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**The Scriptures of Daesoon Jinrihoe: *The Canonical Scripture, The Guiding Compass of Daesoon, and Essentials of Daesoon Jinrihoe*. Translated and published by Daesoon Institute of Religion and Culture. Yeosu City: Gyeonggi-do, Republic of Korea. 2020.**

**Eileen BARKER**

London School of Economics, UK

Currently one of the largest indigenous new religions of Korea, Daesoon Jinrihoe is based on the teachings and practices of Kang Il-Sun (1871-1909), later known by the honorific title of Jeungsan, or as Sangje, the Supreme God of the Ninth Heaven. Records of Kang Jeungsan's life have given rise to a proliferation of new religions within Korea, but only a small handful of these have been translated into English. Unlike some other new religions, Daesoon Jinrihoe has sent few missionaries overseas and has produced relatively few translations and English-language literature. These books open up the possibility for a whole new audience to have access to the teachings and practices of the movement.

Following Sangje's death, several of His disciples founded their own distinct groups, each emphasising different aspects of the teaching, with well over 100 sects appearing (and, in many cases, disappearing) throughout the twentieth century. One branch developed under the leadership of Jo Jeongsan (1895-1958), who, although not a direct disciple of Sangje Kang Jeungsan, had received a revelation in 1917 announcing his succession into the lineage of Sangje's religious orthodoxy. Jo Jeongsan, known in Daesoon Jinrihoe as the Holy Founder, Doju, "the Lord of the Dao", returned to Korea from Manchuria (where he had been involved in a campaign to rescue Korea from the Japanese occupation) to continue Sangje's work. In 1925, he founded a religious order known as Mugeuk-do. During World War II, the Japanese outlawed any religion deemed incompatible with State Shinto, but Doju managed to continue his activities and in 1950 he renamed the order Taegeukdo.

By his death, Doju had established and actualised principles of cultivation, elaborated rituals, clarified codes of behaviour and reorganised the order's executive system. He had also conferred responsibility for the management of the order's affairs to Park Wudang (1917-1995), referred to as Dojeon (Leader of Principle). In 1969, in the face of internal dissension and schisms, Dojeon made further organisational changes, thereby

founding the religious order known as Daesoon Jinrihoe (the Fellowship of the Great Itineration). Since Dojeon's death, the Order has been run by a Central Council.

*The Canonical Scripture*, a weighty volume of 654 pages, is divided into several sections. Five *Acts* describe, in roughly chronological order, the day-to-day life of Sangje, starting with His auspicious birth and prodigious childhood, and ending with His conducting some elaborate rituals in anticipation of His imminent ascension into the Ninth (and highest) Heaven. (Unlike Doju or any other personage, a capital letter is used in the Scripture when reference is made to Sangje.)

The *Acts* paint a vivid picture of Sangje's day-to-day life. In nearly all cases we are informed precisely when and where the event took place and who was present to witness it. In many respects these accounts are similar to the Four Gospels that relate the life of Jesus, His parabolic teachings, healings and miracles, such as turning water into wine.

We learn how, on the day Sangje was born, the delivery room was filled with light; "two celestial maidens descended to Earth from Heaven ... and ... attended to the newborn Sangje. An effervescent, mysterious fragrance filled the entire delivery room. An auspicious vapor enveloped the entire house in which Sangje was born, and its light, extending up into the sky". We also learn that from his youth Sangje "exhibited a good-natured and generous personality and a remarkably brilliant mind." He taught at a neighbourhood school and spent hours reading books on Confucianism, Buddhism and Daoism and learning about East Asian philosophies, rituals and prophecies. Then, "to observe public sentiments and circumstances", He undertook a three-year journey (1897-1900), staying for varying periods of time at the homes of different disciples. During His travels, Sangje met Kim Il-Bu, whose *Corrected Book of Changes* was to have a significant influence on the Korean new religions. And who was, at that time, teaching and spreading the practice of Yeonggamudo – simultaneous chanting and gentle movement, based on the thought of Yin-Yang and the Five Movements (a system of East Asian thought which includes all phenomena, including human affairs).

