

A Comparative Study on the View of Nature between Christianity and Myeongli-hak*

Nam Ho Ri**

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to broaden our view of nature by comparing Christianity and Myeongli-hak and their subjects making up nature. The author believes that Myeongli-hak, based on the theory of Yin-Yang and the Five Elements, can be explained within the General Providence of Christianity. And the author also hopes that this article will contribute to removing Christians' prejudice against

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** Part-time instructor, Sungkonghoe University, Seoul, Korea. Ph.D.

Myeongli-hak and reducing the gap between the two.

Christianity's view of nature has been given consideration throughout history, while Myeongli-hak's view of nature has been overlooked, *as concepts were the main focus of interest in the latter. Depending on the thinking of the times, Christianity viewed nature either as equal to human or as inferior to human. Myeongli-hak's view of nature is composed of the theory of Yin-Yang and the Five Elements (陰陽五行論), the Samjae theory of three things in heaven, earth, and human (天地人三才論), and the sexagenary cycle calendar (干支曆法). The subjects that constitute nature were also examined. Godhead (神性) in Christianity can be compared with the Taeyeok (太易) in Myeongli-hak; the Trinity (三位一體), with the Taecho (太初), the Taeche (太始), the Taeso (太素), the Taegeuk (太極); and the Holy Spirit (聖靈), with the Ki (氣).

In modern Christianity, the ecological view of nature, which emphasizes harmony with nature, has an upper hand. On the other hand, the Northeast Asia view of nature, including Myeongli-hak has consistently emphasized the relationship between human and nature. Examining nature from the perspective of Myeongli-hak will provide another perspective to the current understanding of nature in Christianity.

- Keywords

Christianity, Myeongli-hak, comparison, view of nature, subjects making up nature

1. Introduction

In order to understand Christianity's view of nature, it is necessary to understand the Bible, which shows the characteristics of Christianity as a revelation religion. How does the Bible view nature? Above all, the most distinctive feature of nature in the Bible is its creation. Creation points out that everything in the world, including humans, does not have its own initiative.¹

In the Bible, nature is intensively mentioned in Genesis, Old Testament, which deals with the creation of heaven and earth. In examining the view of nature in Genesis, it is important to note that the creation of nature is closely related to the creation of humans. In addition, the interpretation of the relationship between nature and humans in the Bible clearly reflects the thought of the times.

Therefore, nature and humans were interpreted as interrelated beings, while humans made nature an object of conquest and exploitation. In this study, we are examining the view of nature before and after modern society, and the subjects making up nature.

Nature has been considered in a relatively uniform way in Northeast Asia. In the Chinese classics, nature literally means "it is so by itself," which generally means that the cause of the existence or creations is not outside but within itself.² Therefore, from the Northeast Asian view, nature is recognized as an organism. In other words, the nature of Northeast Asia is an organism in which each part is united under a certain purpose to form a whole: the part and the whole have a close relationship.

1 Jae Hyon Jung, *I who am but dust and ashes* (Waegwan: Benedict Press, 1999), 130.

2 Sin Hwan Kwak, *Understanding the Book of Changes* (Seoul: Seokwangsa, 2003), 49.

The Northeast Asia's view of organic nature is also well illustrated in the *Gyesajun* (繫辭傳), a manual of *the Book of Changes* (周易), which was compiled by Confucians, influenced by the Taoist natural philosophy.³ The *Gyesajun* refers to the fundamental principle that governs everything in the universe: "Being once Yin and once Yang is called the Law of the universe (一陰一陽之謂道)."⁴ The theory of Yin-Yang (陰陽論), combined with the theory of Five Elements (五行論), lays the foundation of Myeongli-hak's view of nature. Furthermore, the theory that heaven and earth and humans are driven by the same principles, which is called the Samjae theory of heaven, earth, human (天地人三才論), also defines Myeongli-hak's view of nature. In addition, Myeongli-hak (命理學)'s view of nature owes its uniqueness to the sexagenary cycle calendar (干支曆法), a means of expressing the movement of nature in a concrete way.

In this study, the author aims at providing another perspective on understanding nature by examining how nature is viewed by Christianity and Myeongli-hak, and by comparing the subjects composing nature in the two systems of thought. The author believes that Myeongli-hak, based on the theory of Yin-Yang and the Five Elements, can be explained within the General Providence of Christianity. General Providence is a law that God imposed when he created his creatures. It is God who has delegated its sovereignty to what we commonly call the laws of nature. Therefore, the theory of the Yin-Yang and Five Elements, a Northeast Asian philosophical system that explains the principle of operation of heaven, earth, and human be-

3 Jung Bae Lee, "Confucian view of nature and ecological theology," *Theology and the world* 36 (1998), 209.

4 Seok Jin Kim, *Daesan lecture on the Book of Changes*, Vol.3 (Paju: Hangilsa, 1999), 54.

ings, can be viewed as a kind of General Providence.⁵ And the author also hopes that this paper will contribute to successfully contracting Christian's prejudice against the Myeongli-hak to reduce the gap between the ways of thinking.

