

(c) The Clash of Modern Eastern and Western Views of Humanity and Their Turn to Mutual Conflict (相克化)

Clash of East-West Views of Humanity

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The Clash of Views of Humanity: Problems before Exchange

Even before exchange, East and West each developed their own View of Humanity, yet each harbored its own limitations and problems.

- **West:** As the fifth element of earth-water-fire-wind was made into the one God, the system of divine beings (神明) vanished → humans were reduced to sinners before the one God, with repentance and salvation the only path.
- **East:** As correlative thinking hardened, discrimination between yangban and commoners intensified → rigidification of the social hierarchy.
- As in the economic law that bad money drives out good, in East-West exchange the shortcomings of each View of Humanity became more pronounced.

East-West Exchange and the Occasion for Change

As East and West began exchanging in earnest in the modern period, the limitations of each system of thought and an occasion for change came into being.

- West: Through Matteo Ricci, the discovery of an ethical society possible even without a transcendent God → a shift from a transcendence-orientation to an immanence-orientation.
- **Shift in worldview: Matter replaces the place of God, strengthening a human-centered worldview.**
- Deepening of the clash: From the age of imperialism, Heaven (天) shifted from an immanent to a transcendent God → Earth and the East were regarded as objects of conquest.
- East-West exchange became the occasion for forming a View of Humanity of indigenous modernity.

Common Origin: The Three-Function System and the Views of Heaven, Earth and Humanity

Despite their surface differences, the Eastern and Western Views of Humanity share a common origin dating back to antiquity.

- **The three-function system (trifunctionalism): a principle of social organization spanning the broad Indo-European region.**
- **Common structure: priestly class (Brahmin) — warrior class (Kshatriya) — producing class (Vaishya, Shudra).**
- **Examples: the 28 heavens of Buddhism, the 36-heaven View of Heaven of Daoism, and the Trojan War in Greco-Roman mythology.**

Western Characteristics

- Emphasis on a temporal, vertical structure
- Continuous intervention by the Creator
- Emphasis on individual karma and reincarnation

Eastern Characteristics

- Emphasis on a spatial, horizontal arrangement
- The Creator as the 'Hidden God'
- Emphasis on the contest of victory and defeat (勝負) between ancestors and descendants

The Process of Mutual Conflict in the Heaven-Human and ~~Earth~~-Human Relationships

With the impact of exchange and modernity, the Heaven-Human and Earth-Human relationships grew more refined while simultaneously turning toward mutual conflict.

- East: In the worldview of Yin-Yang and the Five Phases, the personal Heaven-Human relationship changed into a principle-based (理法) one → the separation of the Samgye (Heaven, Earth, and Human realms) and the weakening of the system of divine beings.
- West: The fifth element was elevated into a transcendent God and lost its immanent attributes → Earth and humanity were reduced to mere objects of domination and manipulation.
- As the once mutually life-giving (Sangsaeng) Heaven-Human and Earth-Human relationships turned to mutual conflict, the development of the celestial realm through the human realm was halted → the transformative nurturing of Heaven and Earth ceased, and cosmic disorder accelerated.

Comparison of the Heaven-Human Relationship in the West and the East—

The Eastern and Western Heaven-Human relationships show a clear difference in how the relationship between humanity and God (Heaven, 天) is conceived.

The Western Heaven-Human Relationship

- The transcendent one God: the Absolute who presides over all things, deciding everything arbitrarily without law
- An authoritarian structure: humans are sinners before God, and obedience to God's commands is the highest value
- The role of angels: they carry out the one God's work only in special cases, with no proper task assigned to specific domains
- Evolutionary pattern: after the modern period, the transcendent view of God weakened and matter replaced the place of God

The Eastern Heaven-Human Relationship

- An immanent View of Heaven: Sangje has the attribute of a hidden God (Deus absconditus) who presides according to law (理法)
- A mutually life-giving (Sangsaeng) relationship: oriented toward harmony centered on the Mandate of Heaven (天命) and virtue (德)
- A system of divine beings (神明): diverse divine beings operate nature, in a structure differentiated by domain
- Evolutionary pattern: the spatiotemporal view of the Three Powers (天地人) is emphasized, with weight on the contest of victory and defeat (勝負) between ancestors and descendants

Conclusion and Significance

The clash and mutual conflict of the Eastern and Western Views of Humanity greatly influenced the formation of each civilization's modernity and identity.

- **Historical significance:** East-West exchange was both an occasion for overcoming each side's limitations and a process in which their shortcomings were magnified.
- **Heaven-Human relationship:** the Western transcendent view of God and the Eastern immanent view of God clashed and turned to mutual conflict, yet at the same time this offered an opportunity for re-establishment.
- **Earth-Human relationship:** the Western view of domination and conquest of the Earth and the Eastern mutually life-giving (Sangsaeng) view turned to mutual conflict, becoming the origin of modern environmental problems.

As an aspect of the liminality of modernity, a rearrangement of the sacred and profane is called for in the Heaven-Human and Earth-Human relationships, offering important implications for the inquiry into a modern View of Humanity and for dialogue among civilizations.