

(a) The View of Heaven (天觀) as a View of the Heavenly Realm (天界觀)

View of Heavenly Realm as View of Heaven

Research Overview and Purpose

- **Research Background:**

Understanding the distinctive characteristics of Korean religious thought by exploring the historical development and change of the concept of the View of Heaven (天觀)

- **Objects of Comparison:**

The concept of the transcendent Heaven (超越天) in Donghak Thought and the Ninth Heaven (九天) and the View of the Heavenly Realm (天界觀) in Daesoon Thought

- **Key Research Questions:**

- What is the semantic difference between the transcendent Heaven's mode of intervention and the phenomenon of Sangje's Advent in Human Form?
- What are the modes of change in the Views of Heaven, Earth, and Humanity in the two thoughts, and what is their significance
- ? What are the distinctive characteristics and modern implications of the View of the Heavenly Realm as a View of the Three Realms (三界觀)
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Research Methods:

Conceptual comparison through analysis of primary texts, examination of their place within the intellectual-historical context, and a hermeneutic approach from the perspective of a critique of modernity

The Concept of the Transcendent Heaven (超越天) in Donghak Thought

- **The First Appearance of the Transcendent Heaven in the Human World**

In Donghak Thought, the transcendent Heaven appeared in the human world for the first time and brought about a total change in the Views of Heaven, Earth, and Humanity. This signifies a fundamental paradigm shift in the relationship between Heaven and humanity.

- **The Change in the Relationship between Humanity and the Transcendent Heaven**

Humanity is now elevated to a being that communicates directly with the transcendent Heaven. This is a mode of communication distinct from the Confucian notion of the unity of Heaven and humanity (天人合一), meaning that humanity shifts from a mere recipient of the Mandate of Heaven (天命) into an interlocutor.

- **Limitation: A Shortfall in Communication and Understanding**

However, by its mere appearance the transcendent Heaven could not be fully understood by humanity. The limitation of a transcendent Heaven that did not descend directly in a human body becomes the occasion for its being overcome by Daesoon Thought's Advent in Human Form.

"If you serve the Lord of Heaven in your mind, creative transformation (造化) is therein."

Main Characteristics of the Donghak View of Heaven
Donggyeong Daejeon (東經大全)

- ◆ Heaven and Earth are spirits, and spirits communicate as yin and yang
- ◆ Endowing Sangje with substantiality by expressing Him as a Spirit (正氣)
- ◆ Establishing a relationship in which humanity and the transcendent Heaven are spiritually connected
- ◆ The appearance of the transcendent Heaven as the starting point of the transition to a modern View of Heaven

Daesoon Thought's Advent in Human Form of the Ninth Heaven (九天)

- **The Meaning of the Ninth Heaven and Sangje's Advent in Human Form**

In Daesoon Thought the transcendent Heaven is called the Ninth Heaven (九天). Whereas in Donghak Thought the transcendent Heaven merely appeared in the human world, in Daesoon Thought it descends directly in a human body. This is not a mere spiritual appearance but, through bodily manifestation, performs the direct role of refashioning Heaven and Earth.

"When Sangje was in the Ninth Heaven, the holy sages, Buddhas, and bodhisattvas appealed that none but Sangje could set right the Heaven and Earth. Sangje, the Transcendent, descended directly into the world Himself."
— the Jeon-gyeong (典經), "Yesi" 1

- **The Refashioning of Heaven and Earth**

"Now I have remade Heaven and remade Earth, weaving the cosmic degrees so tightly that not a drop can leak." Only by being born as a human could Sangje see Heaven and Earth from the human standpoint, and so He becomes a being who remakes the Heaven and Earth He Himself had created. This aims at a comprehensive change through the 'Later Heaven Gaebyeok.'

Difference from Donghak Thought

- **The Philosophical Background of Advent in Human Form** — The background of Advent in Human Form is the situation of the world's annihilation brought about by the material-centered Western modernity begun by Matteo Ricci. Daesoon Thought warns of the crisis of human extinction caused by Western modernity and explains that Sangje's direct advent was needed for a fundamental resolution of it.

- ◆ Substantially, through the Ninth Heaven's Advent in Human Form, the transcendent Heaven gains substance.
- ◆ Mode of transformation: not gaebyeok (renewal) but refashioning (reconstruction)
- ◆ Expansion of the Three Realms: the dynamic interaction of the Heavenly, Earthly, and Human Realms
- ◆ The working of divine beings: the active intervention and systematization of the realm of divine beings

The Reordering Work of Heaven and Earth and the Reconstruction of the View of the Three Realms

- The Meaning of the Reordering Work of Heaven and Earth (天地公事) — The Reordering Work of Heaven and Earth carried out after the Supreme Lord of the Ninth Heaven's Advent in Human Form is the refashioning that remakes Heaven and Earth. This is not a mere renewal but a process of re-establishing the fundamental principles of Heaven and Earth by weaving the cosmic degrees so tightly that not a drop can leak.
"Now I have remade Heaven and remade Earth, weaving the cosmic degrees so tightly that not a drop can leak; as each returns to its appointed measure, a new framework will open."
— the Gyeongjeong (典經), "Gyobeop" 3-4
- The Structural Characteristics of the Three Realms (三界) — The Three Realms of Daesoon Thought are divided into the Heavenly Realm (天界), the Earthly Realm (地界), and the Human Realm (人間界); each realm is independent yet forms an organic world closely interconnected with the others. These Three Realms communicate with and influence one another through the medium of divine beings.
The Three Realms of Buddhism
Composed of the realm of desire (欲界), the realm of form (色界), and the realm of formlessness (無色界)
→ a concept that only subdivides the heavenly realm of traditional thought means the three great
- The Difference between Powers (才) and Realms (界) — If the 'Three Powers (三才)' of traditional thought means the three great elements or capacities of Heaven, Earth, and Humanity, Daesoon Thought's 'Three Realms (三界)' is a systemic concept with a more complex and diverse internal world. A realm (界) includes complex structures such as the realm of divine beings.
The Daoist Concept of the Three Realms
The division into the Three Origins (三元) of Heaven (天), Earth (地), and Water (水), or into the upper realm (上界), middle realm (中界), and lower realm (下界)
→ lacking concrete systematization