II. The View of Nature in Christianity

1. Christianity's View of Nature before Modern Society

To understand Christianity's view of nature, we must see the Bible's reference to nature. The Bible, written by various authors and over multiple ages, is inconsistent in description and even is contradictory sometimes. The Bible is interpreted and applied differently depending on the context, it's reference to nature is therefore inconsistent. The Bible describes the relationship between human and nature from two perspectives. One is that human is superior to nature because he resembles God's image (see Genesis 1:26-28, 2:19, 9:1-3). And the other is that human is also part of nature and is no different from other components of nature (see Genesis 2:7, Job 3:19, Ecclesiastes 3:18-21).

The human-centered view of nature, meaning that one can freely use nature for one's purposes, was not prominent until modern society. According to Scholasticism, which was a mainstream theology until the Middle Ages, it indicated that God could be perceived in what was created through the light of natural reason.

It acknowledged the perception of God found in nature as a creature

5 Nam Ho Ri, "Consideration of Compatibility of the science of Myeongli and Christianity - Focusing on Christian Predestinarianism and Fatalism of Science of Myeongli," *Culture and Convergence* Vol.40, No.4 (2018), 863.

of God, the self-revelation of creation.⁶ Aristotle, who had a profound influence on the Scholasticism's view of nature, said, "In nature, there is purpose for movement. The final cause is the best cause of all movements of nature."⁷ According to Christianity, God created this world for some purpose and God's providence works in the operation of the world. This is because teleology is indispensable to explain such a Christianity's view of world.⁸ In other words, despite human dominance over nature, it was the Christianity's view of nature until the Middle Ages that God's presence could be experienced through nature. Only their levels were different.

However, as we approached modern society, Christians started to think that humanity is different from all other creatures, for he is made after the image of God, and going one step further, that the human was the ruler of nature. This distinction between human and other creatures, and moreover, the exercise of human domination over them lead to demythization of the whole nature, going away from the mystical and pantheistic understanding of nature. This trend accelerated with the advent of Absolute Monarchy, which led to severe natural destruction.

2. Christianity's View of Nature after Modern Society

In 14th century Europe, the development of commerce and increased productivity led to the collapse of the feudal society of Middle Age, leading to the decline of the medieval world view. Once Absolute Monarchy was established in Europe in the 16th century, the monarchs

6 Do Hoon Kim, "Modern Theology's View of Nature," *Korea Presbyterian journal of Theology* 16 (2000), 368.

7 Sang Hwan Kim, *Formation of a modern view of world* (Seoul: Epiphany, 2018), 130.

8 Kim, *Formation of a modern view of world*, 75-76.

of different countries began fighting for colonies, which in turn led to a sharp increase in productivity. The plundering of colonies and the rapid gain in industrial productivity led to the development of science and changes of values concerning nature. The establishment of modern society conferred a new meaning to nature as a source of raw materials, and the economic system of capitalism provided the possibility of handling distribution and consumption.

Francis Bacon (1561-1626) and René Descartes (1596-1650) were the leading thinkers at that time. Their views of nature become those of modern society, and Christianity was also guided by these currents of thought that strengthened human control over nature and disentangled nature. This trend had a great influence until the mid-20th century. What were the Bacon and Descartes views, which greatly influenced the formation of modern society's view of nature? Bacon said in *Novum Organum*, "knowledge is power of human beings. If you don't know the causes, you can't do anything about them. The only way to command nature is to obey it."⁹ Descartes identified thought with existence through his proposition, "I think, therefore I am." Expressed in modern way, the word, "think" would mean "reason." Man has emotion, will, and a body in addition to reason. But by this proposition, he is treating things other than reason as secondary. This dichotomous view of the world comes from human's intention to divide things into the primary and the rest. This further extends to dividing the world into humans with reason and the rest.

According to Scholasticism, nature, despite its low level, had a connection with humans through the sharing of spirit. In other words, the

9 Francis Bacon, *Novum Organum*, trans. Suk Yong Jung into Korean (Seoul, Hangilsa, 2001), 39.

spirit was not something that only human possessed. The spirit existed in nature outside humans before it was inside humans. However, since Descartes, the spirit has become something that exists only within human beings. Descartes' dichotomous view of world, represented by separation of reason and non-reason, the separation of spirit and matter, and the separation of human and nature, has become the dominant ideology of modern society. This dualistic view of the world brought about the establishment of a mechanistic view of nature that treats nature as a kind of machine. With the establishment of purely scientific and objective attitude toward nature, modern European thinkers had come to understand nature as a metaphor of machine instead Mother Earth.¹⁰ Modern Christianity's view of nature, which was influenced by this trend, justified human's exploiting nature, and thus led to the disgrace that Christianity is the main culprit of environmental destruction today. The passages the Old Testament such as "Let us make man in our image, in the likeness of ourselves, and let them be masters of the fish of the sea, the birds of heaven, the cattle, all the wild beasts and all the reptiles that crawl upon earth (Genesis 1:26)" was proclaimed in modern society without any reflection, and nature was reduced to a material and instrumental existence serving human beings.

