

Toegye's Philosophy as Practical Ethics: A System of Learning, Cultivation, and Practice of Being Human

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Abstract

Yi Hwang was a Korean scholar who further developed Neo-Confucianism on the foundation of Zhu Xi's philosophy. However, when some of the Neo-Confucian concepts and logic found in Zhu Xi's philosophy are applied to Yi Hwang's theoretical framework, the following problems arise: (1) his emphasis on Xinjing fuzhu (Selected Scriptures on the Mind-Heart with Notes) and personality cultivation is rather inclined towards Yangming's philosophy; (2) the concept of the issuance of i defies the very definition of i; (3) and the interpretation of Heaven as a transcendental being is highly controversial. Yi Hwang suggested that the ultimate Neo-Confucian goal is to practice its ideology in everyday life. This affected the formation of his theory and thus causes these problems. Consequently, one cannot discuss the merits of Yi Hwang's simseong theory without examining his cultivation theory. Toegye's Philosophy was produced in the course of dynamic theoretical interaction where one's learning is combined with cultivation and culminates in practice. Therefore, pursuit of practice is the main constituent, not an obstacle, to the completion of Toegye's philosophy.

Keywords: Neo-Confucianism, Korean Confucianism, Sage Learning, Toegye, Yi Hwang, Four-Seven debate, cultivation, theory and practice

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Sage Learning and Yi Hwang's Philosophy

Korean Neo-Confucian intellectuals during the Joseon dynasty from the fifteenth to nineteenth centuries often called their philosophy "Sage Learning" (Seonghak). As the name implies, it was the study of how to become a "sage." In Confucianism, sage was defined as a person with thorough knowledge of Confucianism, who internalized its culture and practiced its principles on a daily basis. Since the era of Confucius, sages were always viewed as ideal human beings in the Confucian tradition. For ordinary people to become a sage (or a "wise man," one level below a sage), they had to learn skills and cultivate themselves in the six arts (ritual, music, archery, chariotting, letters, and mathematics) over a considerable period of time. Neo-Confucianism developed as a far more metaphysical philosophy than Confucianism, where becoming a sage or wise man required a broader range of education and cultivation as well as learning the scriptures and teachings of Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism.

Toegye Yi Hwang (1501-1570), one of the leading Korean Neo-Confucian scholars in the Joseon dynasty, studied and practiced Neo-Confucianism, and spread its teachings to the world through his writings and scholarship. His commitment is amply demonstrated in *Seonghak sipdo* (Ten Diagrams on Sage Learning), a masterpiece which contains the essence of his academic works over his lifetime. Written for King Seonjo who ascended to the throne at the age of seventeen, *Seonghak sipdo* introduced the main theories and teachings of Neo-Confucianism, including the principle of origination of the universe, relations between humans and nature (or the universe), the structure and working of morality, and the best method for daily studies and practice. It was written to help the young king to grow up to be an "inner sage and outer sovereign," the ideal Confucian king. The book also contains the key elements of the Four-Seven theory (*sadan chiljeong ron*, i.e., the theory of the Four Beginnings and the Seven Emotions), the major academic accomplishment of Yi Hwang, in the sixth chapter "Diagram and Explanation for 'the Mind-

Heart Combines and Governs Nature and Emotions.’”¹

The purpose of this paper is to show that Yi Hwang’s theory of Sage Learning, though based on general Neo-Confucian concepts and logic, went beyond them and developed into a unique system of thought founded on Neo-Confucian Sage Learning.

Previous studies of Yi Hwang have tended to focus on the Four-Seven theory among his various writings. Indeed, the debate over the Four Beginnings and the Seven Emotions between Yi Hwang and Ki Dae-seung (Gobong: 1527-1572) was an important academic milestone as it involved a great number of Joseon intellectuals and made a substantial impact on the direction of Korean Confucianism afterwards. However, the Four-Seven theory that explains the manifestation process of human’s moral nature is only a small part of Yi Hwang’s theory of Sage Learning. Therefore, the theory cannot be fully understood unless examined from the overall perspective of Yi Hwang’s Sage Learning. Nevertheless, the study of the Four-Seven theory has remained the primary focus of the study of Yi Hwang’s philosophy due to unique circumstances in Korea.

