

V · Comparison of the Indigenous Modernity of Donghak and Daesoon

4. Comparison of the Indigenous Modernity of the Heaven-Earth Relationship in Donghak and Daesoon Thought

Comparison of Heaven-Earth Relationships

Donghak Thought's Theory of the Spirits of Heaven and Earth (天地鬼神)

Reinterpretation of the Spirits (鬼神)

In Donghak Thought, 'spirit' means the transcendent Heaven (天外天), not divine beings (神明)

- ◆ Transcends the Neo-Confucian concept of spirits as the workings of Yin and Yang
- ◆ Reinterprets spirits as the gihwa action of the transcendent Heaven; Heaven
- ◆ and Earth are spirits = Heaven and Earth are the gihwa action of the transcendent Heaven

"That Heaven and Earth are likewise spirits (天地亦是 鬼神), and spirits are likewise Yin and Yang (鬼神亦是 陰陽) — this I did not know; so what use is it to examine the scriptures (經傳)? And not knowing the Dao (道) and virtue (德), how could a wise gentleman (賢人君子) know?"

— the Yongdam Yusa
(龍潭遺詞), "Dodeokga"

The Transcendent Heaven and the Action of Gihwa

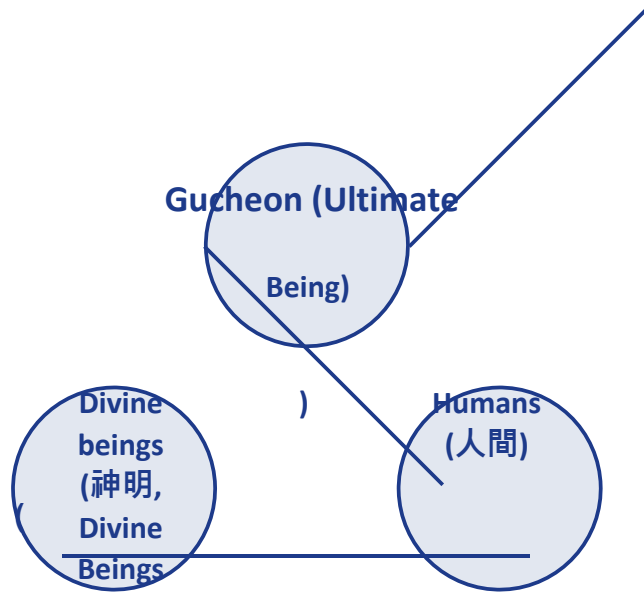
- The action of gihwa (氣化作用): the principle by which the jigi (至氣) of the transcendent Heaven creates Heaven and Earth
- **Difference from Neo-Confucianism: Neo-Confucianism discussed spirits as a substantive explanation of the workings of Yin and Yang, whereas Donghak emphasizes the transcendent Heaven**
- **An attempt at modernity: pursuing a modernity that surpasses Neo-Confucianism through the transcendent Heaven**
- **Limitation: by not adopting the concept of divine beings, it failed to surpass the framework of Confucianism**

Emphasis on the Idea of Sincerity (誠)

Donghak Thought emphasized the idea of 'sincerity, reverence, and faith', but, unlike Confucianism, it emphasized sincerity (誠) toward the transcendent Heaven that created Heaven and Earth, rather than toward the Heaven of Heaven and Earth
"吾道博而約不用多言義 別無他道理誠敬信三字"

Donghak Thought pursued a modernity through the transcendent Heaven, but, failing to adopt the concept of divine beings, it did not reach a complete Indigenous Modernity

| Daesoon Thought's Theory of the Sincerity-Reverence-Faith toward Heaven and Earth (天地誠敬信)



The Significance of the Triangular Structure

- ◆ Emphasis on communication among Gucheon, divine beings, and humans
- ◆ Unlike Donghak Thought, it actively adopts the concept of divine beings
- ◆ Establishes harmony and order between Heaven and Earth through the mediation of divine beings

The Meaning of Sincerity-Reverence-Faith (誠敬信)

Sincerity (誠)

Creativity; the channel connecting Heaven and humans

Reverence (敬)

Reverence and respect; courtesy toward Heaven and Earth

Faith (信)

Trust and belief; the foundation of the operation of Heaven and Earth

"Birth (生), longevity (壽命), and blessings (福祿) are the grace (恩惠) of Heaven and Earth (天地); therefore, through sincerity (誠), reverence (敬), and faith (信), establish the great righteousness (大義) of requiting the grace of Heaven and Earth, fulfill the Way of Humanity (人道)..."

