

(d) The Liminality Manifested in the Johwajeong (造化定) View of Earth (地觀) of Donghak Thought

Liminality in the Donghak Johwajeong View of Earth

Research Purpose and Background

The theoretical inquiry into Donghak Thought and its contemporary significance

01 The aim of analyzing the Liminality manifested in the Johwajeong (造化定) View of Earth (地觀) of Donghak Thought

Attempting a new interpretation of the Donghak View of Earth through the concept of liminality

02 Understanding Donghak's indigenous modern thought and the clash and fusion of Eastern and Western thought

Studying the point where Western modernity and the immanent development of Eastern thought intersect

03 Its significance in Korean modern thought and popular religious movements

Analyzing the influx of Daoist thought and the influence of early-modern Chinese Nandan Daoism

The Concept of the Johwajeong (造化定) View of Earth in Donghak Thought; A Study of the Liminality of Donghak Thought

What is the Johwajeong View of Earth (造化定地觀)?

A distinctive epistemology of the Earth (地) as existing from the transcendent Heaven; a concept that newly defines the relationship between Heaven and Earth in Donghak Thought

Unlike the existing View of Earth, Donghak newly recognizes the earth as a realm of the transcendent Heaven's creative transformation, and as a being of Muwiihwa (無爲而化) and gihwa (氣化)

A new relationality of Heaven and Earth

(造化定地觀)?

According to the distinction between the transcendent Heaven and the immanent Heaven, the Earth (地) too is understood through the creative-transformative working of the transcendent Heaven. The earth is no longer a merely material world but becomes an object of creative transformation

The earth as a realm of cultivation and practice

Donghak Thought expands the earth into a realm of cultivation. A space where not only the king but all the common people can commune with the transcendent Heaven through the cultivation of Siheonju (侍天主)

The concepts of creative transformation (造化), Muwiihwa (無爲而化), and gihwa (氣化)

Through the concepts of 'creative transformation (造化),' 'Muwiihwa (無爲而化),' and 'gihwa (氣化),' the Johwajeong View of Earth forms Donghak's own life-centered worldview, distinct from Western modernity

The Background of the Formation of Donghak Thought and the Influence of Daoism; An Examination of the Establishment of Donghak's Indigenous Modernity

The ideological background of Donghak

The formation of Donghak took place at the point where the influx of Western modernity met the immanent development of Eastern thought. Daoism that entered Joseon was broadly divided into internal-alchemy Daoism (內丹道教) and spirit-communication Daoism (通神道教). Internal-alchemy Daoism centered on cultivation, while spirit-communication Daoism emphasized communion with the divine. Donghak developed by absorbing these Daoist ideas.

After the dialogue with the Heavenly Teacher (天師問答), Suun's deliberation and experience were added, and Donghak's View of Earth was formed. The influence of Daoist thought is especially emphasized.



The influx and influence of Daoist thought



Its relationship with, and differentiation from, Western Learning (西學)

Donghak has an aspect as a response to Western Learning. It was a thought presented to recognize the harm brought by Western modernity and to save the East. It presents an approach differentiated from Western Learning's concept of the transcendent Heaven.



The unfolding of the thought and its stage-by-stage development

Donghak Thought developed in four stages: (1) the Heavenly-Teacher-dialogue stage; (2) the Eunjeogam writing stage; (3) the stage of teaching how to avoid being killed (弑石); (4) the stage extending, after Suun's death, to the Donghak Peasant Revolution. At each stage the concept of the View of Earth deepened.

Aspects of Liminality in the Johwajeong View of Earth; The Intellectual Characteristics of Donghak Thought That Appear at the Boundary

What is Liminality?

A concept denoting a state situated between boundaries; it refers to the ambiguous, transitional intermediate zone between an existing structure and a new one

Donghak Thought's View of Earth shows a Liminality between the Confucian View of Earth and the Western modern View of Earth, ultimately intimating a new paradigm shift. The idea that all the people could commune with the transcendent Heaven through cultivation. The seed of an Indigenous Modernity in which the boundary between the sacred and the profane is reorganized.



The positional liminality of the earth in harmony with the transcendent Heaven

In Donghak Thought, the earth is no longer an object subordinate to Heaven but holds a new ontological position as an object of the transcendent Heaven's creative transformation. This is situated at the boundary between the traditional notion of Cheonjongbu (天尊地卑) and the modern heliocentric theory.



The dissolution of the boundary of the cultivating subject

Breaking away from the Confucian notion that only the king received the earth's energy, it shifted to the idea that all the people could commune with the transcendent Heaven through cultivation. The seed of an Indigenous Modernity in which the boundary between the sacred and the profane is reorganized.



The reinterpretation of earth-energy (地氣) and the auspicious site (明堂)

Donghak reset the center of the earth and emphasized that Korea is an auspicious site (明堂), thereby transcending the notions of 'lesser China' and 'greater China.' It formed a View of Earth as a liminal space emphasizing the mutability and dynamism of the earth.