However, in the second half of 20th century, mankind realized that nature was very closely connected to human life with occurrence of environmental crisis due to abuse of nature, threatening human survival. It was American historian Lynn White Jr. (1907-1987), who first raised the alarm that the damage of nature by humans resulted from the Christianity's view of nature. Five pages published in the journal *Sci-*

10 Yong Hoon Cho, "Christianity's view of nature," *Christian and Cultural Studies* 10 (2005), 27.

ence in 1967 have remarkably shaped the way that religious ethics understands environmental problems. In them, historian Lynn White Jr. argued that “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis” lie in religious cosmology, specifically in Western Christianity’s anthropocentrism and instrumentalist view of nature (1967).¹¹ Examples of biblical theories of human domination of nature, claimed by Lynn White Jr., are also found intensively in the 17th century. In particular, Bacon, who established the concept of governance over nature through natural science, regarded science as a volunteer of faith and viewed nature as an object of inquiry. As a result, nature has become a resource with only instrumental value for humans.¹² It seems that what Lynn White Jr. wanted to say was human humble to nature. This humility is not only what one should have as an individual, but also what one should have as a species to another. For Lynn White Jr., this attitude puts all creation on an equal position, thus enabling them to become autonomous beings capable of preserving their own values.

As such, the view of nature in Christianity did not actively distinguish human from nature until the Middle Ages, but the mechanical view of nature established in modern society hugely differentiated human from nature. But as this view of nature posed a threat to human life, the late 20th century witnessed a call for an organic and ecological perspective of nature.

11 Willis Jenkins, “After Lynn White: Religious Ethics and Environmental Problems,” *The Journal of Religious Ethics*, Vol.37, No.2 (2009), 283.

12 In Hwa Lee, “Eco-educational implications of the view of nature in the Bible,” *Theory and practice of Education*, Vol.14, No.1 (2009), 111.

III. The View of Nature in Myeongli-hak

1. The Theory of Yin-Yang and Five Elements (陰陽五行論)

Myeongli-hak is the study that deals with human destiny. It is believed that human destiny is no exception from the logic of nature. Myeongli-hak is based on the order of nature, including operation of the sun and the moon, and five planets of Jupiter, Mars, Saturn, Venus and Mercury, and 28 constellations. It is based on the theory of Yin-Yang and Five Elements, with which attempts to explain human life, together with the movement of Yin-Yang and the creation, overcome, limitation and change (生剋制化) of the Five Elements. Another Northeast Asian thought, there was also the Samjae theory of heaven, earth, human, contends that heaven, earth, and human move all together according to the principles of Yin-Yang and Five Elements. The sexagenary cycle calendar (干支曆法) is a symbolic system that concretely demonstrates these abstract theories. The sexagenary cycle calendar is a symbolic system that specifically shows the Ki (氣) of Yin-Yang and Five Elements of the year, month, date, and time of a person's birth. Myeongli-hak is a predictive system designed to interpret the interrelationship of Ilgan (日干)¹³ and the rests of seven characters of the Four Pillars and the Eight Characters (四柱八字) to infer life span, rich or poor, the noble or humble, and success or failure of life. Therefore, the theory of Yin-Yang and Five Elements, the Samjae theory of heaven, earth, human, and the sexagenary cycle calendar are essential elements of Myeongli-Hak. It was also established based on the theory that human destiny is predetermined (定命論). Among them, the author will deal with the theory of Yin-Yang and Five Ele-

13 A character, which means I, corresponding to the day of birth in Cheongan (天干).

ments, the Samjae theory of heaven, earth, human, and the sexagenary cycle calendar, which are related to the view of nature in Myeongli-hak. The theory of Yin-Yang and Five Elements and the Samjae theory of heaven, earth, human are methods of understanding nature in Northeast Asian studies, including Myeongri-hak. The sexagenary cycle calendar was also the standard calendar used in Northeast Asia for thousands of years. Of course, in modern times, with the advent of quantum mechanics and the big bang theory, this understanding of nature can be regarded as an outdated method. However, if you understand nature according to the three categories that the author distinguishes, you may have a chance to meet the philosophical and religious implications of Northeast Asia's nature, and the wisdom behind it.

In Myeongli-hak, the theories of Yin-Yang and Five Elements are the core of Northeast Asia's view of nature. They interpret the world order into two ways of Yin-Yang and Five elements. The theory of Yin-Yang is a theory arising from the relative elements that exist in the natural world. Meanwhile, the theory of Five Elements was theorized based on the four spatial directions of east, west, north and south, and the periodic structure of the four seasons.

