



(d) The East–West Distinction as the Theoretical Background of Indigenous Modernity

East-West Distinction as Theoretical Background

Table of Contents

- 1 Differences in Eastern and Western Methods of Thought
- 2 Findings from Cognitive Psychology
- 3 Various Interpretations of the East–West Difference
- 4 Structuralism and the Concept of Immanence
- 5 Poststructuralism's Thought of the Outside
- 6 Alternative Modernity Theory
- 7 The East–West Distinction in Daesoon Thought
- 8 Conclusion and Significance

Differences in Eastern and Western Methods of Thought

Eastern thought

- ♦ Holistic thought (Holistic Thinking)
- ♦ Focus on context and background
- ♦ Oriented toward collective control
- ♦ A complex worldview

Western thought

- ♦ Analytic thought (Analytic Thinking)
- ♦ Focus on individual objects and quantity
- ♦ Oriented toward individual control
- ♦ A simplified worldview

Richard Nisbett's cognitive-psychology research

Experimental result: on seeing a bird in flight

Easterners → remember the background

Concentrate on context and the overall image

Westerners → remember the number of birds

Concentrate on individual objects and quantity

The East–West distinction in Donghak and Daesoon Thought

The difference between Donghak and Seohak (Western learning) reflects not a mere cultural distinction but a fundamental difference in systems of thought

This is also linked to the difference in the properties of yin (陰) and yang (陽)

Findings from Cognitive Psychology

Richard E. Nisbett's empirical research

Demonstrating differences in the cognitive patterns of Easterners and Westerners through experimental psychology

Eastern cognition • the world is complex and an object of collective control • focus on background and context

Western cognition • the world is simple and an object of individual control • focus on objects and quantity

Feng Youlan's interpretation (馮友蘭)

The difference between commercial and agricultural cultures

- West: the development of commerce required distinguishing essence from substance
- intuitive perception is important
- Why there was no epistemology in the East: it arose from a direct relationship with nature

Kim Pil-nyeon's interpretation

Geographical-environmental factors

- West: multiethnic coexistence → clear communication → development of logic
- East: in an agriculture-centered environment
- East (China): the political problems of the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods → the development of inner ethics
- The origins of collectivity (East) and individuality (West) are environmental factors

Park Dong-hwan's linguistic model

Korean logic differs from that of the West and China—a circular logic of “function-word —a characteristic whereby new theories are fused

The East-West difference hypothesis: the relationship between the whole and part | Choi Bong-young: the difference between viewing the individual and the community from an individual vs. holistic perspective

* Based on the research of Nisbett (1941–present), Feng Youlan (1894–1990), Kim Pil-nyeon, Park Dong-hwan, and others

Various Interpretations of the East–West Difference



An environmental-determinist interpretation

Feng Youlan (馮友蘭): the difference between commercial and agricultural cultures — the East's natural environment fostered agriculture-based intuitive perception | Kim Pil-nyeon: the difference between collectivity and individuality — arising from geographical-environmental differences (multiethnic vs. single-ethnic)



A linguistic model

Park Dong-hwan: Korean logic is a “circular logic of function-word determination” in which the periphery determines the center; this Korean logic, distinct from that of the West and China, has the trait of fusing new theories



A culturalist approach

Choi Bong-young: the relationality of individual and community — typologizing each civilization

- ◆ West: an individual-aggregative worldview (modern), a whole-subordinate worldview (traditional) | China: a whole-part worldview | India: a whole-dependent-origination worldview
- ◆
- ◆

💬 Cultural difference must be understood not as a mere difference in custom but as a fundamental difference in systems of thought and worldview

Structuralism and the Concept of Immanence

Lévi-Strauss and “The Savage Mind”

- ♦ Structuralist anthropology: the thought of primitive societies also possesses structural principles no less rich than Western thought
- ♦ | “The Savage Mind”: composed of symmetrical thinking (Symmetrical thinking) such as yin and yang
- ♦ Eastern holistic thought is closer to symmetrical thinking
- ♦ The Buddhist concept of emptiness (空): the pinnacle of symmetrical thinking, coinciding with the symmetry of all things

The concept of immanence and the limits of Western thought

- ♦ Immanence: the tacit conventions shared within a particular culture, recognizable only from the outside | The immanence of
- ♦ Western thought: Aristotle's substance theory
- ♦ Matteo Ricci: criticizing the theory of yin-yang and the Five Phases and the Li-Qi theory on the basis of substance theory
- ♦ The dogmatism of Western substantialism: the premise that change is logical only if explained by substance (atoms, God, etc.)

