

Resolving Grievances for Mutual Beneficence: Kang Jeungsan's Religious Framework for Social Justice in Early Modern Korea

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Abstract

This article examines the principle of 'resolving grievances for mutual beneficence' (Haewon-sangsaeng) in Kang Jeungsan's (1871-1909) Reordering Works, a series of religious rituals performed in early 20th-century Korea. These rituals addressed systemic inequities affecting various marginalized groups, including revolutionaries, economically disadvantaged people, lower classes, and women. While conventional approaches to social harmony typically emphasize political, institutional, or economic measures, Kang's framework distinctively integrates the resolution of grievances at both individual and collective levels. This approach emerges from an anthropocentric worldview that elevates human dignity while acknowledging the interconnection between the divine and human realms. Through an analysis of primary texts and comparative religious perspectives, this study demonstrates how Kang's principle of resolving grievances for mutual beneficence offers a comprehensive religious framework for achieving justice and peace by synthesizing personal transformation with broader social change.

Keywords: Kang Jeungsan; Korea; Religious Movements; Reordering Works of the Universe; Resolving Grievances for Mutual Beneficence; Social Justice

INTRODUCTION

Kang Jeungsan (1871-1909; hereafter referred to as 'Kang') was a Korean religious leader and founder of the Jeungsanist movement in the early 20th century. In this tradition, Kang is revered as the holy



master (Seongsa 聖師), the Celestial Lord of the Ninth Heaven (Sangje 九天上帝), or the Supreme Being (Sangje 上帝), who revealed his Dao, the Daesoon Truth (A Truth of Great Itineration 大巡眞理), in Korea after making a Great Itineration around the world (Jeongyeong [The Canonical Scripture, hereafter CS], Reordering Works 1:24). During Kang's time, Korea faced devastating conflicts, including the Donghak (Eastern Learning 東學) revolution, Japanese intervention, and the Chinese-Japanese and Russo-Japanese Wars. As Flaherty (2011) notes, Korean millennial movements of this period emerged in response to these conflicts, expressing 'a deep yearning for a just society' amid the political and social upheaval of the late Joseon dynasty (p. 328). The Donghak movement and other religious movements arose during this time of 'acculturative strain, rapid social change, and the changing geopolitical conditions of northeast Asia' (p. 328).

Amid these conflicts, Kang sought to establish justice and peace through "his religious ritual", known as the 'Reordering Works of the Universe' (hereafter referred to as 'Reordering Works'). Through his nine-year ritual practice (1901-1909)¹, he aimed to transform a world of mutual conflict into one governed by mutual beneficence (Sangsaeng 相生), enabling social justice and global peace. As

¹ Kang Jeungsan's Reordering of the Universe encompassed a series of religious ceremonies conducted between 1901 and 1909, aimed at addressing the systemic disorder in Heaven and Earth—realms symbolizing the divine world—principally through rectifying the disorder and resolving grievances in each domain. In the sphere of Humanity, these rituals focused on resolving grievances and promoting mutual beneficence. Particularly in the social domain, this cosmic reordering centered on addressing conflicts and inequities affecting marginalized groups, including revolutionaries, the economically disadvantaged, lower classes, and women. This process integrated both divine and human elements, emphasizing individual transformation alongside broader social change, with the objective of achieving resolution of grievances for mutual beneficence through spiritual means rather than solely through political or economic reforms.

Beckford (1991) argued in his work on new religious movements, periods of rapid social change often give rise to religious innovations that attempt to address both spiritual and social concerns simultaneously (p. 47). Kang's movement exemplifies this pattern through its integration of traditional religious elements with modern social reform objectives represented by his religious ritual, that is, Reordering Works. Drawing on Beckford's (1991) framework of how religious innovations address both spiritual and social concerns, this paper analyzes the central concepts in Kang's religious frame of Reordering Works: 'Haewon' (解冤, resolution of grievances) and 'Sangsaeng' (mutual beneficence and co-prosperity). Kang's movement exemplifies this pattern through its integration of traditional religious elements with modern social reform objectives represented by his religious ritual, that is, Reordering Works.

Following this understanding of religious movements as responses to social change that address both spiritual and social concerns, this paper focuses on the central concepts in Kang's religious frame of Reordering Works: 'Haewon' and 'Sangsaeng'. These two principles promote social justice and peace, and are often combined in the term 'Haewon-sangsaeng,' which means 'resolving grievances for (or into) mutual beneficence or nourishment (hereafter referred to as 'resolution of grievances for mutual beneficence'). This thought takes as its starting point the idea that we are liable to incur emotional grudges against others and perhaps even against the spirits of the universe, Heaven, and Earth.² Accordingly, the resolution of grievances for mutual beneficence teaches us how to 'resolve

² In Asian traditions, the capitalized terms 'Heaven' and 'Earth' denote both the divine realm and the cosmic principles governing celestial and terrestrial phenomena, while also serving as symbolic referents for earthly or human relationships.

grievances' by letting go of these grudges, eliminating the need to appeal to coercive measures to fulfill our desires or take revenge.³

In Kang's worldview, the universe constituted an interconnected whole in which all beings, both cosmic and human, existed in mutual relationships. However, harmony broke down as the order of mutual conflict came to rule the world, and as a result, grievances (Won, 冤) became deeply rooted in the Three Realms of Heaven, Earth, and People, causing calamities, disharmony, and injustice. The situation was exacerbated when humanity desired to conquer nature and rule others because of its own greed and self-centered view.

Facing these problems, religious movements such as Daesoon Jinrihoe (The Fellowship of Daesoon Truth 大巡眞理會) claim that divine beings, Buddhas, and Bodhisattvas requested intervention. In response, the Supreme Being of the Ninth Heaven descended to the earthly realm and conducted the 'Reordering Works of the Heaven and Earth' to restore the Three Realms, which had fallen into chaos. This tradition (hereafter referred to as the 'Daesoon tradition')

³ In his religious rituals, Kang employed various symbolic and performative techniques to facilitate the resolution of grievances (Won 冤 and han 恨). These methods included ritualistic burning of paper inscribed with grievance-related text, meditative practices utilizing water as a purifying medium, and direct dialogue with aggrieved individuals. A notable example is his ritual work with disciples Kim Hyeongyeol and Cha Gyungseok, who harbored vengeful intentions toward their respective aggressors—the person who assaulted Kim and Cha's father's killer. Through ritualistic intervention incorporating prayer and symbolic purification, Kang facilitated the transformation of retributive impulses into spiritual reconciliation. Kang's ritual techniques operated on multiple levels: symbolic representation of grievances, invocation of relevant deities, and psychological transformation through ritual performance. These methods provided alternative pathways for addressing injustice and fulfilling desires, replacing cycles of revenge with spiritual resolution mechanisms. His approach demonstrated how religious ritual could function as a means of conflict resolution and psychological healing within early twentieth-century Korean society.

maintains that Kang thus opened the path to an earthly paradise in the Later World where justice and peace prevail.

This paper examines Kang's perspective on social justice within this tradition, specifically focusing on the principle of resolving grievances for mutual beneficence in the context of 'Reordering Works.' Through textual analysis of the CS and Daesoon scriptures, this study investigates how religious rituals and practices were designed to address various societal issues. These include the resolution of grievances within Donghak (Eastern Learning), the struggles of commoners under politico-economic pressure and social inequality, intellectuals' concerns, and broader questions of social justice and welfare. The late 19th century Korea witnessed significant social unrest, exemplified by the Donghak peasant movement led by Jeon Bongjun (Jeon Myeong-suk, 1854-1895). This movement emerged in response to severe socioeconomic inequalities, corrupt governance, and increased foreign intervention. While Jeon advocated for direct political action and armed resistance, intellectuals pursued either institutional reforms through modernization efforts or appealed to traditional Confucian principles of promoting righteousness and opposing injustice, particularly in response to Western and Japanese imperial powers. Jeungsan's religious framework offered an alternative perspective on addressing these social grievances. Instead of armed rebellion or political reform alone, he proposed resolving deep-seated grievances through spiritual means. His rituals acknowledged the legitimacy of peasants' and intellectuals' concerns about social justice, while suggesting that lasting change required transformation at both the individual and cosmic levels.

