



(d) The Liminality Manifested in Donghak Thought's Yeongsebulmang (永世不忘) View of Humanity

Liminality in Donghak Yeongsebulmang View of Humanity

Research Overview and Purpose

This study examines the Yeongsebulmang thought inherent in Donghak Thought's View of Humanity and the aspects of liminality that accompany it.

Key Research Questions

- The process of transformation of the Donghak View of Humanity and the philosophical meaning of liminality
- The changes in the Views of Heaven, Earth and Humanity brought about by the intervention of the concept of the transcendent Heaven
- The reorganization of the sacred-profane relationship and the modes of emergence of indigenous modernity

Research Methodology

- Analysis of intellectual-historical literature and examination of major historical sources related to Donghak
- Analysis of major primary texts such as the Donggyeong Daejeon (東經大全) and the Yongdam Yusa (龍潭遺詞); a religious-anthropological
- hermeneutic approach through applying the concept of liminality

This study aims to contribute to re-illuminating the modern meaning of Donghak Thought's View of Humanity and its place in Korean intellectual history.

The Background and Development of Donghak Thought

The Social and Religious Situation of 19th-Century Korea

- The rigidification of a Neo-Confucian-centered ruling order
- The invasion by Western powers and a heightened sense of crisis
- The influence of Western Learning (西學) and new ideological change
- The suffering of the people and the deepening exploitation by corrupt officials

The Background of Donghak's Formation

- Choe Je-u's religious experience and the thought of Sicheonju (侍天主)
- The proclamation of 'Donghak (東學, Eastern Learning)' in response to Western religion
- An indigenous system of thought differentiated from the three teachings of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism
- Oriented toward the relief of the people and social transformation

The Activities of the Founders of Donghak

- 1860: Choe Suun's Dialogue with the Heavenly Teacher (天師問答), and the founding of Donghak
- 1864: Choe Suun's martyrdom (殉道) and the cessation of missionary activity
- Late 1860s: Choe Si-hyeong's restoration of the Yongdam Yusa (龍潭遺詞) and the Donggyeong Daejeon (東經大全)
- 1880s: Expansion of the movement and the unfolding of nationwide missionary activity

The Donghak Peasant Movement and Its Later Development

- 1894: The Donghak Peasant Movement under the banner of "protecting the nation and bringing peace to the people" (輔國安民)
- It failed due to Japanese intervention, yet its ideas spread
- Development into Cheondogyo and influence on new-religious movements
- Providing an indigenous path to Korean modernity

Characteristics of the Yeongsebulmang View of Humanity

The Transcendent Heaven and Osim-jeuk-yeosim (吾心即汝心) the priest distinction

- The elevation of human status through the intervention of the transcendent Heaven
- **Osim-jeuk-yeosim (吾心即汝心): the mind of the human and the mind of Sangje are joined** (接主制): breaking down the boundary between priest and believer
- The human between Heaven and Earth → elevated to a being on par with Heaven and Earth
- Securing, through Sicheonju (侍天主), the standing to serve Sangje
- Rearranging the sacred-profane boundary and realizing religious egalitarianism

It affirms the egalitarian thought of Western Learning but criticizes the hierarchical difference between priests and believers

A non church character: every believer communicates directly with the Lord of Heaven

The Epistemology of Buryeon-giyeon (不然其然)
Re-establishing human status through connecting the hard-to-understand transcendent world (buryeon) with the comprehensible empirical world (giyeon)

The Process of Change in the View of Humanity

- Change across the process: Dialogue with the Heavenly Teacher → missionary activity → martyrdom (殉道)
- Early period: emphasis on status elevation through the transcendent Heaven
- Later period: expansion into the concept of Innaecheon (人乃天, "Humanity is Heaven")
- The sanctification of the human inner self through the concept of Naeyu-sillyeong (内有神靈, the inner divine spirit)

Gakja-wisim (各鬼爲心) 各知不移

Western Learning's Gakja-wisim (各自爲心, each acting for its own mind)	Donghak's Gakji-buri (各知不移, each knowing and not departing)
• The Lord of Heaven exists externally (surface religion)	• The Lord of Heaven exists within (depth religion)
• Proof of salvation = worldly success	• Proof of salvation = inner reflective ethics
• Lays the groundwork for Western modernity	• Provides the foundation for indigenous modernity

