

Actualization of Ideologies and the Role of Humans in Sage Politics: Neo-Confucian Theories and Political Choices of Yi Hwang (李滉, 1501-1570) and Yi I (李珥, 1536-1584)

Kim, Hyoungchan

(Dpt. of Philosophy, Korea University)

1. Introduction

As part of their efforts to pursue their personal interests, people create diverse types of groupings. To forge a group on a scale and with a system amounting to a nation, however, a shared ideology is required that transcends or at least is able to subtly mask the direct interests of its individual members. In addition, a nation is likely to endure for a greater period when the governing class consists of people who are able to internalize, represent, and practice that ideology. Although dogma can at times overwhelm individuals and trigger negative consequences, the establishment of human roles within an ideological system can serve as an important variable in real-world politics in the sense that ideology can be actualized only via the conduit of the individuals involved.

One fitting example is the Joseon Dynasty, which made use of the philosophy of Zhu Xi and the national civil service examination known as the *Gwageo* to maintain a system supporting such a state ideology and supply the governing body with intellectuals to embody and practice this ideology. Joseon upheld Zhu Xi's doctrines as a national ideology from the establishment of the country in 1392 until its collapse in 1910. The goal of this paper is to compare the philosophies of two prominent Joseon Dynasty scholars as a means to investigate how an overarching ideology pursued by a country and the roles of individuals can be plaited into an academic theory then interpreted and practiced in actual politics.

The emergence of the two Confucian scholars Yi Hwang (pen name: Toegye; 1501-1570) and Yi I (pen name: Yulgok; 1536-1584), was of great import to the history of the Joseon Dynasty. Originating in China, Zhu Xi's ideas became firmly entrenched as the Joseon state philosophy and ideology under the name of Joseon *Seong Li* philosophy (朝鮮性理學) thanks to the academic and political efforts of these twin scholars. The seed of the factional (*bungdang*) politics that characterizes the political affairs of mid- to late Joseon was also sown by the groups surrounding the two literati. While Yi Hwang and Yi I, who were 35 years apart in age, cared for and respected each other with the sentiments typified by a teacher and student, the paths that they chose within the politics of Joseon were starkly divergent. Abandoning all official positions at the age of 49, Yi Hwang attempted to fulfill his role as an intellectual outside of the official system. Yi I began his career in the central government at 29 years of age and held a number of influential positions, remaining near the center of political power until his death.

While both assumed Zhu Xi's philosophy as their academic foundation, their philosophies and political orientations were quite dissimilar. A number of possible reasons underlie their disparate

choices, but this paper simply focuses on the fact that the two scholars developed distinct philosophical theories from an identical academic foundation and that those theories eventually served as bases to establish the two major schools and political factions of Joseon intellectual and political circles. If consistency can be identified in the relationship between their political decisions and philosophical theories, it would be of great assistance in understanding the national ideologies or political philosophies that they pursued, as well as the positions of the twin schools and political factions that bifurcated Joseon's governing class.

What points this paper attempts to establish are two-fold: that the theories of these two scholars, who made great achievements regarding the *ligi-simseong* theories (理氣心性論) related to Zhu Xi's philosophy, can serve as the philosophical foundations that explain their worldly and political choices; and that their theoretical differences in these foundations stem from their dissimilar positions on the roles of people, especially in the practical application of ideology. This is not to stereotype or formulate a link between *ligi-simseong* theories and political choices simply based on the cases of these two scholars, since even similar *ligi-simseong* theories can be interpreted in opposite manners in order to justify certain actions depending on the circumstances involved. However, they are fitting subjects for an exploration of the issues involved, in that the two renowned scholars followed starkly divergent paths, both academically and politically, and their influence lingered throughout the subsequent centuries in the form of academic schools and political factions. Given that both Yi Hwang and Yi I took the *inner sage and outer sovereign* (內聖外王) as their academic ideal and were both intellectuals and public officials allowed to interact directly with the king and exerted significant influence over actual politics, it is difficult to separate their academic pursuits from their political decisions. They were very well aware of the direct and indirect impacts of their theoretical deliberations on Joseon *Seong Li* philosophy as the state ideology, as well as of how to utilize such influence for political ends. While there has been research comparing the political musings and positions of the two scholars, their relationship in terms of the *ligi-simseong* theories, which are the ultimate embodiment of their academic accomplishments, remains unclear.¹ This paper attempts to explore this relationship in order to identify the philosophical underpinnings of the state ideology and sage politics that they pursued.

2. Moving forward and moving back (出處)

Early in the spring of 1558, a 23-year-old Yi I paid his first visit to the 58-year-old renowned scholar Yi Hwang. Since that time, the two maintained a discussion of their lives, learning, and politics through the exchange of approximately twenty letters over the course of the thirteen years until Yi Hwang's death in 1570. One of the main topics engaging the two from their first meeting was the issue of *moving forward and moving back* (出處). At that time, Yi Hwang, retired from court politics since the age of 49, had spent the last ten years dedicating himself to his personal learning and teachings in his hometown of Andong in Gyeongsang Province, while Yi I was studying the scriptures and teachings of

¹ Some researchers attribute the differences in political opinion between Yi Hwang and Yi I to the differences in their understanding of politics rather than of *Seong Li* theories (Choi Jin-hong, 2009), while others view the issue from the perspective of inner morality and situationalistic political orientation or subjective interiority and objective exteriority (Park Chung-seok, 2010; Seo Geun-sik, 2012). Also, some link Yi Hwang's theory on the *concurrent issuance of li and gi* (理氣互發論) and Yi I's on the *release of gi and the ride of li* (氣發理乘一途說) to issues of the political realities in which they were situated (Lee Sang-ik, 2001). While these studies reflect some of the achievements of the existing research on the two scholars, they fail to illuminate the relationship between their political thoughts/positions and the *Seong Li* philosophy in a systematic manner.