On His return, Sangje spent some time practising Holy Works on a mountain top. By now stories of His teachings, healings and miracles were spreading. Particularly impressive was Sangje's ability to produce dramatic changes in the weather, be it to herald some auspicious happening, to save a neighbour from being executed or the crops from drought, to present a couple with a fine day as their wedding gift, or merely to prevent Himself from getting wet – or too hot. Sometimes scolding, occasionally praising, invariably teaching, life for Sangje was not always easy; there were those who subjected Him, His family and His disciples to both verbal and physical abuse, including imprisonment and torture. Such tribulations were, however, used to demonstrate key issues related to His teachings.

Throughout *The Canonical Scripture*, we are frequently told that Sangje (or someone at His instigation) wrote something on a piece of paper and then burnt it. Only occasionally do we know what was written on the paper. Other objects were also burned, such as promissory notes, a whole book and, on one occasion, a new blue outfit He had told a wealthy follower to make for Him.

Three sections labelled *Reordering Works* describe in some detail the rituals and practices Sangje performed to overcome the ills of the past (the Former World), open the Three Realms of the World of traditional East Asian cosmology: those of Heaven (including all divine beings and spirits): of the Earth (all natural living beings); and of Humanity (human civilisation) and establish an earthly paradise in the Later (future) World. Of primary importance is the principle of mutual beneficence (*sangsaeng*), where everyone benefits from any situation or action. To achieve the necessary harmony, all grievances of both divine and humans must first be resolved. Respect, particularly for one's parents, but also for the poor and for women, is required; and various cultural and legal reforms need to be implemented – for example, young widows should not be forced to grow old in isolation but allowed to remarry, there would be no distinction between legitimate and illegitimate children and no discrimination between the gentry and the low-born.

Two sections, entitled *Progress of the Order*, start with Sangje's recounting how all the divine sages, buddhas, and bodhisattvas, who had existed since the dawn of time, petitioned Him to reorder the disorder that had been created throughout the Three Realms. The disorder, Sangje recounted, was due partly to the Jesuit priest, Matteo Ricci (1552–1610), who had travelled from Italy to the East to build an earthly paradise but had failed due to “the deplorable practices that Confucianism had amassed over a long time”. However, Ricci opened the borders between Heaven and Earth, enabling the divine beings to come and go freely. This, largely because Western civilization was undermining the authority of the gods, resulted in the Dao of Heaven and Dao of human affairs becoming violated and the Three Realms being thrown into disorder. Reluctantly, Sangje had agreed to descend from the Ninth Heaven to undertake His Great Itineration (Daesoon) “to save the realm of humans and the realm of gods from the catastrophes that they were facing” – a journey which is likened to that of a king making a circuit about his kingdom as part of his governing or administering of justice. Having travelled throughout the world, Sangje finally reached Korea and spiritually entered the golden icon of Maitreya Buddha in the Golden Mountain Temple, roughly 200 km south of Seoul, for 30 years before incarnating as a man in 1871. Further revelations of a prophetic nature follow, as do Five Incantations and the somewhat enigmatic 25-page “Scripture of the Black Tortoise” which Sangje wrote shortly before His death and which contains one oft-repeated prayer: “to never forget and to know everything”. His disciples were instructed to pass on what He taught them “to 10,000

people”.

The second part of *Progress of the Order* introduces Doju, whose voice, we are told, “was resonant, his eyes were as glittering as those of a tiger, his neck was like that of a crane, his back was like that of a turtle, and his forehead shone like the sun and the moon.” One day, whilst Doju was practising Holy Works, “a man of divine power appeared” and told him, “If you recite this incantation, you shall save the world from chaos and relieve people of their despair.” The man then disappeared. Every day and night Doju respectfully recited the incantation: “*Lord of Heaven and being unified with the divine order, I wish to never forget and to know everything. May the ultimate energy descend abundantly now!*” He then received a revelation from Sangje, suggesting that he should return to Korea and look for Him there. There follows a description of how Doju devoted his life to following in Sangje’s footsteps and how he introduced “the Charter for Realizing the Dao”. Numerous incantations, together with a complex system of rituals that the disciples were expected to follow, are then spelled out in some detail.

