Chi, Soka Gakkai, and the Bhutanese project of Gross National Happiness is the idea that human development and ecology are interconnected. Tzu Chi's most well-known example of "Buddhism in action" is its ability to mobilize thousands of enthusiastic volunteers for its recycling activities. Soka Gakkai dreams of "a world that prioritizes ecological integrity" (Ikeda 2020, 9), and frames its proposals for peace in ecological terms:

To coincide with the 1992 Earth Summit, the SGI established the Soka Institute for Environmental Studies and Research of the Amazon (CEPEAM) in Brazil, which has since carried out activities to restore the rainforest and protect its unique ecology. And it is not by coincidence that our exhibitions originally organized in support of the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable

Development were titled “Seeds of Change” and “Seeds of Hope.” These titles encapsulate the message that every one of us, starting from where we are now, has the potential to become an architect of change for a sustainable global society, and that our every action is a seed of change, a seed of hope, that will bloom into flowers of dignity throughout the world (Ikeda 2020, 9).

Gross National Happiness implies preserving Bhutan’s unique ecology and wildlife. One aspect of it is welcoming tourism only if it is “ecotourism,” through projects developed together with the World Wildlife Fund (Schroeder 2018, 64–66).

Daesoon Jinrihoe is in turn an “ecological religion,” as evidenced by papers presented by its representatives at the Inaugural Yeosu Eco-Forum in 2019 (Daesoon Jinrihoe 2019). According to Ko Young Woon, Daesoon Jinrihoe’s key principle of *Sangsaeng*

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).

A third point in common between Daesoon Jinrihoe’s social work, Tzu Chi, Soka Gakkai, and Gross National Happiness is the idea that true happiness comes from inside, although a community where benevolent deeds are practiced to benefit others, and ecological harmony with nature is promoted, creates the appropriate conditions allowing happiness to be pursued and flourish. Daesoon Jinrihoe teaches that what mostly prevents happiness is self-deception. It is also the root cause of deceiving others and engaging in unethical actions, but it starts as a corruption of the heart and the mind.

This is different from approaches to benevolence and happiness prevailing in the West and in Christianity. It is now becoming common in the West to observe that what prevents a holistic approach to humanity's problems and tragedies is the rigid dualism between mind and body theorized in its most rationalist form in the works of French philosopher René Descartes (1596–1650) and its successors, which is still conditioning the Western way of thinking today (Hanegraaff 1996). Although Descartes' thought, as Étienne Gilson (1884–1978) observed in his doctoral dissertation, used as its building blocks elements from the Christian philosophy of the previous centuries, it is also true that medieval and early modern Christianity also included forms of mysticism that were less dualistic (Gilson 2019). Without entering complicated philosophical questions, there are clear differences between the Western/Christian and the Eastern Asian approach to charity and humanitarian aid, not so much about what is done but about why it is done. Tzu Chi insists on collective karma (*gongye*: Yao 2012, 81), and we find similar notion that all humans and indeed all beings in the universe are interconnected in Soka Gakkai and Daesoon Jinrihoe.

The motivation sustaining the admirable Western Christian charities in the West, and their secular successors, are connected with an affirmation of the self. The self is wounded by sin, and rescues itself through honorable deeds, thus gaining salvation. These concepts have been secularized by modern Western ideologies, and persist even in a post-Christian context. By contrast, for example, among the keys to understand Bhutan's Gross National Happiness are,

the concepts of non-self, emptiness and the principle of dependent origination [...]. All these basically work towards deconstructing the artificial construction of 'I/me/mine' and the false divisions between self and other that dominate our daily life (Gyatso 2014, 144).

Soka Gakkai teaches that the arrogance of the self is the root of social and political evils (Ikeda 2019, 9). Tzu Chi claims that good fortune (*fu*) alone may lead to the arrogance of the self and ultimately make our life a failure, while we should practice *zhifu* (realizing *fu*) through exercises of self-awareness and by cultivating empathy and harmony with the whole universe (Yao 2012, 82).

In Daesoon Jinrihoe, self-deception means remaining within the prison of a self that is separate from the rest of humanity and the universe, and thus is incapable of resolving grievances and restoring harmony (Kim 2016). In fact, Daesoon Jinrihoe's notion of self-deception is different from both the Christian and secular models proposed in the West and at the same time is not identical with traditional Confucian and Buddhist ideas about self-deception (Kim 2016). It is intimately connected with the principle that what prevents

happiness and the possibility of a harmonious and peaceful world is the presence of unresolved grievances, and that grievances should be resolved through the principle of Sangsaeng. The focus on grievances in Daesoon Jinrihoe is original. Although several features of its social work are similar to Tzu Chi and Gross National Happiness, and others to Soka Gakkai, Daesoon Jinrihoe's explanation of why the world is in a condition making social work an urgent necessity is partially different.

### **Conflict of Interest**

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

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