This research employs a qualitative, text-based methodology, primarily analyzing CS to understand Kang's views on social justice within the Daesoon tradition. The analysis proceeds in two stages: first, examining the foundational principles of Reordering Works,

including the root principle of yin and yang, and second, analyzing how these Works function as a mechanism for resolving grievances and establishing social justice. Through textual interpretation, this study examines Kang's response to modern Korean society and his vision of social transformation, while situating these ideas within their historical and theological context.

FOUNDATION AND PRINCIPLES OF KANG'S REORDERING WORKS

The Foundation of Reordering Works Through Yin and Yang Harmony

In the CS, Kang stated that 'Yin and yang are only water and fire' (CS, Acts 3). This foundational statement suggests that all worldly phenomena can be categorized as either yin or yang, with water and fire serving as their symbolic representations. When expanded, this yin-yang framework encompasses various dualities: heaven and earth; spirit (or God); and human, male, and female. Through this lens, the universe operates through dynamic movement of these complementary forces, manifested as cycles of unity and dispersion.

According to the yin-yang and five elements theory, there is a principle that 'water rises and fire falls' (水昇火降) ([Sin, 2021, p. 11](#)). This principle manifests in natural phenomena: in maintaining health, where cold energy must rise while hot energy descends; and in the environment, where water vapor rises to form clouds, and solar energy is absorbed into the ground. The CS affirms Kang's mastery over these natural forces, stating that he 'practiced great authority over Heaven via wind, rain, frost, snow, thunder, and lightning' (CS, Reordering Works 1:4).

The Reordering Works also emphasizes the fundamental relationship between Heaven and Earth, particularly regarding divine and human beings. As stated in the 'Scripture of Yin and Yang' of the

CS, 'Heaven and Earth achieve change through yin and yang, and divine beings and human beings achieve harmony through yin and yang' (天地以陰陽成變化 神人以陰陽成造化; CS, Progress of the Order 2:42). To understand these changes, we examine Jo Jeungsan's (1895–1958) interpretation of the Ocean Seal (Haeyin, 海印). Jo, who received religious authority through Kang's revelation and sealed letter, became Kang's successor as the head of Dao (Doju) in the Daesoon tradition (CS, Progress of Order 2:7, 13). This concept originates from the Buddhist notion of Ocean Seal samādhi (海印三昧, 海印定) found in the Avatamsaka Sūtra (華嚴經). While the later Joseon era transformed this concept into a physical object capable of materializing desires, Jo offered a different perspective. Upon returning from Haein Temple, Jo explained: 'The Ocean Seal is not a tangible object but rather exists close at hand. The origin of all universal principles lies in the ocean.' He elaborated that seawater contains electrical energy, which generates and sustains all things. Jo emphasized that Sangje (Kang), as ruler of the Ninth Heavens and master of electricity, earned the title Nweh-seong Boh-wa Cheon-jon Sangje (The Supreme God, the Celestial Worthy of Universal Creation through His Thunderbolt) (CS, Progress of the Order 2:55).

This framework explains the rationale for the transformation in the Daesoon tradition. According to this understanding, thunderstorms and lightning, charged with electricity, facilitate the division and transformation of heaven and the earth. This movement creates a cycle of seasons, which nurtures all things. Kang elaborates this concept through his discussion of wisdom: 'The wise have the energy of spring, summer, fall, and winter just as Heaven and Earth do, and they use it at their will. This is called wisdom and power' (高見遠慮曰智: 智者 與天地同 有春夏秋冬之氣 每事 任意用之 謂之智慧勇力 大智 與天地同 有春夏秋冬之氣; CS, Prophetic Elucidations 43). This suggests that the fundamental principle of harmony between

water and fire, heaven and earth, and divine and human beings rests in their yin-yang relationship mediated by electricity. Moreover, this implies that universal completion requires divine-human harmony, achieved through the authority of the Supreme God, incarnated as Kang.

The Book of Changes (Yijing, 易經) presents two contrasting hexagrams: 'Fire and water are not well connected' (火水未濟), showing fire above and water below, signifying incompleteness; and 'Water and fire are well connected' (水火既濟), showing water above and fire below, indicating completion. These hexagrams symbolize the Former world's incomplete state of yin-yang harmony. In contrast, the 'virtuous concordance of yin and yang' or 'perfected harmony of Yin-Yang' (陰陽合德) represents the first tenet of Daesoon Truth in the Later world, as described in the Corrected Book of Changes (Jeong-yeok 正易) (Kim, 2018).

In the Book of Changes, Kang's plan to reconstruct Yin and Yang is represented by the hexagram 'Earth and Heaven are intertwined' (地天泰卦). This hexagram depicts Earth above and Heaven below, symbolizing their mutual transformation from their traditional positions. This configuration represents the coming world of the ocean seal, in which the harmonious integration of Heaven and Earth enables human peace. Through his Reordering Works, Kang sought to recalibrate yin and yang to achieve harmonious transformation across multiple dimensions: Heaven and Earth, divine beings and humans, society and individuals.

While Yin and Yang represent a categorical system of opposing aspects, their interdependent dynamics in human affairs suggest that seemingly antagonistic relationships, such as those between men and women, or between upper and lower social strata, constitute a reciprocal relationship (對待) of mutual dependence. In the Korean tradition, Yin, associated with Earth, symbolizes marginalized groups,

including women, while Yang, associated with Heaven, represents those of higher social status, particularly men. Kang's Reordering Works of Heaven and Earth aimed to resolve the grievances caused by excessive mutual conflict in the Former World and transform hierarchical relationships—between aristocrats and lower classes, men and women, divine beings and humans—into relationships of mutual beneficence. This transformation involved reorienting the Yin-Yang principle from opposition toward interdependence, thereby resolving the grievances of marginalized groups through harmonious interaction between Yin and Yang forces.

Kang observed that in the Former World, the governing principle of mutual conflict had filled the Three Realms with grievances, leading to cosmic disorder and worldly suffering (CS, Reordering Works 1:3). The discrimination structure created through the suppression of Yin and exaltation of Yang generated grievances among marginalized groups associated with Yin (Kim, 2021, pp. 22-33). To establish the Later World of mutual beneficence where Yin-Yang harmonious virtue is realized, Kang presented the principle of right Yin and right Yang without mutual conflict. The core of his teaching suggests that, while Yin and Yang possess opposing characteristics, they should develop mutually beneficial relationships through cooperation rather than antagonism, leading to individual happiness and human peace. The harmonious virtue of Yin and Yang (德), understood as beneficial virtue (seondeok, 善德), manifests through the infinite creation of mutual beneficence, ultimately bringing unlimited benefits to humanity (Religious Research and Edification Department of Daesoon Jinrihoe, 2006, pp. 22-25).

Within this framework, social justice functions as a mechanism to rectify imbalances between the cosmic and human realms. The Reordering Works envisions social justice as a transformative structure, achieving societal equity through human transformation

that begins with reorganizing the divine realm. Kang critiqued the existing ceremonies and formalities of the 'old Heaven and Earth,' stating that 'This was wrongly arranged by the old Heaven, and the true dharma shall emerge in the future' (CS, Dharma 1:18). Building on this understanding of Kang's historical context and mission, we can now examine the theoretical foundations that shaped his approach to social justice.