The theory of Yin-Yang was established by observing nature. It was created on the basis of observable natural phenomena such as day and night, summer and winter, darkness and light, and men and women. Furthermore, it was confirmed that these two competing and complementary elements carry out natural phenomena. Therefore, the theory of Yin-Yang was established through an inductive method. *The Book of Changes*, composed of two Hyo (爻), Yin (--) and Yang (—), is considered as the culmination of the thoughts of Yin-Yang. The *Gyesajun*

of the *Book of Changes* said, “there is a Taegeuk (太極) in the Yeok (易), and the Taegeuk produces Yin-Yang.”¹⁴ Nature is composed of the Ki (氣) of Yin-Yang and if you look into the occurrence of the Ki, the first Ki was created by the Taegeuk.¹⁵ The theory of Yin-Yang in the *Gyesajun* becomes a prerequisite for understanding nature in the North-east Asia’s cultures, including Myeongli-hak. Shim Hyo-chum (沈孝瞻) of the Qing Dynasty (1636-1912) wrote in a book of Myeongli-hak, called *Japyongjinjun* (子平眞詮): “There is only one Ki between heaven and earth. However, because there is stillness and movement, it is divided into Yin and Yang, and since there are young and old, it is divided four images (四象).”¹⁶ So, Shim Hyo-chum took the theory of Yin-Yang of the *Book of Changes*.

The theory of Five Element began with the notion of five materials (木-tree, 火-fire, 土-soil, 金-iron, 水-water). The Five Elements are five basic substances that exist in the natural world, such as tree, fire, soil, iron and water. Initially, it was a naturalistic concept like Yin and Yang. However, in the Age of Warring states (戰國時代, B.C. 403-221), the idea of Five Elements gradually became mystical and abstract. So, the Five Elements do not refer to simple appearances and trails, but are none other than the Ki in the atmosphere. Since it is difficult to understand the intangible Ki by senses or feeling, it can be likened to a tangible object.

With spring, summer, fall and winter we meet are good example of how Yin and Yang diverged into four images. Moreover, in a larger

14 Kim, *Daesan lecture on the Book of Changes*, Vol.3, 147.

15 The Korean Society for Thought History, ed., *The natural philosophy of Confucian in the Choseon Dynasty*, (Seoul:Yemoonseowon, 1998), 30.

16 Hyo Chum Shim, *Japyongjinjun*, ed. Rock Oh Seo (Daebuk: Jibmoonseoguk, 1995), 1.

category, it was found that there is a season that plays a mediating role so that spring and summer, which are included in Yang's (陽) category, are transferred to fall and winter, which are in the Yin's (陰) category. In other words, there is another season between spring and summer, and fall and winter. It can be called a turning point season from Yang to Yin. Therefore, in the theory of Five Elements, the Ki of spring is represented by tree; summer, by fire; turning point, by soil; iron, by fall; and winter, by water. The ancient Chinese interpreted nature with the theory of Yin-Yang and Five Elements, established through observation of nature.

In this way, the Ki of Yin-Yang and Five Elements has established itself as a rule to express the changes in nature in Northeast Asian culture. Historically, the Yin-Yang and Five Elements, abstractly conceptualized by Chu-yeon (騶衍), around 4th century B.C. at the end of the Warring States period, was applied to the development of society later. The theory of Yin-Yang and Five Elements was introduced into institutional area when Confucianism was adopted as a governing philosophy under Muje (武帝 B.C. 141-87), Emperor of the Han Dynasty.

2. The Samjae Theory of Heaven, Earth, Human (天地人三才論)

The Samjae theory of heaven, earth, human also supports the view of nature in Myeongli-hak. Heaven represents the world of God, earth represents where all things live, human represents the lord of all things living between heaven and earth.¹⁷ This is expressed in the *Seogwaijun* (序卦傳) that "After the heaven and earth existed, all things came into being."¹⁸ Moreover, in the *Gyesajun* "heaven is in charge of creation

17 Man Tae Kim, *Study on the Saju-Myeongli in Korea* (Seoul: Minsokwon, 2011), 130.

and earth makes everything,”¹⁹ Thus, it is revealed that the creation of all things is caused by the natural function of heaven and earth.

In the former Han Dynasty (B.C. 202- A.D. 8) in *Luxuriant Dew of the Spring and Autumn Annals* (春秋繁露), Dong Jung-seo (董仲舒) established the Samjae theory of heaven, earth, human as follows: “Heaven, earth and human are foundation of all things. Heaven begets all things, earth nourishes all things, and human matures all things. Heaven endows human with to filial piety, earth grows humans through clothing and food, and human achieves it through ritual and music. These three are limbs to form one body, so we can’t say but one.”²⁰

The Samjae theory of heaven, earth, human was also reflected in Myeongli-hak through the sexagenary cycle calendar, which makes up the Four Pillars and the Eight Characters. The heaven is revealed in the Chungan (天干), which is ten celestial stems, that combines Yin-Yang and the Five Elements. The earth is revealed in the Jiji (地支), twelve earthy branches, that shows twelve directions and the flow of the seasons. The human is represented in Jijanggan (地藏干),²¹ that harmonizes Chungan and the Jiji.