Confucianism in preparation for the *Gwageo* exam. Yi I had taken vows as a Buddhist monk at 19 years of age, but returned to secular life after just a single year. It appears that Yi I's visit to Yi Hwang did not stem simply from his desire to meet the then widely-respected scholar. Rather, it seems to have come from his concerns about entering state service at a time when the cognates of the royal family were still gripping power and manipulating state affairs, the reason Yi Hwang had retired from politics nine years previously.

From the time of his first public appointment after passing the *Gwageo* exam at the age of 34 (1534) until his return to his hometown in 1549, Yi Hwang served 16 years in politics during a period considered a terrible ordeal for literati.² At the time when he had just passed the *Gwageo* exam, the *Hungupa* (meritorious elite) faction dominated power after massacring the *Sarimpa* (Confucian literati) faction, including Kim Goeng-pil and Cho Gwang-jo, through a series of literati purges including *Muo Sahwa* (literati purge, 1498), *Gapja Sahwa* (1504), and *Gimyoo Sahwa* (1519). Furthermore, during the period when Yi Hwang was in office, the cognates of the royal family seized power through *Eulsa Sahwa* (1545) and *Jeongmi Sahwa* (1547), designed to debilitate both the *Sarim* and *Hungu* factions. It could be that Yi Hwang decided to retire to his hometown after observing the ineffectiveness of intellectuals in a reality in which government affairs were manipulated by the cognates of the royal family.³ With his repeated appeals for resignation rejected, he finally simply abandoned Punggi, his area of public service, and returned to his hometown in 1549. His older brother Yi Hae died the following year on his way to exile after suffering a flogging for impeaching the cognates of the royal family. Yi Hwang chose to *move back* (處) believing that he could not enact his academic ideology within the political reality in which he was situated.

Upon returning to his hometown, Yi Hwang re-contemplated Zhu Xi's philosophy, which had served as the national ideology over the more than 150 years since the establishment of Joseon. He also seems to have been interested in the philosophy of Wang Yang-ming, which was growing in favor at that time in China's Ming Dynasty. Concurring with Wang Yang-ming's critique that the teachings of Zhu Xi's leaned excessively toward the details of theory, leading to a failure of proper appreciation of theory by overlooking the aspect of practice⁴, Yi Hwang sought to supplement Zhu Xi's philosophy by paralleling his theory with practical instruction.⁵ He thoroughly reviewed the process of the development of Chinese Neo-Confucianism and published his *Outline and Explanations of the Works of Zhu Xi* (朱子書節要) and the *History of Neo-Confucianism in the Song, Yuan and Ming Dynasties* (宋季元明理學通錄). This allowed him to explore the theories of Zhu Xi in greater depth and grasp the need to complement them with a practical extrapolation. He also turned his attention toward the *Supplementary Annotations to the Classic of the Mind-heart* (心經附註). Despite criticism of this work for its inclination toward Wang Yang-ming's philosophy⁶, he included the *theory of cultivation*

² Although Yi Hwang returned to public office on occasion following his retirement, feeling unable to refuse the king's repeated requests, he quickly resigned each post. For more details on Yi Hwang's service in public office, see Lee Sang-eun (1999, pp.29-44).

³ Jo Mok (趙穆), one of Yi Hwang's most outstanding students, describes the conditions of the intellectual society at that time as the following: "As it was right after the *Eulsa Sahwa* when (Toegye was) working at Seonggyeungwan, the foremost education institution in Joseon, in his 20s, the behaviors of the literati became more dissolute every day." (Jeong Sun-mok, 1997, pp.162-163)

⁴ 李滉, 「傳習錄論辯」, 『退溪集』 (韓國文集叢刊本), 30:418a (韓國文集叢刊, Vol. 30, the upper right side on p. 418, hereinafter the citation of 韓國文集叢刊本 will follow this format).

⁵ Hyoungchan Kim (2007)

⁶ 李滉, 「心經後論」, 『退溪集』, 30:410b.

of the mind-heart based on respect (心性修養論) as suggested in this book as a core element to his philosophy and teachings. Yi Hwang also summarized for the king the principles and philosophies of politics according to his academic positions in his two efforts *Memorandum on Six Points* (戊辰六條疏) and *Ten Diagrams on Sage Learning* (聖學十圖), both of which he presented to the young King Seonjo in 1568.⁷ Furthermore, he worked to distribute his philosophy through teaching, help intellectuals check the central power from outside of the system by establishing an ideological legitimacy and foundation for a politics of public opinion through a Confucian academy-building campaign, and develop a code of conduct to allow the doctrine of Confucianism to permeate the daily lives of ordinary people.

In contrast to Yi Hwang, who was already both academically and politically mature, one of the major concerns facing Yi I when he visited Yi Hwang was the issue of whether or not to advance to public office. For Yi I, who was already renowned for his brilliance, the question was not one of whether or not he would be able to pass the *Gwageo* exam, but whether it would be the right thing to do to assume public office during such turbulent times. From the perspective of Yi I, his first meeting with Yi Hwang was related to the issue of *moving forward and moving back* (出處).

“While reading the *History of the Han Dynasty* (漢史), I considered the *Saho*’s decision about the issue of *moving forward and moving back* (出處) to be wrong, but I did not dare to state that publicly. However, when I asked Toegye about this, I found he had the same opinion. Still, I wasn’t able to confirm whether it had been discussed by ancient sages until I came across Zhu Xi’s remark the *Full Compilation of the Theory of Nature and Principle* (性理大全) that ‘the four men (*Saho*) seem to be maneuvering learned men, rather than Confucian scholars,’” said Yi I. “Then I found confirmation that I wasn’t wrong.”⁸

This quotation appears at the beginning of Yi I’s writing *Small Stories* (瑣言). In this work, which is a written record of his first meeting with Yi Hwang, Yi I recalled their discussion on the issue of *moving forward and moving back* (出處) as the highlight of the meeting.

