

The Formation of The Concept *Li* in the Song Confucianism of Nature and Principle

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Abstract

The Song dynasty emerged by ending decades of war and conflicts and China saw a series of unified dynasties after Song. One of the defining characteristics of Song was that it was the dynasty run by intellectuals rather than military leaders. What guided the “reason” of the Song intellectuals consisted of two elements: the theory of institutional reform and the theory of moral self-cultivation. *Li* (理, principle) was the key concept in the theory of moral self-cultivation. Hanfeizi transformed Laozi’s concept of *Dao* (道) into *Li* (理). Huayen Buddhism explains the relationship between the things in the universe in causal terms in reference to *shi* (事) and *li* (理). Zhang Zai, a renowned Northern Song Confucian, explained the world composed of Sky, Earth, and (the myriad) things in terms of “the Great Void and the Guest-like Object”(太虛-客形) structure. However, Cheng Hao criticized Zhang Zai and suggested the concept of one cosmic living body as an alternative, pointing out that everything and all virtue are therein. Then Cheng I recast the metaphysical theories developed by Zhang Zai and Cheng Hao in terms of *li* and *qi*, which was embraced by Zhu Xi, a Southern Song Neo-Confucian. Zhu Xi engages in famous debates with Lu Chiu-yuan, who regarded the heart-mind as *li* itself, and Chen Liang who paid far more attention to material reality.

Short Biography

Youngsick Son is a Professor Emeritus in University of Ulsan. He was a former president of UNU professor’s association. He has been a Professor for 33 years (1991-2022) in Department of Philosophy, University of Ulsan. He received his Ph.D. from the Seoul National University on ‘(A) Study of philosophical arguments in neo-confucian philosophy of Sung dynasty’. He’s majoring in oriental philosophy, especially keep having a research interest on Neo-confucianism of China & Korea and Pre-Qin philosophy. He is the author of several books including *Reason and the Reality: Philosophical Dispute in the Song Neo-Confucianism*, and *The Historic and Philosophical Adventure in Joseon, The Philosophy of the School of Names; Hui Shi and Gong-son ryong, The metaphysics of Neo-Confucianism*. He also co-authored several books including *The Faith of China: Mozi, Laozi and Nietzsche*.

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