In the *Jukchonsoochunmi* (滴天髓闡微), which is considered the best book of Myeongli-hak ever, compiled by Im Chul-cho (壬鐵樵) during Qing Dynasty (1636-1912), the Samjae theory of heaven, earth, human of Myeongli-hak was philosophically intensified, expressed in Chundo (天道), Jido (池道), and Indo (人道).²² Like this, it is the Samjae

18 Kim, *Daesan lecture on the Book of Changes*, Vol.3, 383.

19 Kim, *Daesan lecture on the Book of Changes*, Vol.3, 21.

20 Jung Seo Dong, *Luxuriant Dew of the Spring and Autumn Annals*, trans. Jung Geun Shin into Korean (Paju: Taehaksa, 2006), 317-318.

21 Jijanggan (地藏干) means the Chungan (the heaven) hidden in the Jiji (the earth).

theory of heaven, earth, human that heaven, earth, and human are moved by same rules of Yin-Yang and Five Elements.

From the point of view of Myeongli-hak, Chungan is related with heaven; Jiji with earth; and Jijanggan with human of Samjae theory of heaven, earth, human. And it was considered that the bias and integrity of the Ki of Yin-Yang and Five Elements determined the fortune or misfortune of the owner of the Four Pillars and the Eight Characters.

3. The Sexagenary Cycle Calendar (干支曆法)

Myeongli-hak was first established around 4th century A.D., and the new system of Myeongli-hak, which is still used in the present day, was established in the 11th century Song Dynasty (960-1279). The theory of Yin-Yang and Five Elements and the Samjae theory of heaven, earth, human could be theories of understanding nature in the Northeast Asian cultures from Han Dynasty, including Myeongli-hak. Of course, the sexagenary cycle calendar also became the official means of counting the number of years and dates in Northeast Asian cultures after the Han Dynasty. However, the sexagenary cycle calendar contributed greatly to conferring Myeongli-hak a unique identity that distinguishes it from other Northeast Asian disciplines. Therefore, Myeongli-hak would be more appropriately defined as a study of the sexagenary cycle calendar than a study of Yin-Yang and Five Elements. If so, what is the sexagenary cycle calendar?

The ancient Chinese understood nature through the Yin-Yang and Five Elements. The sexagenary cycle calendar was created as a way

22 Chul Cho Im, *Jukchonsoochunmi*, trans. Jung Hwan Im into Korean (seoul: Wonjejeokhak reseach: 2006), 13-25.

of representing Yin-Yang and Five Elements in a concrete way. The sexagenary cycle calendar were made of Chungan and Jiji. Chungan and Jiji come from the Yin-Yang and Five Elements. Each of the five elements of 木 (tree), 火 (fire), 土 (soil), 金 (iron), 水 (water) are respectably divided into Yin and Yang to make ten Chungan. The 木 (tree) is divided into the Yang (+) 木 (tree) Gap (甲) and Yin (-) 木 (tree) Eul (乙), 火 (fire) into Yang 火 (fire) Byung (丙) and Yin 火 (fire) Jung (丁), 土 (soil) into Yang 土 (soil) Mu(戊) and Yin 土 (soil) Ki (己), 金 (iron) into Yang 金 (iron) Gyeong (庚) and Yin 金 (iron) Shin (辛), 水 (water) into Yang 水 (water) Im (壬) and Yin 水 (water) Gye (癸). That is why Chungan is also called ten Chungan. The Jiji becomes twelve by adding two more 土 (soil) to ten Chungan. The reason why two more 土 (soil) were added like this is because Jiji, which means earth, is more complicated than Cheongan, which means heaven. In Jiji, there are Yang 木 (tree) In (寅), corresponding to Gap (甲) in Chungan, and Yin 木 (tree) Myo (卯), corresponding to Eul (乙) in Chungan, and Yang 土 (soil) Jin (辰), meaning the changing seasons, follows. After 木 (tree), there are Yang 火 (fire) Sa (巳), corresponding to Byung (丙) in Chungan, Yin 火 (fire) O (午), corresponding to Jung (丁) in Chungan, and Yin 土 (soil) Mi (未), meaning the changing seasons, follows. After 火 (fire), there are Yang 金 (iron) Sin (申), corresponding to Gyeong (庚) in Chungan, Yin 金 (iron) Yu (酉), corresponding to Shin (辛) in Chungan, and Yang 土 (soil) Sul (戌), meaning the changing seasons, follows. After 金 (iron), there are Yang 水 (water) Hae (亥), corresponding to Im (壬) in Chungan, Yin 水 (water) Ja (子), corresponding to Gye (癸) in Chungan, and Yin 土 (soil) Chuk (丑), meaning the changing seasons, follows. And spring comes again and the seasons cycle.

