

(b) Former Heaven (先天) and Later Heaven (後天)

Seoncheon and Hucheon

Taegeuk emblem - Contents

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Taegeuk emblem - The Concept of Former Heaven and Later Heaven



Former Heaven (先天)

- ◆ A concept first introduced into the study of the Yijing (易學) by Shao Kangjie
- ◆ **The principle before all things came to operate in mutual conflict**
- ◆ Related to the cosmic principles of Fuxi's Eight Trigrams and the Hetu and Luoshu
- ◆ It signifies the primordial order before matter came into being

Later Heaven (後天)

- ◆ A new age beginning from the Advent in Human Form (人身降世) of the Supreme God
- ◆ A qualitative turning point at which the role of divine beings (神明) is redefined
- ◆ In Donghak, it is connected to the concept of the 'Heavenly Lord (天主)'
- ◆ It signifies the establishment of the order of a new Heaven and a new Earth

Former Heaven and Later Heaven are not a mere temporal division but concepts that symbolize a fundamental change in the human-cosmos relationship. Through these concepts, Donghak Thought and Daesoon Thought sought to explain the reordering of the cosmos and human society and to present the direction of a new modernity.

Taegeuk emblem - Former Heaven and Later Heaven as Seen by Donghak Thought

The Meaning of 'Gaebyeok Again (Doro-seoncheon)'

In Donghak Thought, Gaebyeok is interpreted as 'Gaebyeok Again,' carrying the meaning of 'Doro-seoncheon (回到先天, return to Former Heaven).'

Surface meaning

- ◆ It has commonly been interpreted as "the Later Heaven Gaebyeok"
- ◆ Understood as signifying the advent of a new world
- ◆ Regarded as the modern reformist thought of Donghak

Actual meaning

- ◆ The records of Donghak-related religious orders suggest "Doro-seoncheon"
- ◆ Oriented toward a return to a Confucian ideal society (the age of Yao and Shun)
- ◆ A strongly embedded thought of returning to the origin

"If the problems of the time are viewed solely from a Confucian perspective, the best solution to those problems could be a 'Gaebyeok Again' - a return to the age of Yao and Shun."

Donghak's Practical Orientation

- ◆ "Everyone in the nation becoming yangban" - assimilation into the upper class rather than equality within the status system
- ◆ "The dream of kings, nobles, and ministers" - a hope for rising in status within the existing system rather than a new one
- ◆ Though it professed the Later Heaven, in reality it was closer to a reproduction of the Former Heaven order

Taegeuk emblem - Former Heaven and Later Heaven as Seen by Daesoon Thought

Daesoon Thought views Former Heaven not as a negative concept to be rejected but as an essential process for moving toward Later Heaven according to the principle of birth, growth, harvest, and storage (生長斂藏). The grievance of Former Heaven becomes the driving force for the resolution of grievance (Haewon) in Later Heaven.

Characteristics of Later Heaven

- The fusion of the principles of all times and places - like ontogeny recapitulating phylogeny, a world composed by gathering only the strengths among the principles of all times and places, East and West
- The establishment of the Three Realms (三界) - the Three Realms of Heaven, Earth, and Humanity form a new cosmic order possessing variability, constancy, and compatibility
- The substantiation of the concept of the Supreme God - the substantiation of the Limitless (無極) and the Great Ultimate (太極) through Mugeuksin and Tae-eul-cheonsang-wongun
- The establishment of two concepts: Heaven as the Supreme God and the divine beings of Heaven and Earth
- The replacement of the old Heaven by the new Heaven
- The realization of the Reordering Works of the Underworld (冥府公事) through the Reordering Works of Heaven and Earth
- The astronomical realignment of the Cheonsang-bunya-yeolcha-jido (Celestial Field-Allotment Star Chart)
- The order of the concordance of yin and yang (陰陽合德), the establishment of the Three Powers (三才確立), and the completeness of the Five Phases (五行具備)

The reconstruction of the view of the Heavenly Realm

"Later Heaven signifies the fusion of all principles that have appeared across the time and space of all ages, East and West. Accordingly, the connection of the Eastern and Western views of Heaven, Earth, and Humanity appearing in the creative transformation (造化) of Donghak Thought develops, in Daesoon Thought, into fusion through Samgye-gongsa."

Taegeuk emblem - A Comparison of the Two Thoughts and Conclusion

Donghak - Donghak Thought's View of Later Heaven

- ◆ Oriented toward Later Heaven but in reality pursuing 'Doro-seoncheon (a return to Former Heaven)'
- ◆ Interpreting 'Gaebyeok Again' as a return to the age of Yao and Shun
- ◆ Pursuing an ideal world from a Confucian perspective
- ◆ Oriented toward "everyone in the nation becoming yangban" → "kings, nobles, and ministers"

Daesoon - Daesoon Thought's View of Later Heaven

- ◆ Perceiving Former Heaven not as a negation but as a process leading to Later Heaven
- ◆ Pursuing the creative Gaebyeok of a 'new Heaven and new Earth'
- ◆ A new worldview through the fusion of the principles of all times and places
- ◆ The concordance of yin and yang, the establishment of the Three Realms, and the redeployment of divine beings

Conclusion and Implications

1. Difference in approach to modernity: Donghak presented a past-oriented modernity, while Daesoon presented an integrative, creative modernity. A modernity, which Daesoon presented as an integrative, creative modernity of modern civilization through a traditional View of Heaven, Daesoon Thought still provides meaningful interpretations today, over a hundred years later.
2. Worldview character: Through variability, constancy, and compatibility, Daesoon Thought presents a new relationship (合德) of the East and the West through the relationship between the East's attributive View of Heaven and the West's substantive View of Heaven, it presents a new direction.