

(d) The Liminality in the Sicheonju (侍天主) View of Heaven of Donghak Thought

Liminality in Donghak Sicheonju View of Heaven

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Research Background: The Limits of Neo-Confucianism and the Emergence of Donghak

Neo-Confucianism's Ibeopcheon (理法天) had reached a stage where it could not solve the problems of the new era in late Joseon society.

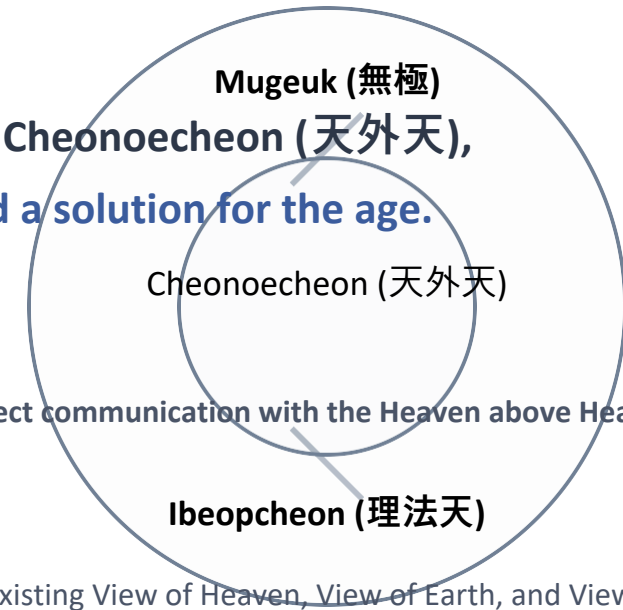
Against this background, Donghak, with the Heaven above Heaven called Cheonoecheon (天外天), that is, a new View of Heaven of the Heaven of Mugeuk (無極), presented a solution for the age.

That is how it responded to its times.

The new View of Heaven presented by Donghak, unlike Neo-Confucianism's Ibeopcheon, emphasized direct communication with the Heaven above Heaven, that is, Cheonoecheon (天外天).

Donghak Thought emphasized the concept of Cheonoecheon, which had not received attention in the existing View of Heaven, View of Earth, and View of Humanity, thereby promoting the indigenous modernity of the View of Heaven, View of Earth, and View of Humanity. Donghak's View of Heaven: beyond Ibeopcheon,

direct communication with Cheonoecheon



The Concept of the Sicheonju View of Heaven in Donghak Thought

Sicheonju (侍天主) is a core concept of Donghak that means direct communication with the 'Heaven above Heaven,' different from the 'Heaven' of Neo-Confucianism.

Throughout his life, Suun devoted all his energies to direct communication with the 'Heaven above Heaven,' and after some forty years of long effort, he reached the Heavenly Dialogue in the Gyeongsin year (1860). He arrived at the Heavenly Dialogue (天師問答).

The appearance of Sangje in Donghak Thought, seen from the standpoint of orthodox Neo-Confucianism, was an anomalous and heterodox phenomenon belonging to the 'strange forces and disorderly spirits' (怪力亂神).

Sicheonju (侍天主)

To serve Heaven

A core concept of Donghak, meaning direct communication with Cheonoecheon and the upholding of the will of Heaven.

Meaning

- An independent View of Heaven: the Sicheonju concept is differentiated from Neo-Confucianism's Ibeopcheon (理法天) and Seohak's Lord of Heaven (天主). It is thus differentiated.
- The Donggyeong Daejeon (東經大全) and the Yongdam Yusa (龍潭遺詞): Suun's Heavenly Dialogue is recorded in detail in these two scriptures. It is so recorded.
- Communication with Cheonoecheon (天外天): a religious experience of conversing directly with the Heaven above Heaven

Sicheonju Johwajeong Yeongsebulmang
Mansaji (侍天主 造化定 永世不忘萬事知)
– the Donggyeong Daejeon (東經大全)

Suun's Heavenly Dialogue and Religious Experience

The Heavenly Dialogue (天師問答): the first revelation Suun received from Sangje on the 5th day of the 4th lunar month of 1860 (the Gyeongsin year), and the conversation that continued for six months thereafter

The first revelation: the encounter with Sangje of the Yongdam Yusa (龍潭遺詞) and the Donggyeong Daejeon (東經大全)
April 5, 1860
One year later

The most distinctive feature of Donghak Thought in religious history is that the founder's religious experience was expressed in great detail and over a long period of time.