Since the end of the nineteenth century, the rapid and forceful inflow of Western culture greatly undermined the academic foundation of Korean traditional philosophy. As a result, scholars in Korea found themselves reevaluating and restructuring their traditional philosophy according to the framework of the modern sciences imported from the West. Therefore, among many areas of traditional Korean philosophy, they focused on those to which it was relatively easy to apply a Western academic framework. As for Korean Confucianism, particularly well-studied areas were *igi* (principle and matter) theory and *simseong* (mind-heart and human nature) theory. Indeed, they were very important themes within Confucianism in the Joseon era, but the main reason for the attention they received was their theoretical characteristics. *Igi* theory explains the origination and operation

1. “Simtong seongjeong doseol” 心統性情圖說 (Diagram and Explanation for the Mind-Heart Combines and Governs Nature and Emotions), in Yi H. (1988, vol.1, 7:22b-25a).

of the universe and objects with the two concepts of *i* and *gi*; *simseong* theory explains the structure and operation of humans’ moral nature based on *igi* theory. For studies centered on *igi* and *simseong* theories, the research methods of Western modern philosophy were relatively easy to apply, as it focuses on clear concepts and elaborate logic. The Four-Seven theory, which developed from serious debate among Neo-Confucian scholars, was indeed a very appropriate subject for *igi*- or *simseong*-focused research.

Sage Learning was the study of how people should study and practice to become a sage themselves and found a morally ideal society on Confucian values. In other words, it teaches training skills for becoming an ideal human being and administration techniques for building an ideal society. Therefore, when we explore the theoretical depths of the concepts of *igi* and *simseong*, our research would be meaningless, however elaborate and sophisticated they may be, unless they take into full consideration the overall structure and function of Sage Learning, especially its practical aspects. Korean Confucian scholars have worked on these issues since the 1990s with a particular emphasis on the study of Toegye’s philosophy.²

Since Toegye’s philosophy has always been the most studied, both quantitatively and qualitatively, among research into not only Korean Confucianism but also all of Korean philosophy, fundamental reflection on Toegye’s philosophy inevitably involves Korean Confucianism and Korean philosophy in general. Approaches based on *do* philosophy (learning of the way) and *sim* philosophy (learning of the mind-heart) have been suggested as alternatives to prevalent *igi*- and *simseong*-based research methods,³ and can be applied not only to Toegye’s philosophy but also to the entire framework of Korean Con-

2. Leading studies include who examined the results of research on Toegye’s philosophy from this perspective. Also noteworthy is the debate with regards to Korean Confucianism that has been conducted through the semiannual *Oneul-ui dongyang sasang* (Issues in East Asian Philosophy), since 2001.

3. Some researchers criticize the *igi* theory-based research trend. However, the author uses the term “*igi*- and *simseong*-based” research to indicate that the main trend of research should be studied based on *simseong* theory, and *igi* theory is to be used as a framework for analysis.

fucianism. Such efforts are expected to go beyond the confines of Toegye's philosophy towards a full-fledged discussion and study of the research methodology for Korean Confucianism. In this context, this paper aims to critically review previous studies on Toegye's philosophy and explore alternative research methods for it.

Ihak, Dohak, and Simhak

Although debate continues on how to define the characteristics of Toegye's philosophy, there seems to be a consensus among scholars that "the concurrent issuance of *i* and *gi*" (*igi hobal*) and "the issuance of *i*" (*ibal*) are a critical part of it. From the perspective of *igi* and *simseong* theories, Toegye's philosophy is the *i* philosophy, the most representative of the *i*-centrism in Joseon. Despite concerns and criticism raised sporadically since the 1970s, the major research trend of this period is already weighted toward *igi*- and *simseong*-based studies.⁴ During the 1980s and 1990s, however, some scholars pointed out that such approaches fell short of reaching the essence of Toegye's philosophy, and continued to explore alternative routes: Kim Kihyun, Lee Kwangho, and others argued that the essence of Toegye's philosophy lies in "learning of the Way" (*dohak*),⁵ while Ahn Byug-ju, Shin Gui-hyeon, Hong Wonsik, and Kim Jongseok focused on "learning of the mind-heart" (*simhak*) in Toegye's philosophy.⁶