Saho (四皓) refers to four old men who lived as hermits in Sangsan (商山) during the reign of Emperor Gaozu (高祖) of Han (漢). They were referred to as *Saho* since all four of them were in their 80s and had gray eyebrows. The story goes that when Emperor Gaozu attempted to dismiss the then-crown prince, the Secondary Instructor of the Crown Prince Zhang Liang (張良), one of the great contributors to the establishment of the Han Dynasty, discouraged the attempt by asking the four men to emerge and serve the crown prince.⁹ Wondering whether it was a proper decision for *Saho* to respond to the call at that time, Yi I sought out Yi Hwang’s opinion about the issue, and the older scholar agreed with his position. He also confirmed his opinion through Zhu Xi’s remark.

Three days later, he left for his mother’s family residence in Gangneung, filled with deep respect for Yi Hwang. Mentioning ancient sages’ *fear of younger generations* (後生可畏) was correct,¹⁰ Yi Hwang

⁷ For details about the political situation and academic process at the time of Yi Hwang’s life, see Kim Hyeong-chan (2007).

⁸ 李珥, 「瑣言」, 『栗谷全書』(韓國文集叢刊本), 44:301d.

⁹ 司馬遷, 「留侯世家」, 『史記』.

¹⁰ 李滉, 「答趙士敬(戊午)」, 『退溪集』, 30:46c.

testified to Yi I's potential and hoped he would be allowed to express it to the full. Six years later, in 1564, Yi I took public office after winning top honors in nine *Gwageo* exams, while Yi Hwang remained devoted to his own academic pursuits and teachings in his hometown. There could have been doubt as to whether Yi I made the right choice, but the political situation began to shift in the following year. Upon the death of Queen Munjeong in 1565, King Myeongjong attempted to consolidate control by driving out her cognates and bringing in *Sarimpa* faction members. Although he died two years later without yet seeing the results of his efforts, his successor King Seonjo, who ascended to the throne at the age of 16, followed in his will to restore power to the *Sarimpa* faction.

Yi I, who was placed at the heart of the central government at that time, not only actively participated in the reversal but worked hard to draw Yi Hwang back into politics. When King Myeongjong died in 1567, Yi I sent a letter to Yi Hwang to discuss the state funeral and eventually to recall Yi Hwang to Hanyang, the capital of Joseon. Yi Hwang promptly returned to his hometown after meeting the newly enthroned King Seonjo, but Yi I, enjoying the full endorsement of the new king, led the dawning of the era of the *Sarimpa* faction.¹¹

3. Universal principle (理) and *eui* (意, will)

While Yi Hwang's philosophy spans a wide range of areas including *ligi-simseong* theories, studies of rites (禮學), politics, and social philosophy, his most-discussed contribution up until now has been his unique interpretation of *li* (理). This reveals characteristics of his philosophy as such and is the core topic most frequently contrasted with Yi I's philosophy. *Li*, which represents the concept of the universal principle in *Seong Li* philosophy, embodies the rules that should be accorded to by human beings, as well as the ultimate ideology that a state or society ought to pursue. In this regard, the interpretation of *li* greatly impacts philosophy.

The propositions that most clearly reveal Yi Hwang's position on *li* are "*li issues* (理發)"¹², "*li moves* (理動)"¹³, and "*li comes into being of itself* (理自到)"¹⁴. While these three propositions were derived from the perspectives of the mind-heart theory, ontology, and epistemology, respectively, they are closely related through coherence in Yi Hwang's argument.¹⁵ The point of debate here is that terms that imply physical movements, such as "issue (發)", "move (動)", and "come into being of itself (自到)", were used as predicates for *li*.

It was not Yi Hwang's conception, however, that *li* performs such physical actions in practice. The *ligi* theory endorsed in the philosophy of Zhu Xi explains the structure, creation, and transformation of all objects, as well as moral emotions, judgments, and behaviors as a combination of *li* (理), which is principle/law, and *qi* (氣), which is matter/energy. According to the *ligi* theory, there is no disagreement that actions such as issuance, movement, and coming into being are of themselves the

¹¹ Serving a number of posts including the taxation minister (hojo panseo), personnel minister (ijo panseo), and defence minister, Yi I remained at the center of political power until he died of illness.

¹² 李滉, 「答奇明彦-論四端七情第」二書, 『退溪集』, 29:419c.

¹³ 李滉, 「答鄭子中別紙」, 『退溪集』, 30:101c-102a.

¹⁴ 李滉, 「答奇明彦-別紙」, 『退溪集』, 29:466c-467b.

¹⁵ For details about the context in which these three propositions were raised, see Hyoungchan Kim (2011) and Moon Seok-yun (2001).

roles of *gi*, given that *li* can be materialized only through the help of *gi*. The crux of Yi Hwang's argument was that even though *li* may be revealed by means of assistance from *gi*, the ideal morality materializes only when the nature of *li* is revealed holistically and without being distorted by *gi*. This argument is clearly dissimilar from the position of Yi I, who underlines the changes in physical character (氣質) in the complete actualization of *li*. From Yi Hwang's perspective, *li*, as a counter-concept to *gi*, is not limited to simply principle and law. Based on Zhu Xi's saying that "there is movement and calmness in the *Great Absolute* and this is the flow of the *Mandate of Heaven* (太極之有動靜，是天命之流行也)"¹⁶, he believed that *li* (理), *dao* (道), and the *Great Absolute* (太極) were equal to the *Mandate of Heaven* that flows freely in the universe.¹⁷ According to Yi Hwang, *li* exists ubiquitously in the universe as a dominating force that controls *gi* and allows the materialization of ethical ideals into reality despite not possessing mobility.

