

(b) The Eastern Common Origins of Western and Indigenous Modernity

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Research Background and Problem Statement

- **The Economic Growth of the Three East Asian Nations and a Reassessment of Modernity**

The need has arisen to reassess the three East Asian nations—the only non-Western civilizations to have achieved economic growth surpassing that of the West.

- **Research Trends on the Eastern Origins of Western Modernity**

A stream of studies showing that Western modernity was in fact influenced by the East — new perspectives from Western scholars such as Jullien, Frank, Hobson, Creel, and Woodside

- **The Need to Reexamine Korea's Indigenous Modernity**

A new perspective on and reassessment of the indigenous modernity of modern and contemporary Korea, hitherto regarded as merely an isolated legacy of a bygone era

Weber's Theory of Eastern Society and Its Limits

- Defining Eastern society as an irrational, pre-modern society

Weber, who did not know Chinese characters, argued that Eastern society lacked rationality and consistency, and characterized it as a patrimonial bureaucracy.

- Adopting Hegel's Absolute Geist and a Western-centric perspective

Accepting Hegel's dialectical view of history, he placed Western modern society at the peak of development and defined Eastern society as an inferior developmental stage.

- Kant's influence and the claim of an absence of rationality and consistency

Evaluating the Li (理) of Neo-Confucianism by the Kantian concept of consistency, he misjudged it as an irrational system without argumentation.

- Influence and problems persisting to this day — even now, more than 100 years on, it functions as the basic lens through which Western and Eastern intellectuals view Eastern society, the first obstacle to the discussion of indigenous modernity.

Metzger's Rebuttal and Eastern Modernity

- Reinterpreting Weber's theory with a knowledge of Chinese characters — Thomas Metzger, knowing Chinese characters and deeply understanding Eastern culture, drew the opposite conclusion from Weber, refuting Weber's claim that Eastern society lacks rationality.
- The Eastern consciousness of anxious concern and tension — the tension Weber saw as a Protestant element in fact appears strongly in Easterners; through this consciousness of anxious concern, Easterners reflect on the world and ceaselessly cultivate themselves.
- The expansion of bureaucracy and an interpretation of historical development — from an Eastern perspective, democracy is an expansion of bureaucracy, a process of “the sage within and the king without” (內聖外王); the unrivaled economic development of contemporary East Asia is evidence of this Eastern modernity.
- A reassessment of Eastern modernity — the Reformation-like character of Donghak Thought toward Neo-Confucianism and the civil-society traits of Joseon society; Joseon society possessed civil-society elements even stronger than those of Western civil society.

Evidence of the Eastern Origins of Western Modernity

- European Enlightenment intellectuals' adoption of Chinese thought — scholars who founded modern thought, such as Voltaire, Rousseau, and Adam Smith, with one voice found the grounds for their claims in Chinese thought: Europe's “China craze”
- Matteo Ricci's role in transmitting Chinese thought — the Chinese thought Matteo Ricci brought to Europe had a decisive influence on the formation of core concepts of Western modernity; Matteo Ricci's role is mentioned in Donghak and Daesoon Thought as well
- Historical Evidence: The Eastern Origins of Western Modern Concepts
 - Smith's “invisible hand” and Rousseau's “doctrine of natural rights” were inspired by Eastern thought — the influence of China's civil-service examination system and its secularized rational tradition upon the West
- The formation of the Western concept of universality and Eastern thought — the Western Catholic concept of “universality” was reestablished through contact with Eastern civilization: the shock that a moral Chinese society without religion gave to a Europe then racked by wars of religion

Donghak Thought and Korea's Indigenous Modernity

- Donghak's idea of the “Renewed Gaebyeok” and the Eastern origins of Western modernity
The Eastern origins of Western modernity, expressed indirectly in Donghak, and the reinterpretation of Eastern and Western civilizations through them
- The theory of the Chinese origin of Western learning (Seohak-jungwon) and Korea's Seo Myeong-eung
The influence of the Seohak-jungwon theory—that Western learning originated in China—and its development through Korea's Seo Myeong-eung
- The Reformation-like character of Donghak Thought
Donghak, which bears a Reformation-like character toward Neo-Confucianism — its similarities to and differences from Western Protestantism
- Korean Neo-Confucianism and its civil-society character
Recent research showing that Korea's Joseon society had a stronger civil-society character than Western civil society, and its significance

Empathy and Reflexive Modernity

- “Empathy” as a keyword of Eastern modernity

The Confucian concept of “empathy” in the East was converted into a core element of Western modernity — a new foundation for Western moral theory

- The eighteenth-century West's adoption of the Confucian concept of “empathy”

Hume, Adam Smith, and others interpreted the Confucian thought of Confucius transmitted by Matteo Ricci as “empathy” and grafted it onto Western moral theory.

- The importance of a modernity joined with reflection — Eastern modernity has the trait of a “reflexive modernity” that emphasizes reflection more than Western modernity; even empathy, the origin of Western modernity, attains its true significance only when joined with reflection.

- Its value as an alternative modernity

The East's indigenous modernity, capable of overcoming the materialism and human alienation of Western modernity — presenting an alternative paradigm for the postmodern era

Conclusion and Significance

- ✓ The importance of Eastern origins in the modernity debate — historical evidence found that Western modernity was influenced by the East: the influence of Matteo Ricci, the “China craze” of the Enlightenment era, and the introduction of the Confucian concept of empathy
- ✓ A reinterpretation of Korea's indigenous modernity and its implications today
The distinctive traits of Donghak Thought and Korean Neo-Confucianism reassessed as the seeds of modernity — a rediscovery of indigenous modernity beyond Weber's limits
- ✓ As a future alternative modernity, “indigenous modernity”
The East's indigenous modernity, capable of overcoming the materialism and human alienation of Western modernity — presenting a new modernity paradigm that joins empathy and reflection

“It is time to reconsider the integrated modernity of Eastern and Western cultures as a new paradigm for resolving the crisis of civilization.”