After nearly forty years of long effort, Suun finally, upon reaching the Gyeongsin year, arrived at the Heavenly Dialogue.

"Unexpectedly, in the fourth month, my mind grew startled and my body trembled ... the words of a certain immortal suddenly came to my ear, and, startled, I probed and asked; the reply came: 'Do not fear, do not fear. The people of the world call me Sangje; do you not know Sangje?'"

For six months

This experience is detailed in the Yongdam Yusa (龍潭遺詞) and the Donggyeong Daejeon (東經大全), written after Suun's Heavenly Dialogue.

— from Suun's Heavenly Dialogue —

Comparison of Donghak and Seohak

Unjeugil (運則一), Dojeukdong (道則同), Ijeukbi (理則非)

Suun expresses the difference between Donghak and Seohak thus: "The fortune

(unsu) is one, and the Way (do) is the same, but the principle (i) is different." Donghak (東學) / Seohak (西學)

The goal (the fortune, the Way) is the same, but the method and the principle are different. View of Heaven (天觀): Cheonoecheon (天外天) The Lord of Heaven (天主)

Donghak emphasizes gihwa (氣化)—the condensation of the energy of Heaven into the body—and values a natural transformation through the practice of Susimjeonggi (守心正氣). Incantation practice; Susimjeonggi (守心正氣, guarding the mind and rectifying the vital energy) separation of priest and believer

That is its emphasis.

Characteristic: the spirit of gihwa (氣化之神), having only form and no substance

Seohak, by contrast, focuses on 'prayer for one's own benefit,' and though it has form, Donghak criticizes it as lacking substance.

Method of transformation: Muwiihwa (無爲而化, actionless transformation) Prayer

The Way I receive transforms the world naturally, according to the will of Heaven. (吾道無爲而化矣) Ken Wober: "The greatest weakness of Western thought is that it has no theory of self-cultivation."

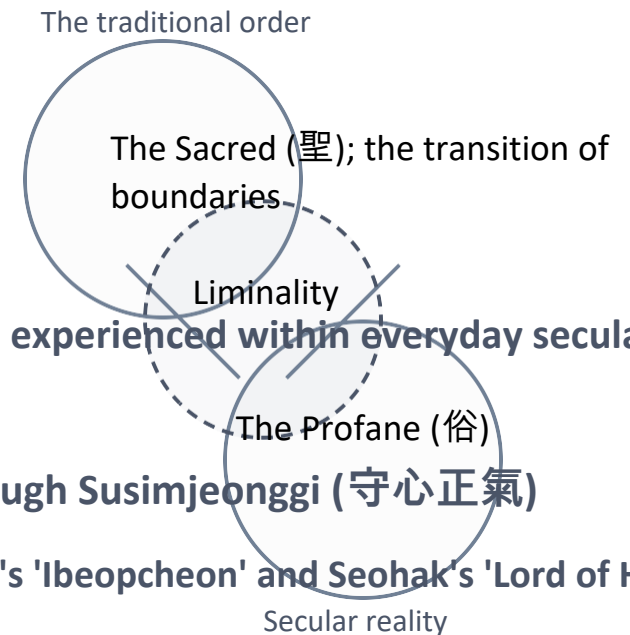
The Concept of Liminality and Its Application

Liminality refers to a liminal state in which the transition of boundaries, the rearrangement of the sacred and the secular, and the dismantling and reconstruction of the existing order take place.