Comparison with Western Modernity; A Contrastive Understanding of Donghak Thought and Western Modernity

The basic standpoint of the View of Earth (地觀)	 The Western modern View of Earth Change from geocentrism to heliocentrism; a mechanistic cosmology centered on the immanent Heaven that excludes the transcendent Heaven	 Donghak's Johwajeong View of Earth An integrated understanding of the transcendent Heaven and the immanent Heaven; recognizing the earth as a realm of the transcendent Heaven's creative transformation and gihwa (氣化)
The relationship between nature and humanity	 The Western modern perspective Recognizing nature as a human tool—an object of use, a separated object	 Donghak's philosophy of life From the Sineo and (侍天主) standpoint, nature too corresponds to the Lord of Heaven (天主); an organic relationship between the earth and humanity, an object of mutual life-giving
Characteristics of modernity	 Western modernity A mechanistic view of nature; the conquest and utilization of nature by reason	 Donghak's Indigenous Modernity A life-centered thought grounded in creative transformation and gihwa; Liminality through the subjectivity and cultivation of the common people

The Spirit-Based (鬼神) Heaven-Earth Relationship in Donghak Thought; Aspects of Liminality

The reconceptualization of Heaven-and-Earth and spirits (鬼神)

Donghak Thought, with the expression 'Heaven and Earth are likewise spirits, and spirits are likewise yin and yang,' re-established the existing concepts of Heaven-and-Earth and spirits from the standpoint of the transcendent Heaven

 The originality of a transcendent-Heaven spirit theory (鬼神論)

By applying, for the first time, the concept of spirits (鬼神)—previously used only for the immanent Heaven—to the transcendent Heaven, Donghak presented an integrative perspective that surpassed the limits of Western Learning and Confucian Learning

 The identity of, and liminality among, the spirits of Heaven and Earth

By emphasizing the identity of Heaven-and-Earth and spirits, it constructs a new Heaven-Earth relationship that includes the transcendent Heaven, the Heaven above Heaven, and the Heaven below Heaven. Liminality formed at the boundary of Heaven-and-Earth, spirits, and yin-yang, it forms an intermediate zone between Western Learning and Eastern traditional thought

"知天地而無知鬼神, 鬼神者吾也" (Though one knows Heaven and Earth, one does not know the spirits; the spirits, too, are I)

 The expansion and integration of yin-yang theory

Donghak Thought embraces the infinite expandability of yin and yang while emphasizing the creative transformation and mutability of the transcendent Heaven, thereby presenting a new worldview surpassing the Views of Earth of traditional Daoism and Neo-Confucianism

Research Findings and Significance; A Study of the Liminality of Donghak Thought

The core findings of the study

Donghak's View of Earth (地觀) is not a mere conception of the earth but an attempt to reorganize the boundary of the sacred and the profane through Liminality

Donghak is Korea's own indigenous modern thought, born from a blend of external pressure and internal development, presenting an alternative value system that counters Western modernity

Academic contribution

Elucidating the innovativeness and liminal character of the View of Earth that had been overlooked in existing Donghak research



The resetting of boundaries and the subjectivity of the common people

Through the concept of the spirits of Heaven and Earth, Donghak's View of Earth broke down the traditional boundaries between elite and common people, sacred and profane, and Heaven and Earth, opening a new field of practical cultivation



The epistemological foundation of a Korean Indigenous Modernity

Donghak's Johwajeong View of Earth, differing from the mechanistic worldview of Western modernity, becomes the ground for an organic perception of the world and a life-centered thought, presenting the possibility of an independent modernization



Contemporary reexamination and applicability

In today's society of ecological and environmental crisis, Donghak's Johwajeong View of Earth can be reappraised as an ideational foundation for the harmonious coexistence of nature and humanity. In particular, it extends into organic farming methods and the ethos of reverence

for life.

Conclusion and Future Tasks; The Contemporary Expansion of Donghak Thought Research

The core conclusions of the study

Donghak Thought's Johwajeong View of Earth, through Liminality, provides the common people with an ideational ground for the recovery of subjectivity

Through a new definition of the relationship between the transcendent Heaven and the immanent Heaven, presenting a path to an Indigenous Modernity differentiated from Western modernity



The possibility of contemporary application of Donghak's View of Earth

From an ecological standpoint, Donghak's View of Earth can provide a philosophical foundation for a coexistent relationship between humanity and nature in an age of environmental crisis



The recovery of the common people's subjectivity through Liminality

Through the harmony and gihwa (氣化) of the transcendent Heaven and the immanent Heaven, establishing the common people's practical subjectivity beyond the dichotomous worldview of Cheonjonjibi (天尊地卑)



Directions for follow-up research

Exploring the expandability of Donghak's Johwajeong View of Earth through comparative research with Daesoon Thought; the need for a comparative-thought approach to establish the standing of Donghak's View of Earth in the history of East Asian thought