From his point of view, what is required of humans in order to draw *li* into existence is to make clear the ethical orientation that should be pursued, by means of clearly distinguishing from all the other kinds of emotions, judgments, and behaviors those ones based on *li*, which stands for moral pure virtue and completeness. Humans should treat such *li* with awe and respect and keep *seong* (性, moral nature), which is *li* given to a human mind, and remain vigilant in order to allow moral pure virtue and completeness to be manifested undistorted. Yi Hwang's emphasis on the attitude of respect (敬) as a key method of learning and practice that remains relevant from the unaroused state (未發) in which the '*seong = li*' has not yet emerged, through the aroused state (已發) in which it is revealed in the form of emotions, as well as on the awe and respect for the *Mandate of Heaven* (天命) and the *Lord on High* (上帝) as the origin of the '*seong = li*' can be understood in this context.¹⁸

While Yi Hwang's attitude toward *li* (= *seong*) was somewhat religious, Yi I attempted to offer a logical basis for the relationship between *li* and *gi* by strictly following the concept of definitions and examples from the *ligi* theory of *Seung li* philosophy. Regarding the relationship between *li* and *gi*, Yi I emphasized that the two can neither remain apart nor be intertwined. As Zhu Xi pointed out, *li* precedes *gi* from the viewpoint of principle, but the opposite is true from the perspective of phenomenon.¹⁹ However, this is simply one way to promote understanding of the relationship between the two: *li* and *gi* can neither be separate at any moment nor be combined in any circumstance. In that sense, *li* and *gi* are one and at the same time two, and two but one at the same time (一而二，二而一).²⁰

As to the roles of *li* and *gi*, Yi I clearly defines that "what arises is *gi* and what causes arousal is *li*."²¹ While this implies a criticism of Yi Hwang's attempt to distinguish *four beginnings* (四端) and *seven emotions* (七情) as the issuance of *li* and of *gi*, respectively, he was simply strictly following the *Seung*

¹⁶ 朱熹, 「太極圖說解」, 『朱子全書』 13, p.72

¹⁷ 李滉, 「第十夙興夜寐箴圖」, 『退溪集』, 29:212d-213a; 「天命圖說後敘」, 『退溪集』, 30:407d; 「答申啓」, 『退溪集』, 30:364d-365b.

¹⁸ This is based on Yi Hwang's theories on *four beginnings and seven emotions* (四端七情說) and on awe and respect for the *Lord on High*. For further details, see Hyoungchan Kim (2010, 2011).

¹⁹ 朱熹, 『朱子語類』 1, p.3.

²⁰ 李珣, 「聖學輯要」, 『栗谷全書』, 44:458d.

²¹ 李珣, 「答成浩原」, 『栗谷全書』, 44:194d-195a.

Li philosophy definition of the two concepts. Based on this understanding, Yi I describes the relationship between *li* and *gi* through the proposition “*li* is universal and *gi* is particular (理通氣局).”²² In other words, *li* is accepted across the universe as the universal principle while *gi*, as matter and energy, is restricted by time, space, and environment; all existence in the universe is constructed of and operates as the combination of *li* and *gi* in the “never apart and never mixed” relationship.

A problem arises, however, that such a perspective may be conducive to explaining phenomena but of little use in the creation of a morally ideal society. In other words, Yi I’s *ligi* theory is highly practical for elucidating facts: based on the quality (clear, muddy, pure, mixed) of *gi*, *li* emerges in diverse forms of phenomena, resulting in the vast spectrum of virtue and vice encountered in the world. However, this explanation fails to offer a force able to change this physical character and guide society into further good. Confucianism or *Seong Li* philosophy, which aims for *inner sage outer sovereign* (內聖外王), is not simply a theory intended to explain phenomena, but a philosophy pursuing the establishment of a morally ideal society. If Yi I’s theory falls short of serving that role, it would then lose its value as Confucianism or *Seong Li* philosophy. For precisely this reason, Yi I notes the will and intention (意志) to turn from vice to virtue through self-cultivation.²³

Yi I believed that human beings are specially connected with the universe/nature through the *ligi* system. With the universe and nature being a combination of *li* and *gi*, his *ligi* theory applies to all existence, including animals, plants, and humans, but humans stand in a unique position from other objects composed of the universe and nature. This is based on the traditional Confucian notion that humans are one of the three core elements, together with Heaven and Earth, that are responsible for the operation of the universe. In that sense, Yi I believed that the judgments and behaviors of humans affect the universe and nature. The *Proposal on the Way of Heaven* (天道策), which was his response taking top place in the *Gwageo* in the winter of 1558, well explains such relationship between nature and humans, although it may need to be taken into considered that exam answers do tend to reflect the intentions of the examiner. Still, the work summarizes Yi I’s position on the relationship between Heaven, Earth, and humans within the framework of *ligi* theory in a succinct and logical manner.

According to Yi I, humans correspond to the heart of the universe and affect nature and the universe to that same degree, alone among all the constituents of nature. When a wise king rules, the universe, Heaven and Earth operate in harmony as well, but turbulent times bring about unpredictable natural events.²⁴ Therefore, human behaviors do not fall simply within the sphere of human society, but affect the entire universe.²⁵

As mentioned above, however, Yi I’s *ligi* theory lacks an impelling force capable of improving this world in which vice and virtue exist in their diverse forms. Here Yi I turns to the *eui* (意, will) of

²² 李珣, 「答成浩原」, 『栗谷全書』, 44:210d-211a.

²³ For how Yi I came to turn to human will toward self-cultivation to overcome the limitation of his *ligi* theory, see Hyoungchan Kim (1996).

²⁴ While Yi Hwang also endorses the mutual communication between the universe and humans, he is critical of Yi I’s position that human behaviors directly interacts with the universe. 李滉, 「戊辰六條疏」, 『退溪集』, 29:192b-194d.

²⁵ 李珣, 「天道策」, 『栗谷全書』, 44:309c-312d.

humans. According to him, *eui* is a core function of the mind and when nature (性) is manifested as emotions (情), it carefully contemplates and makes observations.²⁶ In other words, *eui* refers to the functions of conscious awareness, judgment, and the will of the mind.

In the sense that *eui* contemplates and observes only upon the manifestation of emotions, however, the role of *eui* assumes the arousal of the mind.²⁷ This differs from the viewpoint of Yi Hwang, who distinguished between the *four beginnings* (四端) and *seven emotions* (七情), as well as between the human mind and moral mind from the unaroused state. While Yi Hwang distinguishes good emotions from bad from their very origin in order to focus learning and practice on the cultivation of the origin of positive emotions from the unaroused state, Yi I's learning and practice remain focused on the period following the arousal of emotions.