Overview and Principle of the Reordering Works of the Universe in the Context of Social Justice

Between 1901 and 1909, Kang conducted his Reordering Works, which were fundamentally rooted in the principle of resolving grievances for mutual beneficence through Yin-Yang harmony. This transformation required modifying the Degree Number (度數) of Heaven and Earth—a concept from oriental numerology where degrees (do 度) and their corresponding numbers (su 數) represent worldly phenomena according to specific principles ([Daesoon Institute of Religion and Culture, 2020, p. 364](#)). Kang sought to shift the world from a state of mutual conflict (相克) to one of mutual beneficence by rectifying flawed Degree Numbers and establishing new heavenly predeterminations.

Kang warned that all sentient beings faced annihilation if the existing heavenly predeterminations remained unchanged. The CS records that he 'resolved all grievances and grudges accumulated from time immemorial, opening a way to the paradise of the Later World by building up the Dao of mutual beneficence' (CS, Prophetic Elucidations 9). Kang proclaimed that human beings and society could be reformed through this new principle of resolving grievances for mutual beneficence, lamenting, 'How pitiful it is, as all people of the world are about to be annihilated but do not realize it at all, blinding themselves with property and profit' (CS, Dharma 1:1). In

this context, Kang emphasized his mission to 'redeem humanity by exercising great authority over the three realms, and built the Later World of Earthly Paradise through the principle of mutual beneficence' (CS, Authority and Foreknowledge 1:11). While he aimed to resolve accumulated grievances to transform the world into an earthly paradise free from mutual conflict, he ultimately entrusted the completion of this mission to humanity. Through this principle of mutual beneficence, Kang presented both a remedy for global afflictions and a path to human redemption, emphasizing the elevation of rights and status for the marginalized. Thus, his framework established the foundation for a peaceful society based on freedom and equality through the Reordering Works.

Bell's theory of ritual practice illuminates how Kang's rituals serve as transformative mechanisms for both individual consciousness and social structures. As Bell (2009) argues, rituals can mediate between worldview and social action (pp. 169-170), precisely what Kang attempted through his Reordering Works. Kang described the advent of such a society, stating that he had 'thoroughly woven the Degree Number by rectifying both Heaven and Earth' and would 'have divine beings come in and out of people's hearts in order to change people's constitutions and characters' (CS, Dharma 3:1). He emphasized feeling at ease with the foolish, poor, humble, and weak, while warning that the rich, noble, wise, and strong, who were entangled in grudges, would be 'plucked out by their roots' as 'a place filled with the old energy can hardly support great fortune' (CS, Dharma 3:4). Through this rectification of Heaven and Earth, Kang arranged to seek out the abandoned and make use of them, infusing everything with new energy to transform the Three Realms (CS, Prophetic Elucidations 7).⁴

⁴ Kang's approach to utilizing those with grievances manifested in several key examples: (1) Former Donghak participants: Kang transformed their political

These teachings demonstrate Kang's preferential consideration of those deemed socially inferior within his era's class structure. The Reordering Works aimed to create the world of Human Nobility (Injon 人尊), symbolized by the hexagram of 'Earth and Heaven are intertwined.' This state elevates human beings to the same level as divine beings, in which the weak should rise while the strong descends. Kang declared that 'in the Former World, only Heaven was respected, and not Earth. From now on, both Heaven and Earth must be equally revered' (CS, Dharma 1:62). He further emphasized that 'the rich do not enjoy poverty, the strong do not enjoy weakness, and the wise do not enjoy foolishness. Therefore, the poor, the sick, and the foolish are my people' (CS, Dharma 1:24). He explained this preference to the disadvantaged by noting that 'a man of wealth and nobility is conceited and self-satisfied, devoting his heart only to gaining fame and profit. Only the poor agonizing over his own misfortune will wait for the early realization of the virtue of Dao.'

However, Kang's egalitarian idea of human respect does not advocate a complete reversal of power between divine beings and humans, or within social class structures. Instead, his view of justice emphasizes that both the strong and weak within the social strata, as well as divine and human beings, must create harmonious relationships by resolving grievances. In this framework, Kang

grievances into spiritual energy for universal renovation, as exemplified by his work with Cha and Kim, former Donghak adherents whom he guided toward constructive spiritual practice (2) Scholars with reformist aspirations: Kang engaged with scholarly figures who sought societal transformation during periods of upheaval. Notable among these was Choe Jewu, who, through Kang's divine revelation, established Donghak, incorporating incantations and celestial teachings to address the political oppression and social displacement experienced by commoners (3) Socially marginalized groups: Kang elevated traditionally subordinate classes, including the lower class (ssangnom), shamans (mudang), and women, assigning them significant roles in deity worship and religious leadership, thereby utilizing their experiences of oppression as catalysts for social transformation.

advises humanity to avoid harboring emotional grudges against others, the environment, and spirits, emphasizing the respectful and proper treatment of all.

In the CS, 'the age of the resolution of grievances' frequently appears when Kang encourages followers to adopt attitudes befitting a new era. He counseled his disciple Cha Gyeongseok: 'From a human nature perspective, it is understandable that you and your brothers want to take revenge on the informer. In this era of resolving grievances, one must replace evil with good' (CS, Dharma 3:15). Similarly, he consistently advised his followers to 'cultivate virtue and treat people properly' as 'a felicitous star shines here, so this is the way to find refuge' (CS, Dharma 2:20). Kang urged his followers to develop humane and democratic virtues⁵ and ethical principles appropriate to the 'Later world' of mutual beneficence—an ideal realm free from social inequities. His view of justice in interpersonal relationships emphasized mutual beneficence by avoiding vanity, ambition, hatred, envy, and grievances that often lead to injustice or violence. Thus, the resolution of grievances for mutual beneficence thus serves as a path to clear individual and social impediments and cultivate harmonious living. This framework aligns with Wessinger's (2011) concept of 'progressive millennialism,' where believers work within a divine plan to achieve collective salvation through noncatastrophic transition

⁵ While these concepts paralleled Western democratic ideals, they emerged from Korean religious traditions and social reform movements of the late Joseon period, particularly through Donghak's principle of "bearing the Heaven" (Sicheonju) which emphasized human dignity and equality. In Kang's religious framework, "democratic virtues" manifested through distinctly Korean religious and cultural concepts rather than Western democratic theory. These virtues included: (1) Universal human dignity (Injon): Recognizing divine nature within all humans regardless of social status (2) Mutual beneficence: Emphasizing reciprocal relationships and collective wellbeing over hierarchical authority (3) Resolution of grievances: Addressing historical injustices and power imbalances (4) Equal spiritual potential (Dotong): Affirming everyone's capacity for spiritual enlightenment regardless of class or gender.

(p. 4). Rather than awaiting divine intervention, Kang's followers actively worked to transform human and social relations through spiritual reform and mutual cooperation. The following section examines the major details and implications of resolving grievances within the context of social justice.

RESOLVING GRIEVANCES FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE: DETAILS AND IMPLICATIONS OF KANG'S WORK

As previously discussed, Kang's vision of transitioning from the Former world to the Later world interweaves justice with human renewal. This renewal requires personal transformation by cultivating inner virtues and resolving grievances without harboring resentment.⁶ The present age serves as a transitional period in which grievances must be resolved before entering the just Later world governed by mutual beneficence.