In conclusion, Chungan is the heaven divided in ten (10) and Jiji is the earth divided in twelve (12), and then a combination is made. This is sexagenary cycle calendar. The sexagenary cycle calendar is a method of counting the year, month, day, hour which is the least common multiple between Chungan and Jiji.²³

The sexagenary cycle calendar are composed of ten Chungan of Gap (甲), Eul (乙), Byung (丙), Jung (丁), Mu (戊), Ki (己), Gyeong (庚), Shin (辛), Im (壬), and Gye (癸) and of twelve Jiji of Ja (子), Chuk (丑), In (寅), Myo (卯), Jin (辰), Sa (巳), O (午), Mi (未), Sin (申), Yu (酉), Sul (戌), and Hae (亥). It is presumed that the first calendar was produced in China before the Eun Dynasty (B.C. 1600-B.C. 1046), but the oldest calendar that can be confirmed is Euncalendar (殷曆), the Eun Dynasty's calendar of days. The Euncalendar engraved in the Oracle bone inscriptions (甲骨文字) is the lunar-solar calendar, which records the date of divination with the sexagenary cycle calendar. Therefore, the sexagenary cycle calendar is regarded as the world's oldest method of counting dates without interruption from the date of February's Gisa (己巳) day in B.C. 720 to the third year of Suntongje (宣統帝), the last Emperor of Qing Dynasty (1911).²⁴

The Chinese philosophy proceeds through images (象). This way of thinking sees the essence of the world as images. It probes the essence of the world with the codes and letters that compose images. By explaining images, we come to an awareness of the essence and discipline of the world. In other words, we can understand that each of Chungan and Jiji of the sexagenary cycle calendar used by Myeongli-

23 Kim, *Study on the Saju-Myeongli in Korea*, 262.

24 Man Tae Kim, "A Study on the Origin of Calendar, the Starting Point of a Year and Formation Process of Sexagenary Cycle-based Year Calendar System," *The Academic of Korean Studies*, Vol.38, No.3 (2015), 54.

hak is an image and contains the logic of nature, society, and life.²⁵ The year, month, date and time of a person's birth reflect the relationship between him (日干) and other people or circumstances, through specific time and space when interpreted via in Myeongli-hak's images, known as the sexagenary cycle calendar. In addition, it is recognized that every image (Chungan and Jiji) of Myeongli-hak has its own Ki of Yin-Yang and Five Elements. Therefore, the sexagenary cycle calendar system expresses the human as a part of nature expressed in time and space.

IV. Comparison of the Subjects making up Nature in Christianity and Myeongli-hak

So far, we have looked into the view of nature in Christianity and Myeongli-hak. The view of nature in Christianity has been interpreted differently according to different currents of thought throughout history, but the view of nature in Myeongli-hak has been consistent regardless of the times. Now, I would like to infer the similarities between the two thoughts by comparing the subjects making up nature.

In Christianity, the creator of nature is God. It is the Council of Nicea held in A.D. 325 that doctrinally established the reality of God. According to the Council of Nicea, God is one being but acts as a Trinity. God reveals himself as the Father, and the Son, Jesus Christ, who was revealed to be the Father in limited time and space. And the Holy

25 Sung Ae Kim, "A Study on the Myeongli-hak's View of Society and Its Limits," Ph.D. Thesis at Kongju National University Graduate School (2017), 21.

Spirit is God's presence and activity in the world, present from the creation of the world through the history of Israel, especially in Jesus, and in the church that achieve the completion of God's will in advance.²⁶

In addition to these doctrinal dimensions, however, there is another view of God that can be compared to Northeast Asia, which belongs to Meister Eckhart, a medieval spiritualist. Eckhart postulated the existence of Godhead, the original image of God, behind the concept of the Christian God, which is understood as the Trinity. According to Eckhart, Godhead is distinctly different from the Trinity, which has a form and actively engaged in creative activity. Eckhart defined Godhead as follows. "All creations speak of God. But why do they not speak of Godhead? All that is in Godhead is one, and that is why it cannot be said that there is any activity. Because there is nothing to work in Godhead. Godhead has never thought of any activity. God is different from Godhead in that God is active and Godhead is in active."²⁷ In other words, Godhead is an absolute and non-deterministic being, a potential possibility, an indefiniteness that cannot be given a form, a defined nature. Godhead is the existence of absolute non-discrimination and absolute unity, which does not change and does not move, and remains pure like a unique wilderness where the distinction between the Father, the Sons, and the Holy Spirit has not yet appeared. According to Eckhart, the Trinity is the being which acts in the next stage of Godhead. The creation of nature is accomplished through Trinity.

26 Thomas, Owen C., *Introduction to Theology*, trans. Jae Jung Lee et al. into Korean (Seoul: The Christian Literature Society of Korea, 1993), 108.