4. Devout attention (敬) and purification of physical character (氣質變化)

Although Yi Hwang acknowledged that Wang Yang-ming's criticism of Zhu Xi's philosophy was not inaccurate, he was not of the opinion that Wang's philosophy could replace Zhu Xi's. According to him, while Wang Yang-ming does appear to cast aspersions on Zhu Xi for heavily relying on theory, his philosophy lags behind Zhu Xi's in terms of exploration of detailed methods of practice. Yi Hwang's *Jeonseuprok Nonbyeon* (傳習錄論辯)²⁸, which explicates this argument, influenced a great number of Joseon scholars and played a critical role in preventing Wang Yang-ming's philosophy from taking root in the country.

What he suggested as a complement to the imbalance in Zhu Xi's philosophy was the *Supplementary Annotations to the Classic of the Mind-heart* (心經附註). Authored by Zhen Dexiu (真德秀), Zhu Xi's disciple, and commentated by Cheng Minzheng, a Ming Dynasty Confucian scholar, this work is a collection of ancient writings related to the cultivation of personality. Despite existing criticism of this book for being inclined toward Wang Yang-ming's philosophy, Yi Hwang evaluated it to be as important as the *Four Books* (四書) or *Reflections on Things at Hand* (近思錄).²⁹ Focusing on the concept of *respect* or *devout attention* (敬) presented in this book as a method of practice, Yi Hwang used it to complement Zhu Xi's propensity for theoretical learning and to establish his own *Sim* philosophy (心學, learning of the mind-heart) by placing it at the center of his learning system that parallels *Jondeokseong* (尊德性, honoring the good inborn qualities of one's nature) with *domunhak* (道問學, following the path of inquiry and study).

Yi Hwang explains *respect* (敬) with *focusing on only one thing* (主一無適), *being organized and solemn* (整齊嚴肅), and *being always awakened* (常醒醒).³⁰ Lying at the core of his *Sim* philosophy

²⁶ 李珣, 「答成浩原」, 『栗谷全書』, 44:194d-195a.

²⁷ 李珣, 「答安應休」, 『栗谷全書』, 44:251d-252a.

²⁸ 李滉, 「傳習錄論辯」, 『退溪集』, 30:416b-419b.

²⁹ Hangang Jeonggu, one of Yi Hwang's disciples, published *Simgyeongbalhui* (心經發揮) to offer an uncontroversial textbook of self-cultivation based on Zhu Xi's philosophy by excluding contentious writings from the *Classics of the Mind-heart* (心經) due to their inclination to Wang Yang-ming's philosophy and complementing it with writings by Zhu Xi and the five philosophers of Northern Song (北宋五子). 鄭述, 「心經發揮序」, 『寒岡全集』下, pp.69-70.

³⁰ 李滉, 「第四大學圖」, 『退溪集』, 29:205a.

(心學), these refer to the attitude of focusing, contemplating, passing judgments based on the moral principles of ‘*seong = li*’, and taking action regarding the event one is facing, whatever it may be from one’s moral nature to external objects. *Respect* is also an attitude that needs to be made relevant throughout the entire process, from the unaroused state in which moral nature has yet to be manifested through perceiving an external event, passing judgment, and taking action. It further distinguishes their point of origin from between the moral nature of ‘*seong=li*’ and intervening personal desires, as well as remaining significant throughout the entire process of learning, cultivation, and practice, which brings to light the pure and complete moral nature. *Respect* is an attitude of learning, cultivation, and practice that materializes *li* without distortion by external environments or personal desires. In this regard, humans treat *Heaven* (天), the *Mandate of Heaven* (天命), and the *Lord on High* (上帝) with awe and respect as the origin of moral nature and consequently come to materialize *li*.³¹

While Yi I agreed that the moral ideals of Confucianism and Zhu Xi’s philosophy represented by *li* need to be attained, he turned greater attention to physical character than to *li* itself as a method of their attainment. Yi I stressed that in order for the pure and complete moral nature of *li* to be manifested in its entirety in reality, physical character, which serves as an intermediary in the actualization of *li*, must be unblemished. While indeed clear and homogeneous, *gi* is unable to preserve its inborn nature since it contains the contradictory dual qualities of *yin* and *yang*. The alternation of *yin* and *yang* results in movement of *gi* and the process of the movement creates detritus (渣滓). Due to this detritus, *gi* comes to possess a variety of characters ranging from clear to muddy, pure, and mixed (清濁粹駁).³² Such diversity of *gi*, as argued in Zhu Xi’s philosophy, provides a basis for explaining not only the qualitative diversity of the existents in the universe, but also of the diversity of virtue and vice in terms of morality, since the quality of *gi* (clear, muddy, pure, mixed) determines the degree of completeness in the materialization of *li*.

This logic, however, risks a debate over the utility of *li*, because however pure and complete *li* may be, the overall manifestation of such purity and completeness is only determined by the *gi* combined with the *li* and *li* is not permitted to select the *gi* with which it combines. This leads to a questionable role for *li*, an implication for which his school was to be the target of criticism for the remainder of the Joseon Dynasty.

According to Yi I, *eui* (意) serves as a force to purify the physical character. Given that *eui* is also a function of the human mind, it is difficult to assert that it exists outside of *ligi* theory. However, it is neither an inherent function of *li* nor *gi* but instead a special phenomenon in the human mind through which *li* and *gi* are combined. Yi I fails to elucidate precisely why the human mind possesses the

³¹ Hyoungchan Kim (2011)

³² 李珣, 「答成浩原」, 『栗谷全書』, 44:218a. *Jil* (質) refers to the *gi* (氣) that has reached the stage in which it is condensed to be easily perceived by sensory organs. It is called *Hyeong* (形) when it has taken a concrete shape. *Gijil* (氣質, physical character) and *hyeongjil* (形質) are terms that cover across the boundaries of *gi*, *jil*, and *hyeong*.

function of *eui*³³ but does go on to say that physical character can be purified and then manifested and that vice can be transformed into virtue by means of this *eui*.³⁴ The concept of *eui* may have been inevitable in Yi I's *ligi simseong* theory (理氣心性論). The fact that the contemplation-observation (計較商量) and purification of *eui* is added to the manifestation of moral emotions implies the deliberate intervention of the human mind in the natural transformation of *ligi*. From the perspective of Yi I, who believes that transforming an impure character into a pure one is critical to the actualization of Sage Learning (聖學) to lead the turbid world toward good, *eui* plays the role of impelling not only individuals but the entire universe toward the good.