Kang's approach to social justice manifests through his Reordering Works, which aim to harmoniously integrate divided social classes. His framework particularly addresses marginalized groups, including members of lower social classes, shamans, and women, who experienced alienation, discrimination, and exclusion in

⁶ Kang employed several spiritual practices to help resolve grievances: 1) Ritualistic Practices: (1) Spiritual Cultivation (Suryeon): Having disciples like Kim or Cha meditate with a bowl of water to purify vengeful thoughts (2) Burning ritual (Soji): Writing grievances on paper and burning them symbolically (3) Incantation of sacred formulas (Jumun): Reciting specific phrases to transform negative emotions; 2) Interactive Methods: (1) Direct dialogue (Mundap): Engaging disciples in discussions about their grievances, as with Kim regarding his assault (2) Collective ritual participation: Including aggrieved parties in ceremonies, giving them active roles (3) Group consultation: Having disciples express opinions on ritual procedures and their spiritual meanings; 4) Reflective Practices: (1) Self-examination of past actions: Critical introspection regarding one's moral culpability in interpersonal discord (2) Guidance sessions: Teaching aggrieved individuals about cosmic principles of mutual beneficence (3) Communal activities: Engaging victims and offenders in shared religious activities to foster reconciliation.

the Former world. Although Kang's direct material assistance to marginalized groups was limited, his religious framework established an ideological foundation for their social emancipation. Through his Reordering Works rituals, he symbolically positioned lower-class individuals, shamans, and women in the role of spiritual authority, challenging traditional hierarchies. For instance, he elevated Jeon, a lower-class peasant movement leader, to a position of spiritual authority in the Korean Afterlife and integrated shamanic practitioners into his cosmic order, legitimizing traditionally stigmatized practices.

Rather than providing immediate material aid, Kang focused on spiritual and social transformation through ritual empowerment. In this regard, he prophesied that his Reordering Works would gradually eliminate class distinction and social inequality. This vision preceded significant Korean social development, as marginalized groups gained improved status throughout the 20th century, particularly after the abolition of the traditional class system during the Japanese colonial period (post-1910). Kang prophesied that Japan would play a specific role in his Reordering Work, citing unresolved grievances among Japanese spiritual deities following their defeat in the Imjin War between Japan and Korea (1592-1598). According to his teachings, while he would grant certain powers to Japan, he would reserve the virtue of benevolence for Korea and limit the Japanese influence to a defined period and scope (CS, Reordering Works 1:22). This prophesied role encompassed facilitating the dissolution of the Confucian class structure and catalyzing early modernization processes that would subsequently contribute to technological advancement and socioeconomic transformation, ultimately leading to the establishment of equal rights.⁷

⁷ In the *Canonical Scripture*, Kang states: "As for Japan, since the Imjin War, there has been an unresolved grievance between their spiritual forces and Joseon, so

Indeed, while Kang's theological framework emphasized spiritual transformation over direct material assistance, his doctrine of resolving historical grievances through mutual beneficence provided an ideological foundation for broader social and welfare reforms, particularly addressing marginalized groups. This legacy is reflected in contemporary Korean political discourse through concepts such as 'Sangsaeng policy' and 'Sangsaeng law', as well as in the three major works—social welfare, charitable work, and education—of Daesoon Jinrihoe, which continued Jo's social welfare programs as the succeeding head of Dao.⁸ Having established the basic principles of Kang's Reordering Works, we can now examine how these principles manifested in his approach to gender equality—a crucial aspect of his social justice vision.

entrusting it to them may resolve this antipathy. Therefore, I intend to temporarily bestow upon them the 'Force of Universal Unification' (一時天下統一之氣) and the 'Force of Solar and Lunar Brilliance' (日月大明之氣) to enable their historical agency. However, there is one element I shall withhold from them - benevolence (仁). If benevolence were also granted to them, the entire world would fall under their dominion. Thus, I bestow benevolence upon you; guard it well." Kang continued: "You shall become people of ease. They shall only labor, so illuminate all matters for them. When they complete their task and depart, they shall return empty-handed without receiving compensation for their labor. Therefore, treat them with generous hospitality in your words" (Reordering Works 2:4).

⁸ Jo implemented Kang's doctrine of mutual beneficence through extensive social welfare initiatives focused on economic advancement and education. These initiatives represented concrete manifestations of the religious principle of grateful reciprocity through mutual beneficence. Park, who received religious authority from Jo in 1958, advanced the principles of Haewon-sangsaeng and Boeun-sangsaeng (報恩相生, grateful reciprocity for mutual beneficence) of Kang and Jo through comprehensive social welfare initiatives. Park's social welfare activities extended beyond education and healthcare to encompass infrastructure improvement projects, including the renovation of housing, communal facilities, and public utilities. From 1972, he systematized these initiatives into three major works: charitable aid, social welfare, and education. This tripartite framework was explicitly grounded in Kang's ethical principles of Haewon-sangsaeng, emphasizing active engagement in humanitarian service as a form of religious practice.

Gender Equality in Kang's Framework

Regarding the Harmony of Yin and Yang, Kang asserted that 'those who do not have prestige will earn vigor, and the energy will be returned to the deserted earth' (CS, Dharma 1:67). This perspective represents a significant departure from traditional hierarchical structures, suggesting a fundamental reordering of social-power dynamics. McLain's (2011) research on religious movements in India provides a useful parallel, demonstrating how religious leaders who challenge traditional hierarchies can catalyze social transformation, particularly in gender relations. Like the composite religious figures in McLain's (2011) study, Kang's teachings provided 'a powerful foil to sectarian visions' by promoting gender equality (p. 21). Kang demonstrated his commitment to gender equality through both teaching and practice. He declared that he would 'let all be free to do what they want by eliminating the division between men and women' while reestablishing 'the principle of proprieties by correcting the position of heaven and earth.'

Regarding this, Kang articulated the principle of Yin and Yang to his followers through a critical observation:

'In the past, Yin was suppressed and Yang was respected. Yet, in common parlance, "Yin-Yang" places Yin before Yang—is this not peculiar? Henceforth, I shall rectify this as "Yin and Yang" as it should be' (Daesoon Scripture 6, p.135; Lee, 1965, p. 165; Y. Park, 1980).

This statement critiqued traditional gender hierarchies embedded in cultural linguistics and cosmology. The Book of Changes establishes a correspondence between celestial strong Yang and weak Yin with human social hierarchy, particularly male dominance and female subordination. Kang, challenging this traditional interpretation, questioned why Yin should precede Yang. At an assembly of adherents practicing the five incantation rituals, he applied this vision of harmonious Heaven-Earth relationships to

gender relations in human society, aiming to establish a proper balance between Yin and Yang forces. This perspective materialized in what he declared to be the first Reordering Work for the fifty thousand years of the Later World:

'Kang prompted Park Gongwu to contemplate and express his thoughts on a crucial matter. Though initially hesitant due to his self-proclaimed limited knowledge, Gongwu had an epiphany regarding the unjust treatment of young widows in the Former World. He advocated that in the Later World, widows and widowers should be permitted to remarry according to age compatibility, with formal ceremonies conducted in the presence of family and community members. Impressed by this proposition, Kang entrusted Gongwu with implementing this reform, declaring him uniquely qualified for this Reordering Work and establishing this decision as binding for fifty thousand years' (CS, Reordering Works 2: 17).

In Joseon's Confucian society, the dictum 'A woman of virtue marries but once' enforced strict moral codes that led to an increase in virtuous women following their deceased husbands in death. As Kang observed, this social structure has produced severe humanitarian crises, including the infanticide of children born to widows. Although the Donghak movement and Gabo Reforms (1894) advocated widow remarriage, these efforts were thwarted by deeply entrenched Confucian practices.

Responding to these social injustices, Kang, upon learning of a young widow's suicide in adherence to marital fidelity, declared, 'An evil spirit has taken the innocent away.' He then performed rituals, writing, and burning these words:

'The fundamentals of a country are loyalty, filial piety, and chastity. However, the country perished due to a lack of loyalty, the family fell apart due to a lack of filial piety, and the people lost their virtue due to a lack of chastity' (CS, Dharma 1:46).