Sections entitled *Dharma* return to Sangje’s teachings concerning both individual morality and more social matters – stressing the need for improving the lot of, amongst others, the poor, the sick and the foolish. The following sections, *Authority and Foreknowledge*, include further teachings concerning cause and effect, and more prophecies and warnings about the consequences of not understanding or following His instructions sufficiently clearly.

*Saving Lives* is devoted to healings performed by Sangje. Some were brought about through the administration of Traditional Korean Medicine, providing herbal medicines and/or balancing the person’s energies; sometimes He employed Shamanistic practices; some of His results were seemingly miraculous – but others demonstrated an astute awareness of the nature of both the elements and the human mind.

*Prophetic Elucidations* repeat and elaborate much of what had been written earlier, but from a more systematically theological perspective. This is followed by a six-page commentary by Professor Don Baker on *Reading The Canonical Scripture*. I would strongly advise readers unfamiliar with Daesoon Jinrihoe and/or East Asian philosophy to read this before embarking on *The Scripture* itself. It is not that *The Scripture* is difficult to read. It is not. The English translation is delightfully clear. However, as Baker points out, some basic assumptions of East Asian tradition are very different from those that have shaped Western thought, and in his short commentary Baker provides an excellent framework within which to locate not only *The Scripture*, but also the other two volumes.

Finally, we are presented with *The Literary Companion Dictionary for The Canonical Scripture* which takes up almost half the volume. This is a truly fascinating addition, more like an Encyclopedia than a mere appendix or glossary. It is not to be read from

A to Z, but referred to whenever the reader would like further background to the main text. It is, however, something which can absorb readers, taking them far beyond the confines of the formal Canon to discover new worlds of history, politics, culture, agriculture, sacred mountains and rivers, ritual attire, musical instruments, herbal medicines, ancient war lords, and Confucian, Buddhist, and Daoist and shamanistic beliefs; one can, moreover, train oneself to practise the Steps of Yu the Great – and so much more.

In the box set accompanying *The Canonical Scripture*, there is a 152-page volume entitled *The Guiding Compass of Daesoon*. This contains the basic knowledge required by members of Daesoon Jinrihoe as spelt out in detail by Dojeon (Park Wudang) and now carefully organised into five main parts (*The Right Comprehension of Daesoon Truth; Cultivation and Holy Works; Organisational System; Examples of Proper Conduct; and Works of the Order*), each of which is subdivided into up to four sections, which are themselves further subdivided into numerous headings covering short paragraphs, often no more than one sentence long. This is essentially an internal Guide, full of encouragement for the devotee to follow his or her path correctly and with due diligence.

A shorter, 58-page book, *Essentials of Daesoon Jinrihoe*, provides a useful overview for those who are less familiar with the Order, informing the reader about its organizational structure and numerous charitable, educational and welfare foundations as well as its history, theology and ethical beliefs. There are also a number of illustrations with 22 colour photographs of Daesoon Jinrihoe's five temple complexes and its many projects. Which include the Welfare Foundation; a vast hospital that offers both Western and Traditional Korean Medicine; Daejin High Schools in both Seoul and Bundang; and Daejin University campuses in both Korea and China.

Taken together, these three books offer a comprehensive introduction in the English language to what is arguably the most successful indigenous new religious movement in Korea. They provide essential reading for any religious scholar interested not only in discovering the foundation and contemporary practices of Daesoon Jinrihoe, but also for comparing the many ways in which human beings perceive and act in an increasingly globalising world. There should be a place for it in any library of note.

It is, furthermore, an absorbing read.