5. Two texts on Sage Politics

Yi I discussed the issue of the state funeral with Yi Hwang upon the death of King Myeongjong (1567), bewailed the news of Yi Hwang's death (1570), and presented a request for Yi Hwang's inclusion into the national Confucian shrine (1581). While deeply respecting Yi Hwang, he carved out his own philosophical position unique from that of his older contemporary. In his discussion regarding the theory of *four beginnings* and *seven emotions* with the famous Joseon *Seong Li* philosopher Ugye Seonghon in 1572, two years after the death of Yi Hwang, Yi I clearly expressed his view on the *ligi simseong* theory as explained above and critiqued Yi Hwang's arguments. In 1575, he authored for King Seonjo a new textbook on Sage Learning, from a distinct point of view than that of the *Ten Diagrams on Sage Learning* (聖學十圖) published for the king in 1568 by Yi Hwang.

When Yi Hwang first published the book,³⁵ Yi I expressed a divergent view on aspects of the *Ten Diagrams on Sage Learning* in terms of content and order and appears to have had it in mind to produce a new work to replace or parallel Yi Hwang's work. He presented his book *Essentials of Sage Learning* (聖學輯要) to King Seonjo, but the king and successors converted the *Ten Diagrams on Sage Learning* into a portable format and a folding screen and kept them always nearby, as Yi Hwang had requested of the king when he presented him with the book. For a considerable period before it was finally adopted, Yi I's disciples, were required to expend strenuous efforts in the face of strong opposition to allow the *Essentials of Sage Learning* to be included in royal lectures.³⁶

It required four months for Yi Hwang to complete the *Ten Diagrams on Sage Learning* upon his return to his hometown in 1568 after presenting the *Memorandum on Six Points* (戊辰六條疏) to the 17-year-old King Seonjo and participating in royal lectures as many as nine times. His return home may have been due to his advanced age and the new king not appearing sufficiently mature for the

³³ Here, he seems to be referring to the *eui* (意) of *seong-eui* (誠意, sincere intention), one of the eight items cataloged in the *Great Learning* (大學). In the *Great Learning-Old Version* (古本大學), *seong-eui* (誠意) was considered a more important method of learning and cultivation than *perfecting knowledge by investigating the principle of things* (格物致知).

³⁴ For further details on the relationship between Yi Hwang's *eui* (意) and changes in physical character (氣質變化), see Hyounghan Kim (2009).

³⁵ 李珣, 「上退溪先生問目」, 『栗谷全書』, 44:182a-184b.

³⁶ According to Ji Du-hwan (1995), the *Essentials of Sage Learning* was officially adopted as a textbook for royal lectures as late as the late 17th century.

elderly scholar to actualize his ideals. Still hoping for the young king to develop into a truly wise ruler, he wrote the book for the king.³⁷

The *Ten Diagrams on Sage Learning* is a work summarizing Sage Learning by means of ten diagrams and accompanying commentaries. However, none of the content is directly related to politics. It condenses human ethics into ten items based on the principle of the creation of the universe and the structure of the human mind-heart, as well as method of practice and education. As Yi Hwang described it, this method of explanation stemming from the universe and its origination follows the system of *Reflections on Things at Hand* (近思錄).³⁸ While the later portion of *Reflections on Things at Hand* is allotted in large part to the nature and methods of politics, Yi Hwang's book does not include any content directly treating politics, but is instead focused on the cultivation of personality.

The *Ten Diagrams on Sage Learning*, totaling ten chapters, features a diagram and short commentary from Yi Hwang on each respective chapter. With the exception of his own commentaries, the bulk of the diagrams and writings are excerpted from the works of ancient sages. Therefore, the most revealing way to understand Yi Hwang's suggested reforms within the book is through its overall structure rather than the content of a particular chapter. He divided the work into two sections, stating that the first five chapters are "based on the *cosmic order* (天道) but they are about upholding the moral principles of humanity and accumulating virtuous achievements"³⁹ while the following five pages are "based on the *mind-heart* (心性) and the gist is striving for daily learning and cultivating a mind of awe and respect"⁴⁰. Identifying the *cosmic order* and *mind-heart* as the two core theories of Sage Learning, Yi Hwang summarized the two concepts on chapters 1-2 and 6-7, respectively, and corresponding practice methods on chapters 3-5 and 8-10. The entire process of learning, cultivation, and practice that "uphold the moral principles of humanity and accumulate virtuous achievements" and "strive for daily learning and cultivating a mind of awe and respect" has its basis in the *cosmic order* and *mind-heart* and solely through such daily practice should the *cosmic order* and *mind-heart* be manifested. Sage politics, which was not mentioned at all in this book, would flow as a natural consequence of such learning and cultivation.

In the *Diagram of the Saying*, "*The Mind Combines and Governs the Nature and the Feelings*" (心統性情圖), which Yi Hwang sketched himself, he described in the second drawing an ideal state in which mind controls nature and emotions (心統性情). His theory of *four beginnings* and *seven emotions* (四端七情說) appears in the third illustration regarding how moral emotions should be distinguished based on the virtue-vice criteria. It was his position that the direction that should be pursued by humans should be clarified by identifying moral emotions as virtue or vice from their very origin. He concludes the book by emphasizing awe and respect for the *Lord on High* (上帝). To Yi Hwang, who saw *li* (理, principle), *dao* (道, way), and *Great Absolute* (太極) as the movement of the *Mandate of Heaven* (天命), the *Lord on High* was the origin of *li*.

³⁷ 李滉, 「進聖學十圖節」, 『退溪集』, 29:197d-200a.

³⁸ 李滉, 「第一太極圖」, 『退溪集』, 29:201c.

³⁹ 李滉, 「第五白鹿洞規圖」, 『退溪集』, 29:206c.