Through this pronouncement, Kang issued a pointed critique of Confucian interpretations of loyalty, filial piety, and chastity, which

he identified as catalysts for societal collapse. His Reordering Works established the new principles of gender equality:

‘In the Later World, women will be regarded as equals to men, based on their accomplishments in spiritual cultivation. Consequently, the traditional practice of male dominance over women will no longer exist’ (CS, Dharma 1:46).

This declaration heralded the end of gender-based discrimination, asserting that social status in the Later World would be determined by merit rather than gender. The significance of gender equality in his vision for the Later World was ritualized in a specific Reordering Work:

‘Kang engaged in a Reordering Work on a certain day, during which he inscribed ‘brave men, brave women’ on a piece of paper and subsequently set it on fire’ (CS, Authority and Foreknowledge 1:17).

The Daesoon tradition interprets these rituals as transformative works that elevate the status of marginalized groups, particularly women, presaging twentieth-century developments in women's suffrage, educational equality, and social participation. Thus, Kang's Reordering Works on equality fundamentally centered on establishing egalitarian justice for marginalized groups, with particular emphasis on women's empowerment. In this regard, Kang's vision of equality and justice through the Harmony of Yin and Yang is exemplified in his pronouncements:

‘Now is the era of resolving grievances. While I have loosened the distinctions between men and women, allowing each to act as they wish, hereafter I shall rectify the positions of Heaven (Geon, 乾) and Earth (Gon, 坤) and reestablish the principles of propriety.” At this time, as Gongwu was accompanying the Supreme Lord through Taein township, two elderly women crossed their path, whereupon Kang stepped aside and turned away’ (CS, Reordering Works 1:32).

From a Western perspective, the act of stepping aside for elderly women might be interpreted merely as conventional gentlemanly courtesy; this gesture held profound significance in traditional Korean

Confucian society. In a social order in which male dominance, particularly that of the upper class, was deeply entrenched, it was unprecedented for a man of high status to defer to women in public spaces. Such an encounter would typically result in severe punishment or public censure of women according to conventional social norms. Therefore, Kang's act of yielding to elderly women represented a radical symbolic challenge to the established hierarchies, demonstrating through practice his religious doctrine of transcending traditional gender and class distinctions.

This conception of gender equality, illustrated by King (1993) as religious innovation's potential to challenge traditional gender hierarchies, is further elaborated in Kang's following exposition:

'Sangje, indicating a well in Dochang-hyeon of Taein County, proclaimed, 'This is a spring of milk. As Dao shall reside in the twelve thousand peaks of Geumgang Mountain (金剛山), an equal number of sages who have attained enlightenment to Dao will emerge in the world. Moreover, in the Later World, women will constitute the majority among these sages' (CS, Prophetic Elucidations 45).

As the hexagram of "Earth and Heaven are intertwined" shows, Kang's Reordering Works inspire the energy of Earth (Yin) and lowers the energy of Heaven (Yang). Yet, Kang does not propose the complete reversal of power from Yang to Yin. Rather, it implies that Heaven and Earth, as well as divine beings and human beings, and accordingly, men and women, will create an equal and harmonious relationship. While the Book of Changes, represented by the first hexagram of "Obstruction between Heaven and Earth (天地否)" had established a correspondence between strong yang and weak yin in the heavenly world with male superiority and female subordination in human society, Kang's teachings challenged this established order through both symbolic and practical means. As shown in the above example, Kang established women's equal status based on spiritual merit rather than gender, which practically reversed the traditional interpretation

that the Heaven-Earth relationship automatically placed women in a subordinate position.

Kang demonstrated his teachings through both ritual practice and social reform. In a significant ritual, he led approximately 30 disciples to practice five incantations (五呪) to adjust the yin-yang Degree Number. When his disciple Gongshin marked only one dot, explaining that ‘there is only one yin (坤, gon) per yang (乾, geon),’ Kang praised this understanding as aligned with his vision of gender harmony (CS, Reordering Works 2:16). In a similar vein, Kang’s Reordering Work concerning widows’ rights (CS, Reordering Works 2:17) directly challenged the inhumane conventions of Joseon Confucian society that had precipitated widespread widow suicide and infanticide.

Kang’s vision for the Later World explicitly linked gender equality with spiritual cultivation, stating that ‘women will be regarded as equals to men, based on their accomplishments in spiritual cultivation’⁹ (CS, Dharma 68). This reconceptualization of gender roles grounded in individual merit and spiritual cultivation was articulated through Kang’s Reordering Works. While parallel developments in women’s rights emerged in the West, Kang’s distinctive approach integrated traditional East Asian cosmological principles with social reform, anticipating the later implementation of women’s suffrage, equal education, and broader social participation in 20th century Korea.¹⁰ Notably, Kang’s emphasis on women’s rights

⁹ Kang’s legacy of gender equality based on spiritual training is evidenced by the fact that 70 percent of the highest-ranking officials (最高任員) in the representative Daesoon tradition, such as Daesoon Jinrihoe, are women, as well as in several social welfare programs and educational and charitable initiatives.

¹⁰ While the emergence of gender equality movements originated predominantly in Protestant Western nations, Kang’s ideas and symbolic actions in early 20th century Korea, a society dominated by Neo-Confucian traditions and value systems, represented a significant indigenous development. His teachings, particularly the concept of mutual beneficence, progressively shaped Korean

and status represents a remarkably progressive stance within his historical context.

While Kang's approach to gender equality demonstrated one aspect of his social vision, his framework for broader social transformation addressed the additional dimensions of justice and equality.

Social Transformation and Economic Justice

Kang articulated a vision of social transformation where 'the future world will favor the weak, provide good health to the sick, raise the humble to higher social status, and impart wisdom upon the foolish,' while the 'strong, the rich, the noble, and the wise are predicted to experience their own decline' (CS, Dharma 2:11). Rather than advocating for mere role reversal or abolition of social distinctions, Kang envisioned a restructured society with two primary classes: a noble gentleman class unified with the Dao, and a noble populace enjoying equitable resource distribution.

'In the Later World, there shall only be two social classes, rather than many. However, the blessings of material and dietary sustenance are distributed fairly to everyone. If those who belong to the lower class are treated unfairly, even in regard to food, how could they not fall into frustration?' (CS, Dharma 2: 58).

His emphasis on the equitable distribution of resources stemmed from his recognition that a lack of access to basic necessities would lead to severe hardship. He demonstrated this through practical

societal discourse across sociopolitical, economic, and ethical domains throughout the 20th century. Although these ideas evolved during an era of global social transformation—marked by movements such as the National Self-Strengthening Movement, the March 1st Movement—Kang's distinctive contribution lay in reformulating traditional East Asian concepts to address modern social issues. Though similar principles of equality can be found in Western liberal thought, Kang's approach was unique in its integration of traditional East Asian philosophical frameworks with progressive social reforms.

actions, such as sharing food with his disciples and selling his property to distribute money to beggars, thereby addressing immediate needs while establishing a model for future social welfare practices.

This focus was particularly significant in Joseon society, where Confucian class ideology perpetuated centuries of suppression and alienation. The lower classes were not only politically suppressed and socially despised but also severely exploited, making it difficult for them to make a living. Given these circumstances, Kang was resolute in his efforts to improve the lives of farmers, the lower classes, and common people by ensuring that they could live without hunger, guided by the equitable principle of distributive justice. To achieve this goal, Kang envisioned the realization of social justice and harmony, not through the abolition of classes as in Marxism but through the peaceful principle of Haewon-sangsaeng. In other words, he aimed to transform human society by gradually achieving social harmony, eliminating political oppression, and resolving economic, particularly distributive, issues, so that everyone could lead a blessed life. In this regard, Kang emphasized that in the Later World, a noble gentleman class unified with the Dao and a noble populace would receive equitable blessings of material and dietary sustenance.