Donghak Thought displays the following liminality characteristics:

- A rearrangement of the ranking of sacred and secular, whereby the Sacred (聖) is experienced within everyday secular life through direct communication with Cheonoecheon
- A crossing of boundaries that resolves the existing, overlapping problems through Susimjeonggi (守心正氣)
- The presentation of a new View of Heaven (天觀) that goes beyond Neo-Confucianism's 'Ibeopcheon' and Seohak's 'Lord of Heaven'

In the theory of multiple modernities, modernity arises, as in Donghak Thought, from a consilience and liminality that revitalize the parts alienated in the existing View of Heaven, View of Earth, and View of Humanity, changing the ranking of sacred and secular so that the secular can accommodate the sacred.



The Ideological Background of Donghak – the Influence of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism

On the basis of various East Asian traditional thoughts, Donghak developed its own distinctive View of Heaven.

Amid diverse religious backgrounds, Donghak established its own path while embracing the strengths of the existing traditions.



- **Confucianism (儒教):** Donghak is grounded in the Neo-Confucian View of Heaven and emphasized the role of 'qi (氣).' Yet it presented a new View of Heaven that went beyond Neo-Confucianism's Ibeopcheon.
- **Daoism (道教):** under the influence of late-Joseon Nandan Daoism (鸞壇道教), Daoist traditions were reflected in incantation practice and in the Donghak hymns. Suun was even appointed by Jeungsan as the 'Patriarch (宗長) of the Later Heaven Way of the Immortals.' That is what happened.

Mugeukdaedo and the Concept of Creative Transformation

Mugeukdaedo (無極大道) is a concept pointing to a state even prior to the Supreme Ultimate (Taegeuk), the state before Yin and Yang are distinguished, and is connected to the primordial cosmos.

In terms of the View of Heaven, this corresponds to the Heaven beyond Heaven, that is, Cheonoecheon (天外天). That is what it corresponds to.

"You have reached the boundless, infinite Way; cultivate and discipline yourself, compose writings and teach the people, rectify the law and spread virtue, and I will cause you to live long and shine throughout the world."

Creative transformation (造化) and Muwiihwa (無爲而化): in interpreting the incantation, Suun explained that 'creative transformation' means 'Muwiihwa' (actionless transformation), and that 'jeong (定)' means 'uniting with its virtue (合其德)' and settling one's mind (定其心).
Thus he expounded it.

Mugeukdaedo (無極大道)

Creative transformation (造化) and Muwiihwa (無爲而化)
Creative change
Natural change

The Indigenous Modernity of Donghak's View of Heaven

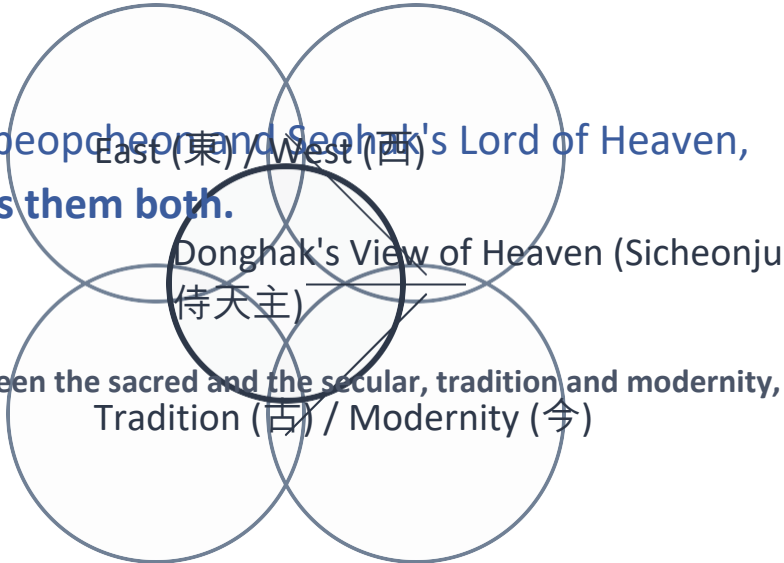
The View of Heaven of Donghak Thought shows an indigenous modernity that encompasses and transcends the views of Heaven of all times and places, East and West.