Deleuze and Jullien's exploration of immanence

Gilles Deleuze (1925-1995)

Criticizing the substantiality of Western thought and pursuing the “thought of the Outside (Outside Thinking)”

François Jullien

At (Outside Thinking) Immanence: aiming at the unity of opposites without assuming substance

- The East's correlative thought: escaping dogmatism while offering an alternative to problems analytic philosophy could not solve

* Lévi-Strauss, The Savage Mind (La Pensée sauvage) (1962)

Poststructuralism's Thought of the Outside

What is the “thought of the Outside (Outside Thinking)”?

A mode of thought pursued by poststructuralists to escape the immanence of Western thought

It departs in particular from a critique of the dogmatic character of Aristotle's substance theory

Gilles Deleuze

Presenting the concept of immanence — he criticizes the substantiality of Western philosophy, yet does not criticize the East

Michel Foucault

A genealogical critique of the Western knowledge system

Analyzing the relations of power and dogmatism inherent at the core of Western thought

Jacques Derrida

Critique of phonocentrism (Grammatology)

Deconstructing the dichotomous structure of Western metaphysics

The limits of Western substantialism

- ♦ The dogma that a substance (atoms, God, etc.) is necessarily required in the process of change
- ♦ Aristotle's substance theory brought about the dogmatism of Western thought; Matteo Ricci used substance theory to criticize the Eastern theory of yin-yang and the Five Phases

The possibility of an Eastern alternative

- ♦ The Eastern immanence that assumes no substance
- ♦ A correlative-thought system able to escape Western dogmatism
- ♦ Jullien: discovering the moral foundation of modern Western thought in Eastern immanence

Alternative Modernity Theory

Wang Hui (汪暉, 1959–present)

An alternative modernity grounded in Chinese thought

- ◆ Exploring an alternative modernity in the process of transformation of Chinese thought — Confucius's idea of “benevolence (仁)” was an attempt to restore the sanctity of the Zhou dynasty's rites and music
- ◆ The theory of portents (災異論) and the Li-Qi theory likewise were a restoration of collapsed sanctity
- ◆ An alternative modernity becomes possible together with the restoration of tradition

Hwang Tae-yeon (1955–present)

Confucian rationality and modernity

- ◆ Western rationality is not rationality in the Kantian sense but Confucian rationality; the thought of Confucius and Mencius was introduced to the West and formed modern rationality
- ◆ Confucian rationality is freer from dogmatism than analytic philosophy; “Confucian General Theory of Modernity” is put forward

Common features of the alternative modernities

The encompassment and transformation of sacred and secular
Discovering contemporary values in Eastern tradition

The contemporary application of correlative thought
Overcoming substantialism through yin-yang thinking

The East–West Distinction in Daesoon Thought

West (西洋) | East (東洋)

West (西洋) — yang (陽)

- The region west of Mt. Kunlun; the property of yang: the principle of ascending from below to above
- An analytic, substance-based system of thought
- Daesoon Thought: the West's “each acting for its own mind” (各自爲心)

Mt. Kunlun

East (東洋) — yin (陰)

- The region east of Mt. Kunlun; the property of yin: the principle of descending from above to below
- A holistic, property-based system of thought
- Donghak Thought: the realm where the Eastern divine beings (神明) dwell

The East–West distinction within the realm of divine beings (神明界)

“Before Matteo Ricci, East and West were firmly kept apart, and the divine beings did not come and go between them.” — the Jeon-gyeong (典經), “Gyoun” 1-9

“Leading all the divine beings of Dao-attainment of the East, the Great Master Jinmuk crossed over to the West.” — the Jeon-gyeong (典經), “Gongsa” 3-15

In Daesoon Thought, the East–West distinction functions as a fundamental principle that, beyond geographical boundaries, penetrates even the structure of the realm of divine beings

Conclusion and Significance

The philosophical implications of the East–West distinction

The East's immanence

A holistic property, context-centered, the principle of yin (陰) descending from the cosmos to the self

The West's immanence

A substantialist property, individual-centered, the principle of yang (陽) ascending from the self to the cosmos

The significance of Donghak and Daesoon Thought

Interpreting the East–West distinction on the worldview basis of yin and yang, providing an indigenous framework for understanding modernity

The possibility of indigenous modernity

The value of the Eastern approach

- A contemporary reinterpretation of holistic thought
- Mencius's self-cultivation concept of existence; Wang
- Hui's model of alternative modernity
- The contemporary application of yin-yang-based correlative thought

The need for an integrated perspective

- Poststructuralism's pursuit of the “thought of the Outside”
- Liminality theory and liquid modernity
- The complementary combination of substantialism and property theory
- Fractal theory and self-organization theory

Contemporary significance and implications

The East–West distinction can be interpreted, beyond a mere geographical or cultural dimension, as a fundamental difference in mode of thought and philosophical immanence

Beyond the East–West dichotomy, it provides a philosophical foundation, through the principle of yin-yang harmony, for solving the diverse problems of modern society