In this context, Kang foresaw at the divine-spiritual level that 'the old Heaven had only administered the work of killing people, which would lead to the severe depletion of daily necessities and make it impossible for all living beings to survive.' To mitigate this, he performed religious work where he consistently shared food with his disciples (Authority and Foreknowledge 1:31). Furthermore, since the Donghak Peasant Movement of 1894, to eliminate the public harm caused by plundering from groups such as Iljinhoe members and military forces, and to enable people to live using their own property, he conducted religious works where he sold his household goods and

some rice paddies from his original residence, went to Jeonju with that money, and distributed it to passing beggars. After this work, it is said that the Iljinhoe¹¹ members stopped plundering and began operating with their own property' (CS, Progress of the order 1:15). By supporting his adherents and local communities, Kang established religious practices aimed at progressive social transformation. This ideological framework was subsequently institutionalized in the Daesoon tradition through Jo and his successor Park Wudang's (1917-1996) implementation of comprehensive relief, charitable, and social welfare initiatives. McLain's (2011) study of composite religious figures observes that movements emphasizing 'spiritual unity in diversity' often gain increased following during periods of communal tension (p. 41). Similarly, Kang's movement offered 'a needed corrective to rigid sectarian ideologies' in early 20th-century Korea (p. 42). Rather than advocating for class abolition, Kang emphasized social harmony and universal welfare through a peaceful resolution. In this regard, he reconceptualized traditional priorities, arguing that 'blessing and fortune' should take precedence over mere longevity, as a long life without sufficient resources was considered 'shameful' (CS, Dharma 1:16).

'In the world, there is an adage called 'sumyeong-bokrok (壽命福祿, lifespan, and blessing and fortune)'. While lifespan is commonly valued more, if blessing and fortune are lacking and only lifespan is long, it is considered disgraceful. Therefore, I prioritise blessing and

¹¹ Iljinhoe, established in 1904, was a pro-Japanese Korean political organization that advocated for Korea's annexation by Japan. Under the leadership of Song Byung-jun and Yi Yong-gu, it gained significant influence during the period of increasing Japanese control. The group collaborated with Japanese authorities, supported the 1905 Protectorate Treaty, and worked to undermine Korean independence movements. With Japanese funding and protection, Iljinhoe's membership grew to approximately 800,000 by 1910. Following Japan's formal annexation of Korea that year, having served its purpose, the organization was dissolved by Japanese authorities.

fortune over lifespan, as when blessing and fortune decline, one's life comes to an end' (CS, Dharma 1: 16).

Kang's commitment to universal welfare is further evidenced in his declaration that after 'carrying out the Reordering Works of Heaven and Earth,' he had 'redirected all starving spirits towards Heaven, ensuring that no one will perish from famine in the future'.

'Since I have carried out the Reordering Works of Heaven and Earth, I have driven away all the spirits of starvation towards Heaven, ensuring that no one will suffer from famine any longer' (CS, Authority and Foreknowledge 1:8).

Although this religious work of resolving the grievances of the spirits of those who died of starvation was also accomplished through his religious pronouncement based on spiritual power, Kang's emphasis on fair blessings of material and dietary sustenance indicates his concern for people's welfare. Furthermore, Kang performed Reordering Works with the aim of eliminating discrimination between legitimate and illegitimate children, as well as between the gentry (yangban 兩班) and those of low-birth status (Dharma 1:10). During that time, in Confucian society, illegitimate children of concubines were barred from taking the civil service examination and relegated to a lower social status based on their mother's status. Kang's efforts to challenge this deep-rooted social and cultural custom of treating those of low birth with contempt are further supported by the following statement:

'Now is the era of grievance resolution. Pursuing the noble and distinguishing between the gentry (yangban) and the low-born is akin to severing the bones of our ancestral spirit, resulting in the impending shadow of doom. Therefore, abandon yangban conventions and treat lowly people favorably, so that grievances may be resolved and a good era will soon arrive' (Dharma 1: 9).

In relation to the Reordering Works aimed at resolving grievances of the underprivileged and socially oppressed, Kang's

commitment to social equality manifested in his daily conduct, particularly his consistent use of honorific language, regardless of social status. In a significant encounter with Kim Hyeongryeol and his servant Ji Namsik, Kang explicitly rejected hierarchical language norms, declaring that 'from now on, there will be no distinction between legitimate and illegitimate children, and there should be no discrimination between the nobility and the lower class' (CS, Dharma 1:10). This vision was particularly radical in Confucian society, where illegitimate children face severe institutional barriers, including exclusion from civil service examinations. In articulating this challenge to established norms, Kang emphasized that they were living in 'an era of resolving grievances' where maintaining traditional class distinctions would be equivalent to 'disrespecting our ancestors and inviting bad luck' (CS, Dharma 1:9).

The CS documents Kang's extensive work on addressing grievances across various social strata, focusing particularly on revolutionary figures who pursued social reform. This included resolving the grievances of Jeon, a Donghak leader whose movement aimed to 'elevate commoners into nobles and transform men of low birth into noblemen' (CS, Dharma 1:2). The movement was built upon the foundation laid by Choi Suwun (1824-1864), who established Donghak after receiving divine teachings.

In the Canonical Scripture, Jeon's mind is described as follows:

'Our work is to promote the betterment of others. You can only take whatever remains after others become prosperous. Jeon, Myeong-suk became the head of the Korean Afterworld (冥府, Nether world) because when he rose up, he had a mind to elevate the low-born to the gentry and raise men of low birth to nobility' (CS, Dharma 1: 2).

Initially, Kang acknowledged the good intentions of Donghak, but he held the belief that its revolutionary approach, which involved sacrificing human lives, would ultimately fail to achieve its goals. As a result, he discouraged his disciples from joining this movement,

prophesying that it would fail when snow fell (CS, Acts 1:23). However, it is apparent that Jeon's unwavering determination, which fueled the Donghak Movement, has been widely praised and acknowledged by Kang (Reordering Works 1: 34).

Another figure was Jinmuk (1562-1633), a Korean Chan master whose legacy, like Jeon's later social movement, was associated with the transmission of knowledge for societal benefits. According to Canonical Scripture, Jinmuk is believed to have sought divine wisdom to benefit humanity. This theme of seeking knowledge for social transformation was also present in the East Asian mission of Jesuit scholar Matteo Ricci (1552-1610), who sought to bridge Eastern and Western traditions of learning, although each figure approached this goal through different religious and cultural frameworks.

As is evident from the cases mentioned above, Kang held those who pursued noble causes in their lifetimes in high esteem, incorporating them into significant roles in his Reordering Works. Jeon, Jinmuk, Choi, and Ricci were among the historical figures accorded within Kang's comprehensive framework of promoting justice and peace. For instance, after their untimely deaths, Jeon and Choi were appointed heads of the Korean and Japanese spirit worlds, respectively (Dharma 1:2; Reordering Works 1:7). Despite facing failures in their original missions, their ultimate aim was to achieve the well-being of humanity and work for the greater good of the people. In other words, their causes were centered on saving people from suffering, and thus Kang entrusted them with leading roles in his Reordering Works to create a better world for the future.

Similar to the Reordering Works of the Spirit Worlds, Kang also had plans to address wrongs in various fields of the human world. For instance, he carried out the Reordering Work to resolve grievances related to education and welfare, which had accumulated due to the

discriminatory structure of the “Former World” (Prophetic Elucidations 46).

