



Chapter II

Indigenous Modernity and Liminality

Indigenous Modernity and Liminality

Table of Contents

1. The Concept and Definition of Modernity
2. Characteristics of Western Modernity
3. The Limits of Western Modernity
4. Post-modernity and Alternative Modernity
5. Multiple Modernities and Consilience
6. The East's Indigenous Modernity
7. The Indigenous Modernity of Donghak Thought
8. The Indigenous Modernity of Daesoon Thought
9. The Eastern Origins of Western Modernity
10. Comparison: Western and Eastern Modernity
11. The Concept of Liminality and Its Ideational Implications
12. Conclusion and Implications

The Concept and Definition of Modernity

Modernity is a new mode of life that emerged through the combination of reason, science, capital, and the state, and a universal value discovered by humanity since the Middle Ages.

It is defined as a mode of life that takes science and technology as the basis for understanding the world and, combining capital and the state, objectifies and efficiently manages nature and humanity.

Key concepts:

Rationalization · Science and Technology · Statism · Capitalism

The etymological root of modernity, 'mode', means "now, here," and can thus connote both modernity and post-modernity at once.

Characteristics of Western Modernity

Weber condensed and explained modernity as the 'rationalization of the entire society'.

Weber's three elements of modernity:

- Rational capitalism
- Rational legal-administrative systems / the rule-of-law state
- Rational social differentiation

Key features of Western modernity:

Reason-centrism · the principle of rationality · the absoluteness of truth · a scientific worldview · secularization

The methodological doubt and reason-centrism arising from Descartes' "I think, therefore I am (Cogito, ergo sum)" form the epistemological foundation of Western modernity.

The Limits of Western Modernity

As a result of unbridled desire, modernity brought humanity to an unprecedented crisis of extinction, and post-modernism (post-modernism) theory, a critique of modernity, became greatly popular.

The post-modernists' critique:

- The problem of rationality: the reason-centrism epitomized by Descartes' "I think, therefore I am" is the core problem of modernity.
- The narcissistic self-same: a narcissistic modernity that denies the Idea or God and re-establishes all laws from the self.
- The exclusion of the Other: modern thinking that excludes and alienates the Other in the name of rationality.

"Hell is other people (L'enfer, c'est les autres)"

— Jean-Paul Sartre

The background to the emergence of post-modernism:

Sparked by the May 1968 French student movement, the debate between existentialism and structuralism began and later developed into post-structuralism, forming a vast current in contemporary philosophy today.

The Debate on Post-modernity and Alternative Modernity

Post-modernity is a current of thought that critiques modernity and explores various alternatives to overcome its limits — a movement that recognizes the problems caused by Western modernity and seeks solutions.

Reflexive Modernity

A concept proposed by Ulrich Beck, arguing for a reconstruction of modernity through the reflection and self-examination of modernization.

Liquid Modernity

Zygmunt Bauman's theory: a modernity characterized by the uncertainty and fluidity of contemporary society.

Multiple Modernities

A concept advanced by Eisenstadt and others, acknowledging the coexistence of different modernities grounded in regional and cultural diversity.

Alternative Modernity

Focusing, beyond the Western model, on the distinct modernization paths of various civilizations, including the East's indigenous modernity.

Key features:

Overcoming the limits of modernity · recognition of regional diversity · reflection and self-criticism · cultural relativism

Multiple Modernities and Consilience Theory

Multiple modernities is a concept that acknowledges the manifestation of modernity in regions outside the West and emphasizes the diversity of modernities that each society developed on its own.

 **Representative scholars: comparative-historical sociologists such as S. N. Eisenstadt, B. Wittrock, and J. P. Arnason.**

Consilience (統攝) theory:

An alternative model to the Cartesian-rationality-centered Western modernity, explaining modernity through a rearrangement of the boundary and relationship between the sacred (聖) and the profane (俗).

Consilience 1: after the Axial Age, the sacred (聖) subsumes the profane (俗).

Consilience 2: modernity is the shift in which the profane (俗) subsumes the sacred (聖).

The consilience model is an alternative theory capable of explaining both Western modernity (Weber's case of the Reformation) and Eastern modernity (the Neo-Confucianism of the Song dynasty).

The East's Indigenous Modernity

Indigenous modernity (Indigenous Modernity) refers to a distinct modernity that draws on the modern elements inherent in our tradition and, in response to Western modernity, preserves that tradition.