27 Raymond Bernard Blackney, ed., *Meister Eckhart*, trans. Min Jae Lee into Korean (Seoul: Dasangeulbang, 1994), 58.

Creationism does not simply argue that God established the origin of universe, but it also contends that this world relies on God for its existence and that God preserves and maintains the existence of the universe every moment.²⁸ The Trinity reveals itself as the Father, and the Son, Jesus Christ who was incarnated as the presence of Father, and the Holy Spirit which reveals itself as a subject of eternal activity. As such, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are one, but they are different in their roles. From a human point of view, the closest being is the Holy Spirit, and the next is the Son and then, the Father. Therefore, it is the Holy Spirit who plays the role of continuous creation and intervenes in human life by side.

The term Holy Spirit does not appear in the Old Testament. Instead, “ruach(רוח)” which means breath, wind, and God’s spirit, take on the Holy Spirit. “God is spirit, which means that God is a wind that penetrates into everything, sometimes with a quiet breath, and sometimes with a strong storm, that penetrates and governs everything.”²⁹ As shown in Genesis 1:2, “ruach” is a reality or personality that has existed since the beginning, moving on the surface of the water and participating in the work of creation.³⁰ The spirit of creation is proclaimed by the breath of God that dwells within the whole creation and sustains their lives. The term Holy Spirit appears in the New Testament. In the Acts of Apostles, it served as the basis for the establishment of the church, which led to the beginning of the full Christian history. Paul the Apostle also says that grace of the Holy Spirit can be given differently to each individual. In other words, the Holy Spirit, one of

28 Owen, *Introduction to Theology*, 182.

29 Yong Gyu Kim, *God* (Seoul: Humanist, 2010), 27.

30 Lee, “Confucian view of nature and ecological theology,” 234.

the Trinity, is the basis for the creation of nature and the existence of the church through constant creative activities, and is deeply involved in individual life.

On the other hand, the structures similar to Godhead, the active Trinity, and the Holy Spirit appear in Northeast Asia's thoughts. In *Sammyungtonghoe* (三命通會), which is a kind of Myeongli-hak's encyclopedia, compiled by Man Ming-young (萬民英) of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), discussed the creation of the universe in the chapter of the beginning of original creation (原造化之始). "Materiality arises from the intangible. In the beginning, there are the Taeyeok (太易), the Taecho (太初), the Taeche (太始) and the Taeso (太素). There is no Ki in the Taeyeok. The Taecho is the beginning of the Ki. The Taeche is the beginning of form (形). And the Taeso is the beginning of nature (質). When the Ki, form and nature are mixed, it is called chaos (渾淪).³¹ In other words, the universe starts in a state of chaos and proceeds to the stages of the Taeyeok, Taecho, Taeche and Taeso. The Taeyeok is a stage in which the Ki has not yet appeared, and is a stage of silence and without dynamic change. The Taecho is the stage in which creation begins with the emergence of the Ki. Form is achieved in the Taeche, and nature is finally achieved in the Taeso.

Also in the chapter of discussing on the beginning of Ki of the Five Elements (論五行所生之始) in *Yeonhaejapyeong* (淵海子平) of the Song Dynasty, which announces the beginning of modern Myeongli-hak, it is stated: "When the Yin-Yang begin to separate from a single Ki, the Taeyeok (太易: the state in which the Ki has not yet occurred) produces water (水). The Taecho (太初: the state in which Ki is present, but has

31 Min Young Man, *Sammyungtonghoe*, trans. I Nam Kim and Myung San Lee into Korean (Seoul: Samha Press, 2011), 1.

not yet appeared) produces fire (火), and the Taeche (太始: the state in which form is present, but has not yet shaped detail features) creates a tree (木). The Taeso (太素: the state in which nature is hidden, but not yet been made into perfect forms) produces iron (金), and Taegeuk (太極: the state in which the form and nature are completely revealed) produces soil (土)."³² As such, *Yeonhaejapyeong* refers in detail to the stages of the generation of Ki of the Five Elements in relation to the the Taeyeok, Taecho, Taeche, Taeso, and Taegeuk. In other words, it is said that the Ki of water, fire, tree, iron and soil occurred from one single Ki in order.³³ In addition, the system of *the Book of Changes* is composed of the Taegeuk giving birth to Yin-Yang, Yin-Yang giving birth to four images, four images giving birth to eight gwae (八卦), and eight gwae decide the fortunate (吉) and vicious (凶), and the fortunate (吉) and vicious (凶) determines the great achievement.³⁴

And in Northeast Asian studies, including Myeongli-hak, it is assumed that the Ki, which occurred in the Taecho, is the subject of Yin-Yang and the Five Elements, the Samjae of heaven, earth, and human, and the destiny of each individual. By the Ki, everything in the universe moves, changes in natural phenomena, and opens the way to the unique destiny for each individual. From a Christian point of view, this Ki can be seen as comparable to the action of the Holy Spirit. The reason why the Holy Spirit and Ki can be compared is that they are both sources of life. Both are the source of all things that are made up of matter, including spiritual and spirituality. Both exist in all things and are the link that connects all things, and they contain an ecological