‘Though schools are being widely established in this world to educate people with the future intention of greatly civilizing the world and resolving the grievances of divine beings and humans (神人解冤) in the history of the Three Realms, the current school education only leads students to become fixated on base material benefits such as official positions and salaries. Therefore, enlightenment has come to be achieved outside the established system’(CS, Progress of the Order 1:17).

‘Saving lives and healing the world (濟生醫世) is the way of the sage, while causing calamities to people and revolutionizing the world (災民革世) is the art of the hegemon. The world has long suffered from the pain inflicted by hegemons. Therefore, I shall now pacify the people and rectify the world through the way of mutual beneficence. From now on, you must set your mind right. Those who study to become great persons must always accumulate the virtue of protecting life. How could it be proper to desire life by killing countless living beings?’ (CS, Progress of the Order 1:16).

As shown in the above quotations, Kang declared that true higher education lay in the study within his Way, which cultivated Dotong-gunja (道通君子, enlightened leaders) who would guide the Later World through spiritual cultivation and cultural refinement. According to him, this was in contrast to the contemporary educational system, which focused solely on personal gain and fame. Following this tradition, Jo later established the Jeonhakwon institution and operated free elementary schools, while Park in Daesoon Jinrihoe established an educational foundation, founding more than six high schools and Daejin University to promote holistic education.

Furthermore, Kang, who advocated the ideology of saving lives and healing the world (濟生醫世), established a medical clinic in Donggok (copper valley), Jeonju. After performing a religious work where he wrote and burned the phrase ‘The Medical Bureau of the

Way Operating through the Four Cosmic Principles, Serving Heaven and Earth, Located in Donggok, Jeonju, Determining Life and Death ' (元亨利貞奉天地道術藥局 在全州銅谷生死判斷) (CS, Reordering Works 2:9), he treated various illnesses of numerous impoverished patients, thereby conducting religious works to address future intensifying epidemics and diseases (CS, Prophetic Elucidation 1-44). This spirit and practice of saving lives and healing the world was also inherited in the Daesoon tradition through Jo's free medical clinic in Busan and Park's ongoing social welfare projects, including the operation of the Jesaeng Hospital, nursing homes, and various care facilities.

Overall, Kang's approach to resolving grievances operated on both spiritual and social levels: he addressed the spiritual dimension by elevating troubled spirits to higher realms or assigning them specific divine functions while simultaneously incorporating their historical reform efforts into his comprehensive vision of social transformation, equality, and welfare. Flaherty (2011) observed that Korean millennial movements frequently emerged in response to sociocultural pressures from external powers, particularly among marginalized groups seeking liberation from oppression (p. 329). This pattern manifested distinctly in late 19th century Korea: Donghak, for instance, developed explicit anti-foreign characteristics, positioning itself as a protector of national sovereignty against Western imperial powers while advocating for popular welfare. The name "Donghak" itself was chosen to signify opposition to Seohak (Western Learning), specifically Roman Catholicism and its culture. Against this historical backdrop, from the late 19th to early 20th centuries, Kang's teachings also addressed the precarious state of East Asia, describing it as being "on the tip of a hundred-foot pole" (CS, Reordering Works 1:13). He performed ritual works to prevent the transfer of power to the West. Thus, amid this comprehensive crisis regarding Western powers while

accepting Western material culture and technology, Kang conducted his teachings and rituals within a framework that preserved the East's cultural identity and autonomy.

In this regard, Kang's message of resolving grievances between social classes aligned with what Wessinger (2011) identifies as millennial movements providing hope to 'members of a demoralized group' (p. 5), both in a regional and spiritual context. Kang observed that many disputes among ethnic or groups were based on differences in thoughts and cultures that had been passed down through history.

'Each ethnic group in the world established various cultures based on special thoughts, passed down to them respectively through different transmissions of life experiences. Yet, when they demonstrated those, there arose substantial disputes. Hereupon, Sangje sets the foundation of civilization for the Later World by extracting the essence of these cultures from each nation' (CS, Dharma 3: 23).

This passage illustrates how religious thoughts can be considered the foundation for each culture in the world and how Kang unified the essence of these cultures in his Reordering Works. Regarding his Reordering of the heavenly leaders of each religion, he further explained their roles in the following manner:

'Daoism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Christianity have become foundations for their respective ethnic cultures. Accordingly, I appoint Choi, Jinmuk, Zhu Xi and Ricci as the leaders of Daoism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Christianity, respectively' (CS, Progress of the Order 1: 65).

In his system, these historical reform advocates received significant spiritual roles: Jinmuk was designated as the head of Buddhism, Ricci assumed leadership in Christianity, while Choi and Zhu Xi (1130-1200) were appointed as the heads of Daoism and Confucianism respectively (CS, Progress of the Order 1:65). This spiritual reorganization reflected Kang's belief that addressing disorder in the spiritual realm, such as in the afterworld, was crucial for establishing justice in the human realm. As Bourdieu (1986)

suggests, in his concept of religious capital, such reorganization enabled marginalized groups to acquire new forms of spiritual and social power outside traditional hierarchies (p. 247), although this transformation occurred incrementally rather than immediately.

Kang's approach to cultural diversity and conflict resolution demonstrated particular sophistication. He acknowledged that 'every ethnic group in the world has developed unique cultures based on their distinctive perspectives,' shaped by varied life experiences (CS, Dharma 3:23). Huntington's (2011) analysis predicted that post-Cold War conflicts would primarily arise from cultural and religious differences between civilizations (pp. 28-29), Kang's earlier perspective offered a different vision: he advocated for extracting and integrating essential elements from diverse cultures while resolving historical grievances among nations such as China, Japan, Russia, and Korea. As Appleby (2000) notes, this approach could foster sustainable conflict resolution by addressing both the material and psychological dimensions of social conflict (pp. 121-122). Specifically, Appleby emphasizes that effective reconciliation requires addressing not only tangible inequities but also deep-seated psychological trauma stemming from historical conflicts, a dual approach that closely parallels Kang's methodology in addressing inter-civilizational grievances through both practical measures and spiritual resolution.¹²

¹² Kang developed a comprehensive approach to intercultural conflict resolution that operated on multiple levels. When addressing historical grievances among nations like China, Japan, Russia, and Korea, he emphasized both practical and psychological reconciliation. This corresponds to Appleby (2000)'s approach that effective conflict resolution must address both material inequities and psychological trauma from historical conflicts. For instance, regarding the Chinese religious ritual, following disciple's view that "the land and people of Greater China have been conquered by the Qing, who bear the name of barbarians, and thus harbor resentment against them, so it is right to help them recover their territory," a practical ritual was performed to psychologically resolve the Han people's resentment by returning Chinese territory to the Han ethnicity rather than foreign peoples (CS, Reordering Works 3:18), ultimately leading to the establishment of the Republic of

No (2009) observes that Kang's ethical framework of resolving grievances for mutual beneficence provides an effective approach to addressing both contemporary and historical challenges: the polarization induced by globalization and the patterns of oppression between powerful and weaker nations (pp. 113-114). This analysis highlights the enduring relevance of Kang's vision, which achieves justice and peace through spiritual transformation based on cultural harmony and the principle of resolving grievances for mutual beneficence, rather than relying solely on political or social mechanisms. Having examined both the theoretical foundations and practical applications of Kang's social justice framework, we can now assess its broader significance and contemporary relevance.