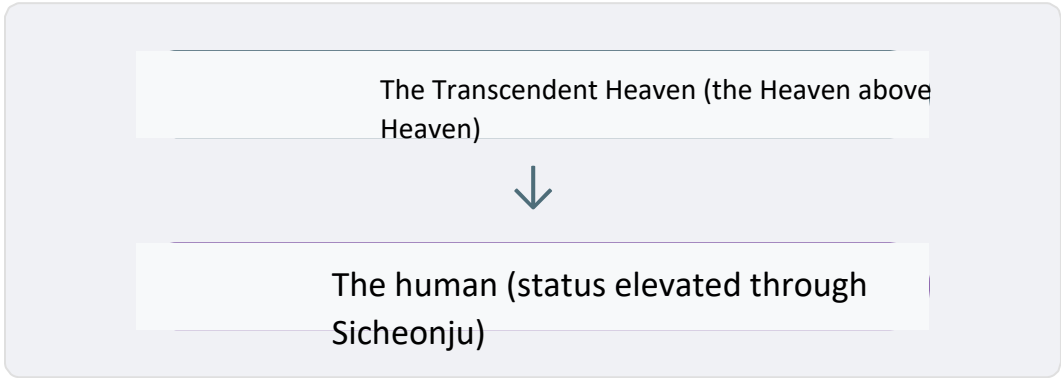
The Yeongsebulmang (永世不易) view of humanity
The human is recognized as a being who participates in the transformative nurturing of Heaven and Earth and who bears the responsibility of never forgetting and forever practicing transcendent values

The Liminality of the Naeyu-sillyeong (內有神靈) Heaven-Human Relationship

Sicheonju and the Concept of Creative Transformation / The Reorganization of the Status System

- Sicheonju's 'creative transformation (造化)' is expressed as Naeyu-sillyeong (內有神靈) on of the hierarchy between priest and believer
- Overcoming Western Learning's monotheistic Heaven-Human relationship (God exalted, humans lowly, 神尊人卑)
- The revival, through 'Osim-jeuk-yeosim,' of the state of the unity of Heaven and humanity
- The human directly connected in mind to the Heaven above Heaven
- Direct connection to Heaven without distinction between yangban and commoner (神尊人卑)
- Realizing religious equality through the jeopju system (接主制)
- An egalitarian orientation expressed as "the whole nation becoming yangban"

The Change in the Heaven-Human Relationship



- The elevation of human status through the intervention of the transcendent Heaven; [into] the transformative nurturing of Heaven and Earth
- the View of Humanity changes into that of a being able to participate in it

The Rearrangement of the Sacred (聖) and Profane (俗)

- The dissolution of the existing sacred-profane boundary and its new rearrangement
- Neo-Confucianism: distinction between yangban (sacred) and commoner (profane) → Donghak: a divine spirit (the sacred) within every human
- The emergence of the liminality (boundary-state) of indigenous modernity
- Religious status elevation becomes a driving force for social transformation

The Liminality of the Oeyu-gihwa (外有氣化) Earth-Human Relationship

Status Change through Gaebyeok and Creative Transformation / The Concepts of Heaven on Earth and the Earthly Immortal

- The elevation of Earth's standing through Sicheonju thought; the vision of realizing Heaven on Earth through Again-Gaebyeok
- A change from the hierarchical order of Heaven and Earth (Heaven exalted, Earth lowly, 天尊地卑) to an equal relationship (Heaven exalted, Earth exalted, 天尊地尊); the earthly immortal: the new standing of the human who has awakened to Sicheonju; a change in the nature of Earth:
- from bondage and oppression into a source of creation and life; the cyclical thought of a good era arriving after the Ha-won-gapja period
- Donghak's concept of "creative transformation (造化)": the liminal integration of opposing elements at their boundary; the power of the East: presenting a new worldview beyond Western Learning

The Breaking Down of Social and Class Boundaries / The Liminality Aspect of Oeyu-gihwa