The Three Realms of Daesoon Thought

A clear distinction among the Heavenly Realm (天界), the Earthly Realm (地界), and the Human Realm (人間界)
→ emphasizing interaction based on the system of divine beings

The Introduction of the Realm of Divine Beings and the Characteristics of the View of the Heavenly Realm

- **The Active Introduction of Divine Beings (神明) in Daesoon Thought — Unlike Donghak Thought, Daesoon Thought introduces divine beings as a core concept of the Reordering Work of Heaven and Earth and defines them as beings that actively participate in the operation and change of the Three Realms. This is because Sangje's Advent in Human Form created the occasion for divine beings to intervene in the human mind.**

"Now I have re-arranged Heaven and remade Earth, weaving the cosmic degrees so tightly that not a drop can leak; as each returns to its appointed measure, a new framework will open. Moreover, I shall have the divine beings enter and guide people's veins to reform their constitution and character..."

— the Jeon-gyeong (典經), "Gyobeop" 3-4

- **The Relationship between the Structured System of Divine Beings and the Three Realms**

Daesoon Thought's View of the Heavenly Realm presents a highly detailed structure of divine beings through a system called the 'realm (界)'. This means that, beyond the concept of the Three Powers of Heaven, Earth, and Humanity (三才), a dynamic system of divine beings operates within the Three Realms (三界).

The Change in the Concept of Divine Beings

Donghak: "Heaven and Earth are spirits, and spirits are yin and yang" — a conceptual, abstract expression

Daesoon: divine beings, as concrete substances, interact with humans and lead cosmic change

- **The Revitalization of the View of Divine Beings**

In Eastern thought, discussing Heaven and Earth (天地) together with divine beings (神明) was an approach that Confucian scholars avoided after the Song and Ming periods. Daesoon Thought attempts a modern reinterpretation by revitalizing the ancient view of divine beings found in the Guodian Bamboo Slips (郭店竹簡).

Characteristics of Daesoon Thought's View of the Heavenly Realm

- ◆ Unlike Buddhism's three realms (desire, form, formlessness), it encompasses the Heavenly, Earthly, and Human Realms
- ◆ The Heavenly, Earthly, and Human Realms change dynamically and simultaneously
- ◆ Presenting the View of the Heavenly Realm as a means of overcoming the crisis of modern civilization brought about by Matteo Ricci

Comparison of the Views of Heaven in Donghak Thought and Daesoon Thought

Comparison Item	The View of Heaven in Donghak Thought	The View of Heaven in Daesoon Thought
Expression of the transcendent Heaven	Appears in the human world and communicates through incantations and rituals	Direct manifestation through Advent in Human Form and the Reordering Work of Heaven and Earth
Heaven-Human relationship	Humanity is elevated to a being that communicates with the transcendent Heaven	Through the Ninth Heaven's descent as a human, the Heaven-Human boundary virtually disappears
The concept of divine beings (神明)	The conceptual expression "Heaven and Earth are spirits, and spirits are yin and yang"	Expanded into a structured system of the realm of divine beings, emphasizing the substantive working of divine beings
Direction of change in the View of Heaven	Oriented toward renewal through "Again-Gaebyeok"	Pursuing the fundamental refashioning of Heaven and Earth through the "Later Heaven Gaebyeok"

Key Distinctions

Daesoon Thought completes, in a more substantive and systematic form, the change in the View of Heaven begun in Donghak Thought through Sangje's Advent in Human Form, re-establishing the structural relationship among the Three Realms (Heavenly, Earthly, and Human Realms) through a critical View of Heaven directed at the material-centered ills

Response to Modernity

Confronting the tradition of Donghak Thought, Daesoon Thought, through a critical View of Heaven directed at the material-centered ills brought about by the Western modernity begun with Matteo Ricci, presents a solution to the conflict between Eastern and Western civilizations.

Conclusion and Significance

Intellectual-Historical Meaning

- ◆ Donghak Thought and Daesoon Thought present a distinctive response to modernity amid the clash of Eastern and Western civilizations
- ◆ Seeking to overcome the crisis of the material-centered civilization brought about by West Donghak Thought through the completion of Daesoon Thought
- ◆ Breaking away from the existing Confucian thought of the unity of Heaven and humanity and establishing a new relationship between the transcendent Heaven and humanity

Modern Implications

- ◆ Providing alternative thinking for the crisis of modern civilization brought about by materialism
- ◆ Presenting a model of a mutually life-giving (Sangsaeng) relationship among heaven, nature, and transcendent beings
- ◆ Among the thoughts that arose in East Asia since the modern period, it transcends national boundaries and recognizes the problems of universal humanity

Significance in Korean Religious History

- ◆ The formation of an original religious thought through the rearrangement of the sacred and profane and through liminality in the Korean context
- ◆ Presenting a new cosmology through the 'realm of divine beings,' by West Donghak Thought through the completion of Daesoon Thought
- ◆ Systematizing a Korean set of Views of Heaven, Earth, and Humanity differentiated from Buddhism and Daoism through the 'View of the Three Realms'
- ◆ Establishing a distinctive position as a human-centered cosmology (anthropocentricity)

Q&A

- ◆ Contact example@religion-studies.org
- ◆ Additional material: The full paper of this study is scheduled for publication in the Summer 2025 issue of Korean Studies in Religion.