32 Seung Seo, *Yeonhaejapyeong* (Daebuk: Mooreung press, 1995), 19.

33 Seo, *Yeonhaejapyeong*, 19.

34 Kim, *Daesan lecture on the Book of Changes*, Vol.3, 147.

perspective that allows us to see all things as colleagues and compatriots. And both are eternal beings and have a divine nature.³⁵ Shin Eun-hee, a religious scholar in Korea, also positively describes the relationship between the Holy Spirit and Ki as follows. “Despite the different cultural and philosophical context, both the Holy Spirit and the ultimate *Ch'i* (氣) suggest the comprehensive life principle that animates all forms of life and integrates both physical and spiritual dimensions. This common theme of the vitality is particularly important and relevant to today’s life-destroying world, marked by the massive poverty of the Third world, eco-cide, and other “isms and oppressions” (racism, sexism, classism, etc.).³⁶

Then, how does Northeast Asia study and define Ki? Ki is a being that is immortal, gathered and scattered without creation and extinction, and is the source of all things that actually exist, as well as the entity and the cause of the material movements, life activities, and mental phenomena of all things in the universe.³⁷ As such, in Northeast Asian cultures, Ki occupies a very important position in explaining nature and humanity. *Yeonhaejapyeong* said, “All the fortunate (吉), vicious (凶), misfortune (禍) and blessing (福) that people face are not what people can do something about artificially, but the acts of Creators and the principle of Yin-Yang. That means human beings, like nature, were born with the Ki of Yin-Yang and Five Elements, so their fate could not escape from the frame of Yin-Yang and Five Elements.”³⁸

35 Jin Kwan Kwon, “A Pneumatological study on Ki - Focusing on Jangjae and Hwadam,” *Studies in Religion (The Journal of the Korean Association for the History of Religions)* 32 (2003), 104.

36 Eun Hee Shin, “Holy Spirit and Korean Ch'i (氣) - Inter-religious Dialogue in a Postmodern Philosophical Context,” *Madang: Journal of Contextual Theology* Vol. 3 (2005), 19.

37 Jong Ran Lee, *What is the KI?* (Seoul: Saemoonsa, 2017), 292.

38 Seo, *Yeonhaejapyeong*, 71.

In other words, like nature, humans are born with the Ki of the Yin-Yang and the Five Elements, and their destiny cannot escape the movement of the Yin-Yang and the Five Elements.

Now, by comparing the subjects making up the nature of Christianity with those of Myeongli-hak, we can establish the following correspondence. Eckhart's Godhead corresponds to the Taeyeok, where Ki has not yet been generated. This is because Eckhart's Godhead is non-existent. The activity of the Trinity is revealed in the Taecho, in which Ki is generated. As shown in Genesis 1:2, the statement “the Spirit of God revolves around the water” happens in the Taecho. And just as creation is achieved through the cooperation of the Trinity, these things are done in the Taecho, Taeche, Taeso, and Taegeuk in Myeongli-hak. And the Holy Spirit is comparable to Ki, which began to operate in the Taecho. Of course, the Holy Spirit and the Ki cannot be identified, but I think that some analogy is possible in understanding the nature of the two thoughts.

Comparison of the subjects making up nature in Christianity and Myeongli-hak

Christianity	Myeongli-hak
Godhead (神性)	Taeyeok (太易)
Trinity (三位一體)	Taecho (太初), Taeche (太始), Taeso (太素), Taegeuk (太極)
Holy Spirit (聖靈)	Ki (氣)

V. Conclusion

Eckhart defined the state of Absolute, in which the Ki, form and nature, do not exist, as Godhead. It is very similar to Myeongli-hak’s the

Taeyeok. The creation of nature in Christianity is possible thanks to the activity of Trinity. Creating means giving the Ki, form and nature, to the creation. In Myeongli-hak, these happen in the Taecho, Taeche, Taeso, and Taegeuk. In Christianity, after the first creation through the Trinity, the subject which continuously carries out the work of creation is understood as the Holy Spirit. The equivalent of this can be the Ki in Myeongli-hak.

Even nowadays, the prevailing current of thought is to consider nature from a mechanistic point of view, but humanity has begun to realize from the second half of 20th century that nature is closely related to humans through environmental issues. Therefore, the present Christianity emphasizes the ecological view of nature, with consideration of the continuity between nature and the human world. However, this understanding of organic and ecological nature can be found in Northeast Asian thought, for the idea of *the Book of Changes*, the basis of Northeast Asian cultures, is “Reviving and saving is called Yeok (生生之謂易).”³⁹

Myeongli-hak is no exception. Myungli-hak is a science that can present concrete and detailed evidence on understanding humanity as a part of nature more than any other Northeast Asia’s studies. Myeongli-hak insists that human is also nature. However, it seems that many people don’t understand this. The reason is that Myeongri-hak has been treated as a study of hidden and trivial stories in this country. Looking at nature from the perspective of Myeongli-hak will provide a new perspective in understanding it, given that the Western understanding of nature still prevails in our times.

39 Kim, *Daesan lecture on the Book of Changes*, Vol.3, 60.

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