- "The whole nation becoming yangban": a religious justification for dismantling the status system
 - Jeon Myeong-suk's Donghak ideal: "make commoners into yangban, and the lowly into the noble"
 - The desire to become kings, nobles, generals, and ministers: the inner motivation of participants in the Donghak Peasant Movement
- "Originally Donghak's advocacy of protecting the nation and bringing peace to the people (輔國安民) was no more than a cry for the affairs of the Later Heaven, yet in their hearts each longed to become a king, noble, general, or minister, and, failing to fulfill that wish, " (the Jeon-gyeong (典經))
- The Social Manifestation of Liminality**
- Anti-structure:** the formation of a deviant space breaking free of the traditional hierarchy
- Communitas:** a social transformation movement grounded in communal practice
- Crossing boundaries:** indigenous modernity through the rearrangement of the sacred (聖) and profane (俗)
- Creativity:** the liberation of the creative "creative-transformation (造化)" element that had been suppressed during the Joseon dynasty

Donghak Thought and Indigenous Modernity

The Reconstruction of the Sacred-Profane (聖俗) Boundary Characteristics of Indigenous Modernity

- The reorganization of the sacred-profane order due to the intervention of the transcendent Heaven
- The religious subjectivation of the masses through the concept of the Lord of Heaven; priest-Overcoming the status system and social transformation grounded in egalitarian thought
- Religious democratization through abolishing the believer hierarchy; kings, nobles, Seeking a balance between inner reflection and outer practice
- acquiring the religious legitimacy to become kings, nobles, generals, and ministers Indigenous enlightenment and the establishment of subjecthood through Sicheonju

The Transformative Character of Liminality

Social Influence after Donghak

- A borderline position between the traditional order and the new order; through creative transformation
 - mony (調和), the fusion and overcoming of contradictions; the mutually complementary
 - liminality of Naeyu-sillyeong and Oeyu-gihwa
- Influence on new-religious movements such as Cheondogyo and Won Buddhism
 - Providing the ideological foundation for the March First Movement
 - The spread of the values of harmony and mutual life-giving (Sangsaeng)
 - The spiritual wellspring of modern Korean social movements

"Donghak Thought had the Heaven above Heaven intervene, yet unlike Western religion it also included the concept of Heaven-and-Earth, the Heaven within Heaven, so that even ordinary believers could be connected in mind to the Heaven above Heaven."

The Significance of the Liminality of Indigenous Modernity

Donghak Thought created a distinctive liminal space between Western modernity and tradition, providing an occasion for creative transformation that dismantled and reconstructed the existing sacred-profane order. This opened a path of indigenous modernization in which the value of religious equality was extended into social equality.

Conclusion and Significance

The Essence of Donghak Thought's Liminality

- The fracturing and reorganization of the status order following the intervention of the sacred identity between Heaven and humanity
- The revitalization of the thought of the unity of Heaven and humanity through the Donghak spiritual and ethics within the process of modernization
- The rearrangement of the sacred-profane boundary through the harmony of Naeyusillyeong and Daesoon-gwan
- An orientation toward transforming this world through the concepts of Heaven and Earth and the earthly understanding of the world

Implications of the Study

- Reinforcing the identity between Korean traditional thought and modernity
- Illustrating Donghak spirituality and ethics within the process of modernization
- Rethinking the ideological relationship among Donghak, Confucianism, and Western Learning centered on the View of Humanity
- Deepening a general understanding of new-religious movements after Donghak

The Modern Meaning of the Yeongsebulmang View of Humanity

- Providing a philosophical and religious foundation for human dignity
- The realization of egalitarian thought through abolishing the priest-believer distinction
- A critique of modern society through inner reflection and spiritual awakening
- Presenting a Korean model of indigenous modernity

Direction for Future Research

- A comparative study of the change in the View of Humanity between early and late Donghak
- Distinction and complementary interpretation of the Views of Humanity in Donghak and Daesoon Thought
- Exploring the Donghak elements manifested in modern Korean social movements
- A modern reinterpretation of the Donghak View of Humanity in a global context

Donghak Thought's Yeongsebulmang View of Humanity is not a mere historical relic but an ideological and practical resource still operative in modern Korean society, calling for reflection on the fundamental value of human existence and on interrelationality.