The main characteristics of indigenous modernity:

- 1 Correlative thought: unlike Western dichotomous thinking, a mode of thinking in which all elements of the world achieve harmony within interconnected relationships.
- 2 Liminality: an attempt to reflectively transcend the boundary between the sacred (聖) and the profane (俗).
- 3 Immanent development: Eastern societies possessed their own modernization processes even before Western influence.

Examples of Eastern modernity:

Donghak's nationalism · Daesoon Thought's Haewon-sangsaeng · the Neo-Confucianism of the Song dynasty · Japan's Kyoto School · the research of China's Wang Hui

Donghak and Daesoon Thought are not merely resistance to Western civilization but distinct modern thoughts that creatively integrate Eastern tradition and Western modernity.

The Indigenous Modernity of Donghak Thought

Donghak is the culmination of the Joseon post-Imjin-War trend of "the whole nation becoming yangban," and the ideational foundation on which Korea's concept of the nation-state was first formed.

Characteristics of Donghak's indigenous modernity:

- Immanent thought: emphasizing the immanence of Eastern thought — "the principle of the universe is furnished within the body, so the will of the people is the mind of Heaven."
- Correlative thought and Liminality: forming a creative relationship of tension at the boundary between the sacred (聖) and the profane (俗).
- Similarity to the Reformation: sharing a structural similarity with the Reformation, the harbinger of Western modernity.

"Donghak's expression 'Gaebyeok once again' indirectly asserts the Eastern origins of Western modernity."

Donghak and the formation of the nation-state:

Nationalist movement · the will of the people = the mind of Heaven · equality of all people · social transformation

By simultaneously presenting the beginning of the modern nation and critical thinking about modernity, Donghak exemplifies a distinctive indigenous modernity that encompasses both modernity and post-modernity.

The Modernity Presented by Daesoon Thought

Some 120 years ago, Daesoon Thought foresaw the limits of the Western modernity of its time and presented an alternative modernity integrating Eastern and Western thought.

Haewon-sangsaeng (解冤相生)

The core principle of Daesoon Thought: resolving the relationships of grievance dominated by Sangseuk (相克, mutual conflict) and realizing the Dao (道) of Sangsaeng (相生, mutual life-giving).

Resolving grievances · mutual coexistence · harmonious relationships

An East-West Convergent Approach

Pursuing a balanced modernity by integrating Western rationality and Eastern morality.

Rationality and spirituality · the harmony of the sacred (聖) and the profane (俗) · the consilience of Eastern and Western thought

The crisis of modernity foreseen by Daesoon Thought, and its alternative:

- Foreseeing the crisis of human extinction that the materialism of Western-style modernity would bring about.
- Presenting the harmonious Sangsaeng of Eastern and Western civilizations as an alternative for a new modernity.
- Presenting a concept similar to reflexive modernity already more than 120 years ago.

"The concept of modernity that Daesoon Thought presented by synthesizing Eastern and Western thought is only now beginning to draw attention as an alternative for overcoming the contemporary crisis."

The Eastern Origins of Western Modernity

Recent studies reveal that Western modernity was influenced by the East — China in particular — and that after Matteo Ricci the European 'China craze' had a significant influence on the development of the Western Enlightenment.

The influence of Eastern thought on Enlightenment thinkers:

Voltaire: highly valued China's religion-free morality and used it to criticize European religious dogmatism.

Adam Smith: the concept of the 'invisible hand' was inspired by Eastern thought, especially the Chinese concept of natural order.

Rousseau: 'natural rights (Natural Right)' was conceived and developed from Chinese civilization and its theory of human nature (人性論).

Researchers:

Thomas A. Metzger · Andre Gunder Frank · John M. Hobson · François Jullien · Alexander Woodside

Key implications:

Overcoming European fetishism · the mutual exchange of knowledge · the restoration of concealed history · recognition of multiple modernities

Conclusion and Implications

The Rediscovery of Indigenous Modernity

Research on modernity requires ceaseless reflection in the 'now, here', and it is important to expand alternative perspectives beyond Western-centric modernity.

The Contemporary Implications of Eastern Thought

The East's indigenous modernity, such as Donghak and Daesoon Thought, is not a mere historical relic but presents a reflective alternative to the problems of modern society.

Convergence and a New Paradigm

Through the concepts of consilience and Liminality between Western and Eastern thought, it is possible to seek a new social paradigm that preserves the positive aspects of modernity while overcoming its limits.

"Toward a new modernity beyond modernity"