⁴⁰ 李滉, 「第十夙興夜寐箴圖」, 『退溪集』, 29:213a-b.

While *li*, as universal principle/law that both fills and flows through the universe/nature from the origin of being, was internalized as the moral nature of humans in Zhu Xi's philosophy (性即理), Yi Hwang believed that Sage Learning could be practiced holistically by considering the *Lord on High* as an external object and treating it with awe and respect.⁴¹ Although physical character (氣質) may interrupt the materialization of *li*, Yi Hwang's attention was directed at the equal relationships between moral nature (性), universal principle (*li*, 理), *Mandate of Heaven* (天命), and *Lord on High* (上帝). According to him, focusing on the equal relationships between the four elements with an attitude of respect from the unaroused state and through the arousal is the most effective way to materialize moral nature and principle. In addition, such learning and cultivation is the most appropriate path to becoming a sage and sage politics can be achieved as a result of such learning and cultivation on the part of a wise king.

In comparison, Yi I's *Essentials of Sage Learning* presents highly specific details of practice methods ranging from the cultivation of personality to the principle and methods of politics. Extracting *cultivating the mind and body* (修身), *stabilizing the family* (齊家), *ruling the state* (治國), and *bringing peace throughout the world* (平天下) from among the eight items of the *Great Learning* (大學) as its basic framework, the *Essentials of Sage Learning* is focused on the aspect of practice rather than being an exploration into the fundamental principle of politics. However, he seems to have considered the *Great Learning* to be rather simplistic although it contains techniques for attaining the vast knowledge of the *Four Books and Six Classics* (四書六經). He highly valued the *Extended Meaning of the Great Learning* (大學衍義) published by Zhen Dexiu (真德秀) for supplementation, but commented that "it is too voluminous, incoherent, and rather more of a history book describing the development of events than an academic system"⁴². He wanted to create a new textbook on Sage Learning as systematic as the *Great Learning* and with commentaries more succinct than the *Extended Meaning of the Great Learning*. The product of this desire was the *Essentials of Sage Learning*.

Unlike Yi Hwang's *Ten Diagrams on Sage Learning*, which was focused on cultivation of mind and body (修身) from the very conception, Yi I had in mind a textbook for Sage Learning spanning the entire range of *cultivating the mind and body* (修身), *stabilizing the family* (齊家), *ruling the state* (治國), and *bringing peace throughout the world* (平天下). With this aim clearly revealed through the organization of the book, its chapters progress from *cultivating oneself* (修己) to *proper family governance* (正家), *practicing governance* (為政), and to the last chapter devoted to the *Lineage of Sages' Dao* (聖賢道統), underlining the legitimacy of his Sage Learning based on Zhu Xi's philosophy. Still, he placed a great deal of emphasis on self-cultivation. There was no disagreement between Yi Hwang and Yi I in that both *ruling the state* (治國) and *bringing peace throughout the world* (平天下)

⁴¹ The *Lord on High* (上帝) and *Heaven* (天), which were frequently referred to as personified gods in Pre-Qin Confucian scriptures, were replaced by abstract concepts such as *li* (理), *Great Absolute* (太極), and *dao* (道) as the *Seong Li* philosophy was formed through the era of Confucius and Mencius. Yi Hwang strongly emphasized the role of *li*. Even until the era of Yi Hwang, however, the *Lord on High* was still revered as a personified god. While reinterpreting the role of *li*, Yi Hwang also underscored the awe and respect for the *Lord on High*. This may draw criticism for being contradictory in Yi Hwang's philosophy, but it appears that Yi Hwang believed that the combination of internal cultivation through *li* and external vigilance through the *Lord on High* was effective in the actualization of moral ideals. For more details, see Hyoungchan Kim (2010).

⁴² 李珣, 「聖學輯要-序」, 『栗谷全書』, 44:422d.

stem from the ruler's learning and cultivation and expanded to the family, village, country, and finally to the universe. While a smaller portion than in Yi Hwang's book, still almost a full half of the *Extended Meaning of the Great Learning* is devoted to self-cultivation. Unlike Yi Hwang, however, who was solely focused on the preservation and achievement of an equal relationship between moral nature (性), universal principle (*li*, 理), *Mandate of Heaven* (天命), and *Lord on High* (上帝), the most important point in Yi I's version of self-cultivation was changes in physical character.

He stated, "I consider there to be nothing more urgent in the learning of a ruler than cultivating his physical character, and nothing more urgent in the ruler's governance than receiving recommendations on and employing wise and honest talent. The cultivation of physical character can be achieved only when it is performed as if diagnosing an illness and prescribing a treatment. Receiving recommendations on and employing wise and honest talent will succeed only when there is no gap between top and bottom."⁴³

According to Yi I, the core of the education of a ruler lies in cultivating physical character and the highest priority in his governance is the employment of wise and honest individuals. When viewed from this perspective, the education of a ruler that changes physical character is learning and cultivation at the personal level and the governance of a ruler that utilizes wise subordinates transforms the physical character surrounding the *li* of the country, which is that of the ruler. As in learning and cultivation at a personal level, what is important in politics is creating an environment that enables the actualization of moral ideals.

However, Yi I places the establishment of *ji* (志, intention) ahead of transformation of physical character in relation to self-cultivation. According to him, one should establish a goal upon setting out to learn, and this is not simply related to a ruler. In the *Secret of Expelling Ignorance* (擊蒙要訣), a book offering educational guidelines that he wrote for beginning learners two years after completing the *Essentials of Sage Learning*, he similarly promoted the establishment of *ji* as the first step in learning.⁴⁴

According to him, *ji* here means that *eui* (意) has been defined. In other words, the operation of *eui* that contemplates and observes (計較商量) occurs upon an arousal of emotions and the establishment of a responding orientation in the mind is *ji* (志). Given that such moral emotions and judgments are frequently sparked in a very brief instant, it is difficult to define the order of occurrence between emotion, *eui*, and *ji*. For the convenience of explanation, however, Yi I placed emotion first, followed by *eui* and then *ji*.⁴⁵

In sum, the transformation of physical character occurs through the functioning of emotion, *eui*, and *ji*, and such transformation lies at the center of the success of Sage Learning, which to Yi I equals *cultivating the mind and body* (修身), *stabilizing the family* (齊家), *ruling the state* (治國), and *bringing peace throughout the world* (平天下), as well as Sage Politics. In other words, will and

⁴³ 李珣, 「聖學輯要-進筭」, 『栗谷全書』, 44:420d.

