



(c) The Clash and Mutual Conflict (相克化) of Modern Eastern and Western Views of Heaven

Clash of East-West Views of Heaven

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🔗🔥 It explores the interrelationship and modern meaning of the Eastern and Western views of Heaven.

Problem Statement and Overview



The Eastern View of Heaven

Yin-Yang and the Five Phases (陰陽五行)

Clash



The Western View of Heaven

Earth-Water-Fire-Wind (地水火風)

- 1 In the modern period, the worldviews (views of Heaven) of East and West met in earnest for the first time in history and clashed.
- 2 **The East's Yin-Yang and Five Phases: a correlative view of nature, emphasizing the principles of change and circulation**
- 3 **The West's earth-water-fire-wind: a view of nature based on a personal God, distinguishing substance and property**
- 4 The clash of the two views of Heaven brought about fundamental changes in East Asian traditional thought and social systems.
→ This clash unfolded not as a simple cultural exchange but as a clash of civilizational paradigms.

Basic Concepts of the View of Heaven: Earth-Water-Fire-Wind vs. Yin-Yang and the Five Phases

Earth-Water-Fire-Wind (地水火風), the Western Four Elements theory. The four basic elements of earth (地), water (水), fire (火), and wind (風).

- 1 A view of nature as substance – recognized as independent existents.
- 2
- 3 Originating in Aristotle's natural philosophy and inherited through the Middle Ages.
- 4 The basic constituent elements of a world created by a personal God.



Yin-Yang and the Five Phases (陰陽五行), the Eastern correlative view of nature. The complementary relationship of Yin and Yang and the Five Phases of metal (金), wood (木), water (水), fire (火), and soil (土). 1 2 A view of nature based on correlation (相關性) – emphasizing relationship and change. 3 A balance between generative (相生) and restraining (相剋) relationships. 4 Natural law as principle (理法), an immanent worldview.



Similarities and Differences

Similarities / Differences: an attempt to explain the basic constituents of nature. West: substance-centered vs. East: relationship-centered. A mediating role connecting the material world and the spiritual world. West: independent existence vs. East: interdependent existence. West: centered on a personal God vs. East: centered on principle (理法).

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Matteo Ricci and a Comparison of Eastern and Western Views of



Matteo Ricci (1552–1610)

A Jesuit missionary from Italy, known by the Chinese name 'Li Madou (利瑪竇),' who spread Catholicism to East Asia and served as a bridge between Eastern and Western thought. Work: the Cheonju Sirui (天主實義) – introducing the Western View of Heaven to the East.

"I marvel that the Eastern View of Heaven found in the Book of Documents (書經), a Confucian classic predating Neo-Confucianism, is similar to the Western View of Heaven and indeed has points that are even better."

—
Matteo
Ricci

The ancient Confucian View of Heaven

The notion of a personal Sangje (上帝):
a transcendent being that
communicates with humans

Change

The Neo-Confucian View of Heaven

The notion of a principle-based (理法的) Heavenly Principle (天理)
Heaven as an impersonal natural
principle

- 1 Ricci discovered and welcomed elements in the Confucian classic the Book of Documents similar to the Western concept of a personal God.
- 2 It triggered the fundamental difference and debate between a personal God (the West, early Confucianism) and a principle-based deity (Neo-Confucianism).
- 3 Through the Cheonju Sirui, it introduced the Western View of Heaven and delivered a fresh shock to the East Asian intelligentsia.

The Theory of Supplementing Confucianism and the Clash of Views of Heaven



The development of the theory of supplementing Confucianism; the key point of conflict

- Matteo Ricci's strategy
The claim that the original thought of Confucianism accords with Catholicism
 - The response of the Joseon yangban class
Partially accepted insofar as it revives the original purpose of Confucianism
 - A clash occurred
Beyond surface similarities, a fundamental difference in worldview was discovered.
- 1 Difference in the view of humanity. West: the individual, independent human being. East: the relational, correlative human being.
 - 2 Difference in the View of Earth (地觀). West: the Earth as an objective object. East: the land in a correlative relationship with Heaven (天).
 - 3 The deepening of a civilizational crisis
The crisis of survival of traditional philosophy in the process of modernization

The Problem of the Li (理) of the Supreme Ultimate and the Mutual



Western substance theory — Substantialism

The view that sees Li (理) as substance

- God as an independent being • an external creator • the separation of humanity and nature



Opposition



Eastern Li-Qi theory — Li-Qi Philosophy

The view that sees Li (理) as principle

- the immanent principle of all things • inseparability from qi (氣) • the idea of the unity of Heaven and Humanity (天人合一)

The Phenomenon of the Mutual Conflict (相克化) of Views of Heaven

- 1 Ontological opposition: the debate over whether the Li (理) of the Supreme Ultimate is a self-subsistent being is a fundamental point of conflict between Eastern and Western philosophy.
- 2 Conflict in the view of the divine (神觀): the opposition between a personal God and a principle-based deity, and the debate surrounding the immortality of the soul
- 3 Change in the view of humanity: the confusion between the relations of 'the divine exalted, humanity lowly' (神尊人卑) and 'humanity exalted, the divine lowly' (人尊神卑)
- 4 Social consequences: in the East, Yin-Yang, the Five Phases, and the divine beings of Heaven and Earth were negated, and in the West an atheistic worldview took form.

"Mutual conflict begets mutual conflict, and it is the reality of today that Heaven, Earth, and humanity fall into terrible disorder and turn toward the brink of annihilation."

The Harmony of Donghak Thought and Conclusion



- 1 The harmonizing approach of Donghak Thought: Korea's Donghak, through Sicheonju (侍天主),**
attempts a harmony between the natural philosophy of Yin-Yang and the Five Phases and the personal-God concept of earth-water-fire-wind.
- 2 The ideological value of liminality (boundary-ness)**
Beyond the extreme opposition of East and West, it pioneers a 'middle zone' between different worldviews.
- 3 The search for indigenous modernity**
Presenting the possibility of a new philosophical thought that goes beyond Westernization or adherence to tradition

Contemporary Implications



A dialogical encounter of Eastern and Western thought
The possibility of Sangsaeng (mutual life-giving) beyond mutual conflict; the contemporary global crisis and the recovery of a worldview