CONCLUSION

Kang's comprehensive framework for social transformation, centered on the principle of 'resolution of grievances for mutual beneficence,' represents a unique synthesis of spiritual and social

China. In the case of the Japanese ritual, as exemplified in Reordering Works 2:4, "Since there has been animosity between Japan and Joseon in the spiritual realm since the Imjin War, Joseon will be entrusted to them to resolve this animosity. However, if benevolence is also granted to them, the whole world would belong to Japan. Therefore, benevolence will be granted to Joseon, and Japan will only work but return empty-handed when their work is done, so treat them with courtesy." This demonstrated how Japan was granted temporary universal unification energy and the energy of great luminance of the sun and moon to resolve their resentment, while prophesying that their period of rule would not exceed 40 years (CS, Reordering Works 1:22). Ultimately, this shows an integrated approach that could resolve conflicts both psychologically and practically through subsequent rituals, as evidenced by statements such as "Western spirits are being summoned to make Joseon a superior nation" (CS, Prophetic Elucidations 29), and the ritual of turning Joseon's national fortune by attaching the resolution of grievances of Danju, the founder of Go, to the Five Immortals' Energy Point of Hoemun Mountain, indicating that "when the great powers surrounding Joseon finish their game of Go and become busy with their own affairs, the Go board and stones will return to their original master (Joseon)" (Gongsa 2:3).

reform. This approach integrates personal transformation with broader societal evolution, moving beyond the conventional reform methods. Beginning with the renewal of the human spirit through the transformation of the Three Realms, his framework encompasses both individual and collective cultivation, offering an alternative to purely political or social methods of change. Central to Kang's vision is the recognition that human existence is fundamentally interconnected – a principle that Kim (2018) identifies as the key to understanding the inseparable link between individual and collective welfare. This recognition of interdependence grounds Kang's radical reconceptualization of human dignity through his concept of 'Human Nobility,' which elevates humanity to a divine status. Rather than mere symbolism, this elevation represents a fundamental restructuring of social relationships based on mutual respect and reciprocal benefits.

This understanding of human interconnectedness and divine dignity manifests in a comprehensive framework for social transformation that operates across three interconnected dimensions:

1. At the individual level, the focus lies on personal spiritual cultivation and ethical development through self-reflection and moral rectification;
2. At the societal level, the emphasis lies on addressing structural inequities through ritualized social works and practices, encompassing the resolution of historical grievances, economic disparities, and the development of educational, welfare, and charitable initiatives;
3. At the cosmic level, the objective is to restore harmony between human society and divine principles by integrating ritual practices and ethical conduct.

Significantly, this comprehensive religious framework did not remain theoretical but found practical expression through Jo and Park's successive leadership in the Daesoon tradition.

Jo, in particular, translated Kang's philosophical principles into tangible initiatives focusing on poverty alleviation and economic stabilization. Central to these efforts was the Advancement Team (established 1928), which focused on irrigation, land reclamation, and industrial development. The team's activities expanded geographically, with deforestation projects in North Hamgyeong Province and North Manchuria (1930), followed by mining operations in Jeonju and Eumseong, and tidal flat reclamation in South Chungcheong Province (1932) (CS, *Progress of the Order* 2:11; No 1995, pp. 203-204). These economic development initiatives continued until the forced dissolution of Mugeuk-do by the Japanese imperial authorities in 1936. In the educational sphere, Jo established the Jeonhakwon Academy in April 1956, utilizing Gamcheon assembly halls as classrooms, with designated positions for the principal (Hakjeong) and teachers (Hakmu) (Song, 2018, p. 40).

Following his succession to religious authority in 1958, Park continued these initiatives through the principles of the Haewon-sangsaeng and Boeun-sangsaeng. His educational works include free public schools (Cheondeok Public School, 1963), advanced public schools (Gamcheon, circa 1966-1967), and the Gamcheon Clinic (circa 1963) (Taegeuk-do Headquarters Department of Edification, 1966, p. 12; Song 2018, p. 44). These initiatives were complemented by infrastructure improvement projects including housing renovations and public utility maintenance. Park's commitment to education was explicitly linked to religious continuity, as evidenced by his statement emphasizing adherence to Kang's and Jo's teachings, particularly regarding educational institutions. Under his leadership, Taegeuk-do

was formally registered as a religious organization in 1963, establishing its constitution and regulations (Song, 2018, p. 36).

After establishing Daesoon Jinrihoe in 1969, Park implemented three major initiatives aligned with Haewon-Sangsaeng philosophy:

a. Charity Aid

Succeeding to Kang's ideology of saving the world (廣救天下) and Jo's principle of relieving and benefiting all life (救濟蒼生), the initiative focuses on supporting marginalized populations and disaster victims through the Daesoon Men's and Women's Associations (est. 1981). International expansion began with the Korea International Volunteer Organization partnership (2008), which implemented relief projects in Kenya. The Daejin International Volunteers Association (DIVA, 2013) further extended these efforts domestically and internationally, particularly in Vietnam, where educational facilities and language institutes have been established. Support funding increased substantially from 214 million won (1975-1990) to 1.3 billion won (2022) (Daejin International Voluntary Association, 2020, pp. 8-25, 2021, pp. 5-14).

b. Social Welfare

Emphasizing civic responsibility and societal development, this initiative encompasses healthcare facilities—including the Daejin Medical Foundation (1992), a network of Jesaeng Hospitals, and the Yeosu Welfare Complex (2009), alongside community service initiatives implemented through Daesoon women's associations and youth associations, such as free ceremonial facilities, village development projects, and comprehensive elderly care facilities (W. Park, 1984, pp. 101-102). The program's funding grew significantly from 9.6 billion won (1975-1990) to 10.3 billion won (2022), supporting various community services and elderly care facilities (Jeong, 2013, pp. 143-144).

c. Education

Inheriting Kang's teachings and Jo's established practices, the Daesoon Educational Foundation (1984) was established to nurture individuals who contribute to national interests through holistic education. The initiative expanded from the Daesoon Scholarship Foundation (1976) to a comprehensive network that included Daejin University and multiple specialized high schools. International academic exchange is facilitated by the Daesoon Academy of Sciences, publishing academic journals, and organizing international symposiums. Educational funding reached 6.8 billion won in 2022, supporting both domestic education and international academic collaboration (Jeong, 2013, p. 145).

This infrastructure demonstrates the practical implementation of Kang's religious principles through systematic social welfare initiatives with consistent growth in both scope and funding over the past five decades. More fundamentally, this multilayered approach demonstrates that true social justice and peace require more than external reforms, which necessitates a fundamental transformation of human consciousness and relationships. Kang's framework provides significant insights for contemporary discourse on discussions of social justice and peacebuilding through its emphasis on addressing historical grievances and fostering mutual beneficence. The framework's recognition of the interconnected nature of personal and social transformation suggests that sustainable social change must address both the individual and collective dimensions of human experience.

As Wuthnow (1994) observed, religion possesses the capacity to generate novel forms of social capital and moral resources to address societal challenges (p. 185). Kang's synthesis of spiritual practice and social reform, and its subsequent organizational development, exemplifies this transformative approach. His comprehensive

framework, while grounded in religious understanding, offers practical insights into contemporary efforts toward social justice and peace. By positioning the resolution of grievances as a prerequisite for mutual beneficence, Kang's model provides a valuable framework for contemporary approaches to conflict resolution, social justice, and community-building. His vision of a harmonious society, achieved through the integration of human and spiritual dimensions, demonstrates that lasting social transformation requires attention to both material and spiritual aspects of human experience.

Moreover, this analysis reveals how Kang's theological framework materialized into concrete daily practices, transforming abstract principles into tangible social action. Beyond merely articulating concepts like "resolution of grievances" or "mutual beneficence," Kang's followers developed specific programs that addressed community needs while embodying these principles in practical ways. The lasting significance of these initiatives is evident in contemporary institutional structures that continue to serve community needs, while maintaining the synthesis of spiritual principles with practical social engagement. This continuity demonstrates that Kang's model established sustainable frameworks for social transformation that transcended the historical context.

Author Contributions

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest in this manuscript.

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