This it demonstrates.

Donghak's Sicheonju (侍天主) View of Heaven integrates Neo-Confucianism's Ibeopcheon and Seohak's Lord of Heaven, **while emphasizing a direct communication with Cheonoecheon that surpasses them both.**

The dismantling and reorganization of boundaries – Donghak Thought reconstructs the boundaries between the sacred and the secular, tradition and modernity, so that the Sacred (聖) can be experienced in everyday life.

The indigenous modernity of the View of Heaven of Donghak Thought reorganizes the sacred and the secular and includes and transcends the views of Heaven of all times and places, East and West. Donghak's View of Heaven seeks to embrace, as fully as possible, the strengths of Eastern Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism and also to embrace the excellence of the Western View of Heaven.



Encompassing all times and places, East and West (東西古今)

The Indigenous Modernity of Donghak's View of Heaven

Conclusion and Significance

Donghak's Sicheonju View of Heaven embraces both tradition and modernity and shows a transcendent thought system that encompasses the views of Heaven of all times and places, East and West.

This achieved an indigenous modernity through a liminality that reorganized the boundary between the sacred and the secular, centering on the concept of Cheonoecheon, which had not received attention in the existing views of Heaven. That is how it was achieved.

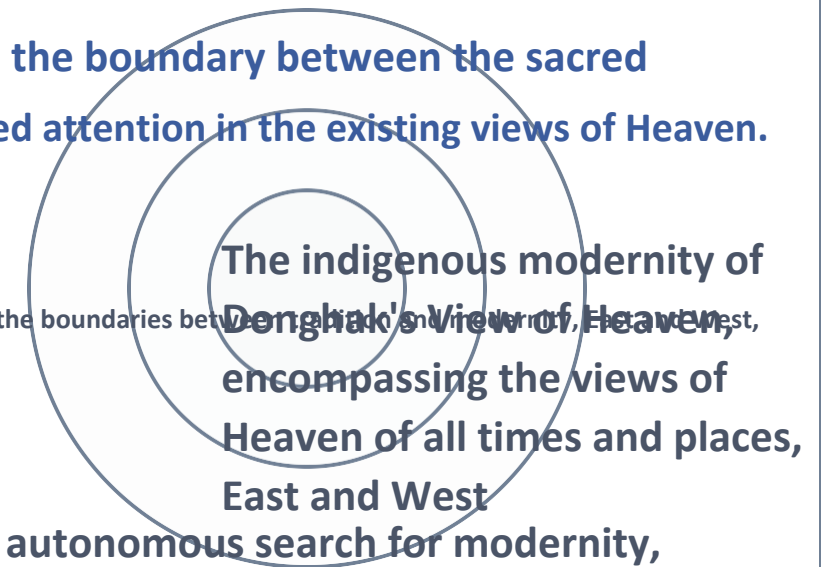
- Contemporary meaning: Donghak's View of Heaven serves as a model of a new mode of thought that today transcends the boundaries between tradition and modernity, East and West, and religion and science.

It becomes such a model that crosses these boundaries.

- Indigenous modernity: as both a resistance to Western imperialism and an autonomous search for modernity, it offers an alternative perspective on the contemporary crisis.

- Susimjeonggi and incantation practice: on the practical side too, they present a solution to the spiritual crisis of modern people.

Such a solution they offer.



The liminality of Donghak Thought: an integrative thought beyond boundaries

References and Q&A

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Q&A

Concerning the Sicheonju View of Heaven and the liminality of Donghak Thought

— on these topics —
we welcome your questions.

Thank you.