The Distinctiveness of Sincerity-Reverence-Faith

Confucian thought: emphasis on sincerity (誠) in the Heaven-human relationship

Donghak Thought: emphasis on sincerity (誠) toward the transcendent Heaven

Daesoon Thought: sincerity-reverence-faith within the triangular structure of Gucheon–divine beings–humans

Analysis of the Concepts of Dogijangjon and Sangsaeng

Donghak Thought: Dogijangjon (道氣長存)

- Meaning: the energy of the Dao is preserved forever (nothing evil can enter)
- Character: emphasizes the meaning of opposing force with force
- Emphasis: the force of Sanggeuk (相克, mutual conflict); values the repulsion of Japan (斥倭)
- Limitation: insufficient value placed on Jinsim-gyeonsu (真心堅守)

"道氣長存邪不入, 世間衆人不同歸" (Ipchunsi, verse of the beginning of spring)

Daesoon Thought: Sangsaeng (相生)

- Meaning: Haewon-sangsaeng (解怨相生); the harmonious generation of all things
- Character: pursues harmony as Gucheon's operating principle of Yin-Yang and the Five Phases
- Emphasis: the principle of Jinsim-gyeonsu (真心堅守), "blessings come first (福先來)"
- Development: realizes the Sangsaeng principle of "do not repay evil with evil"

"Jinsim-gyeonsu bokseonrae (真心堅守福先來)"

Sangsaeng The principle of Yin-Yang and the Five Phases by Gucheon (九天) **Sanggeuk** The ordering (調理) of the Five Phases

Donghak Thought: pursues the force of Sanggeuk, emphasizing gihwa (氣化) and the repulsion of Japan vs. **Daesoon Thought:** the harmony of Haewon-sangsaeng, pursuing the balance of Yin-Yang and the Five Phases

Differences in the Perception of the West

Donghak Thought: A Confrontational Attitude toward Western Learning (Seohak)

- Name: the very name 'Donghak (Eastern Learning)' opposes 'Seohak (Western Learning)'
- Character: pursues an Indigenous Modernity opposed to Western Learning
- Influence: asserts the Eastern origin of Western modernity
- Feature: an indigenous modernization that seeks to go beyond Neo-Confucianism

Donghak was re-imported into the East together with Western Learning; early-modern Chinese Daoism and Neo-Confucianism were synthesized, and it was established in the form of a revelation of the Supreme God called the 'Angel Dialogue (天使問答)'

Daesoon Thought: An Inclusive East-West Worldview

- Name: the term 'Daesoon' emphasizes the meaning of inclusiveness
- Character: pursues a Sangsaeng relationship between East and West
- Influence: the Eastern reception and development of Western modernity
- Feature: seeks East-West harmony from the perspective of the Yin-Yang union of virtue

"東有大聖人曰東學 西有大聖人曰西學" (in the East there is a great sage, and this is called Donghak; in the West there is a great sage, and this is called Seohak)

Donghak Thought: centered on wariness of and opposition to the West → Daesoon Thought: pursues a Sangsaeng of East and West grounded in the Yin-Yang union of virtue

As is evident in the relationship between Silhak and Western Learning, the perception of Western civilization in late Joseon was complex; yet Daesoon Thought presents a more inclusive perspective, evaluating Western figures such as Matteo Ricci as "one who brought the civilization of Heaven down to Earth"

Comparison of Perspectives on Japan and Conclusion

Donghak Thought's View of Japan

- ◆ Hostile perception: "the dog-like Japanese foe"
- ◆ Attitude: wariness toward the West and Japan
- ◆ Feature: pursues the force of Sanggeuk, emphasizing the repulsion of Japan (斥倭)
- ◆ Dogijangjon (道氣長存): the meaning of opposing force with force
"Dogijangjon sabulip (道氣長存邪不入)"

Daesoon Thought's View of Japan

- ◆ Haewon (解怨): the perspective of resolving the grievance (憾) among the magic-wielding divine beings after the Imjin War
- ◆ Sangsaeng perspective: "the Japanese are Japanese people, so treat them generously, at least in words"
- ◆ Feature: the Resolution of Japan's Grievance (日本解冤) is the first Reordering Work of Heaven and Earth realized after Jeungsan's passing (化天)
- ◆ Jinsim-gyeonsu (真心堅守): emphasizes that Sanggeuk must be resolved into Sangsaeng
- "Jinsim-gyeonsu bokseonrae (真心堅守福先來)"

Conclusion: The Significance of Indigenous Modernity

Conceptual Significance

- ◆ Redefinition of the relationship between the trans-oriental heaven and earth
- ◆ Presents diverse paths of Indigenous Modernity
- ◆ Continuity with and rupture from late-Joseon thought

Practical Significance

- ◆ Donghak: a resistant modernity centered on the Earth
- ◆ Daesoon: an inclusive modernity centered on Heaven and Earth
- ◆ Sanghak: seeks a balance and harmony between Sanggeuk and Sangsaeng

Contemporary Implications

- ◆ The possibility of finding independent modernization within East Asian intellectual history
- ◆ A direction for the modern reinterpretation of traditional thought; East and West
- ◆ Proposes a new paradigm for the exchange between the two civilizations

The two thoughts present different approaches in the process of constructing Korea's Indigenous Modernity, and they are important cases demonstrating the original developmental path of Korean intellectual history