⁴⁴ *Secret of Expelling Ignorance* was completed in 1577, two years after Yi I presented the *Essentials of Sage Learning* to King Seonjo.

⁴⁵ 李珣, 「聖學輯要」, 『栗谷全書』, 44:458b-d.

intention (意志) purify the physical character and actualize the ideology of *li*, and the education of a ruler is practicing it at the level of personal learning and cultivation, while the politics of a ruler is applying it to actual operations.

6. Conclusion: political choices, political thoughts, and philosophical interpretations

Yi Hwang and Yi I, one generation apart, each played a central role in Joseon's academic and political areas. They have more common ground than they do differences. They lived in nearly the same period and under similar social and political circumstances, all within the same nation. They also cared dearly for one another and influenced succeeding generations to a similar extent.

Nevertheless, their positions are often described as conflicting. This is primarily attributed to the fact that the two were considered heads of the opposing schools and political factions that later split Joseon's intellectual society and political circles. As a result, the differences in their academic perspectives and political positions became a focus and disciples of each school used such discrepancies to denounce others and strengthen their own position. They share a number of convergences, but their differences have been brought to the fore over the long course of historic and academic evaluations.

This paper has attempted to interpret the departures in their academic perspectives as they relate to their political choices and thoughts. The focus of this comparative research was directed at how they defined the role of humans in materializing their common ideology. They shared a goal of forging a nation and society that achieves the moral ideals represented by *li* (理). This objective can be approached at two levels: learning and cultivation at the personal level and striving to materialize these ideals at the national and social level. While the former centers on self-cultivation to attain the ideals represented by *li* at the personal level, the latter is related to *stabilizing the family* (齊家), *ruling the state* (治國), and *bringing peace throughout the world* (平天下) to bring about the ideals together with others.

Yi Hwang approached *li* from two directions. One is that *li*, which is a universal principle and law, is given as a component of human nature (性). That means that the universal principle and law exists internal to humans. Yi Hwang emphasized the study of the unaroused state of 'seong=*li*' undisturbed by physical character in order to fully preserve and materialize the internalized universal principle in actuality. Believing *li* to be the movement of the *Mandate of Heaven*, he considered *li* itself to be a driving factor in the actualization of morality. The role of humans is to protect this *li* in its entirety and allow it to be revealed within itself. As far as he was concerned, whether or not physical character interrupts learning and cultivation was a separate matter. He also believed that *li* was provided as the *Mandate of Heaven* by the *Lord on High*. While *li* is internalized in human nature (性), the *Lord on High* as its origin remains an object for awe and respect. In this regard, humans should study from an unaroused state while remaining continuously alert with awe and respect for the *Lord on High* so that 'seong = *li*' can be properly preserved and manifested holistically in order for the nature provided by the *Lord on High* to be fully revealed. Here, the center of learning, cultivation, and practice is at the origin of moral perception, judgment, and behavior, which is the equal relationship between the *Lord*

on *High* (上帝), *Mandate of Heaven* (天命), universal principle (理), and moral nature (性), while humans are assigned the role of both preserving and manifesting it. By the same token, the actualization of Sage Politics comes as a consequence of internal learning and cultivation of moral principles and nature, as well as external vigilance for the origin of such moral principles.

Meanwhile, Yi I turned to the role of the physical character surrounding *li* rather than the pure and complete *li* itself. Whether or not *li* or *seong* can be fully materialized depends on physical character. However, if the principle of the *ligi* theory of “what arises is *gi* and what causes the arousal *li*” is strictly applied, Yi I’s argument fails to provide a driving force able to manipulate physical character. Here, Yi I noted *eui* (意) and *ji* (志) as functions of mind. He argues that humans, one of the three main elements of the universe along with Heaven (天) and Earth (地), can purify the physical character of nature and society, which is constructed through *li* and *gi*, by means of their *eui* (意) or conscious perception, judgment, and will. According to him, once one’s nature (性) is manifested as an emotion (情), the direction of the mind is determined (志) and the physical character is purified through *eui* or the function of perception, judgment, and will. As a result, the person and the world can be changed toward the good (善).

Valuing awe and respect for the *Lord on High*, and efforts to draw to the fore the purity and completeness of ‘*li = seong*’, Yi Hwang underscored the importance to study of unarousal at the personal level. In the meantime, Yi I purported that moral emotions can be converted into virtue (善) by contemplating and observing as well as by purifying the revealed emotion and transforming the physical character. His emphasis was on the study of the arousal after ‘*li = seong*’ has been revealed at the surface. These theoretical stances are conducive to understanding the approaches taken by the two scholars and their succeeding schools and political factions.

Unlike Yi Hwang, who exerted indirect influence over politics while devoting himself to his own academic study and education in his hometown, Yi I directly participated in the governance of the nation from the political heart. While Yi Hwang’s *Memorandum on Six Points* (戊辰六條疏) and *Ten Diagrams on Sage Learning* (聖學十圖) are focused on the learning and cultivation of the ruler, Yi I’s *Essentials of Sage Learning* (聖學輯要) addresses practical political aspects ranging from self-cultivation to *stabilizing the family* (齊家), *ruling the state* (治國), and *bringing peace throughout the world* (平天下). Furthermore, the Toegye school and Namin (南人) supported monarchism under the governance of a well cultivated ruler, while the Yulgok school and Seoin (西人) preferred the governance of officials and Confucian scholars under a monarchy.

This attempt to link the academic perspectives and political choices of these two scholars requires further reflection on history and political history. However, this paper presents a potential philosophical interpretation to explain their political choices and considerations by comparing the theories of *Seong Li* philosophy with which they were intimately involved.

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