The approach that focuses on *dohak* is noteworthy since Toegye's philosophy consistently tried to place practice of morality in daily life at the center of research. Traditionally, they thought Neo-Confucianism should be a practical guide for moral life beyond a mere academic theory, and practice of morality was the ultimate goal sought by Yi Hwang and other Joseon Confucian scholars. Therefore,

4. Kim J. (1997, 123-124).

5. Research results include Kim K. (1988) and Lee K. (1993).

6. Refer to Ahn (1987); Shin (1987); Kim J. (1994); Hong (2001).

broaching the subject of *dohak* in studying Toegye's philosophy was deemed proper and insightful.

However, previous works on the *dohak*-based approach in studying Toegye's philosophy failed to provide an objective and logical explanation concerning some essential issues as follows: the role of the theoretical research process and outcomes in realizing the goal of practicing morality; the intervention of moral judgment, behavior or intention in theoretical study; the assessment method to determine whether Toegye's philosophy successfully connected theoretical study and practice of morality. Indeed, it is a considerably difficult task considering that it should solve the problem of "linguistic presentation of practice" or "of orientation toward practice." Research conducted through the *dohak*-based approach can hardly achieve the status of a modern philosophical theory until the problem is solved. This situation may be the reason why the *dohak*-based approach did not attract support from many scholars.

The *simhak*-based approach, which shares much of the same research tendencies and the critical stance of the *dohak*-based approach that emphasizes "ethics for practice," also seemed to recognize the problem of the latter. Scholars who adopted this approach attributed *igi*- and *simseong*-centered research results to "characteristics of *ihak* in *simhak*" and tried to theorize their approach to secure unique academic status for "Toegye's *simhak*" within the horizon of East Asian Confucianism. However, they were preoccupied with the time-consuming debates seeking to distinguish "Toegye's *simhak*" in particular from "*simhak*"—an appellation given to refer to Liu Xiangshan and Wang Yangming's philosophy—even before a full-blown discussion commenced. Moreover, it is doubtful whether we should use the term *simhak* in discussing Toegye's philosophy. Although Hong Wonsik's attempt to define Toegye's *ihak* as a subordinate element of *simhak*, or Kim Jongseok's consistent effort to reinterpret the Four-Seven theory through *simhak*-based approach are meaningful, most research of Toegye's *simhak* seems to be limited to retracing the *igi*- and *simseong*-focused study. In particular, considering the fact that Toegye's *simhak* depends on his *ihak*, many more research

findings will have to be accumulated to establish Toegye's *simhak* as a theoretically solid system in which his *ihak* can be included as a subordinate unit.

The concerns previously raised and the related research so far are significant as they bring attention to the areas disregarded by *igi*- and *simseong*-centered studies. However, it is not likely that any other research so far conducted can be comparable or can serve as an alternative to the *igi*- and *simseong*-focused research, due to the fact that the new attempts tend to be deprived of the methodological strengths of *igi*- and *simseong*-based studies, leading to few efforts made to actively utilize such academic research produced and accumulated by Korean scholars. As a result, many researchers have been taking an excessively long detour to study Toegye's philosophy.

From Zhu Xi's Philosophy to Toegye's Philosophy

This paper agrees with the argument of some researchers that most studies on Korean Confucianism including Toegye's philosophy tend to focus on *igi* and *simseong* theories, and fail to fully examine other remarkable characteristics of Korean Confucianism. Most *igi*- and *simseong*-based studies adopt the main concepts—*i*, *gi*, *sim*, *seong*, emotion, Four Beginnings, Seven Emotions, human mind, moral mind, natural law, human desire, perception, and issuance—from Korean Confucian scriptures, and offer logical analyses of these concepts. However, since the main concepts and theoretical system of Korean Confucianism are intertwined with the practical goal of realizing Confucian (or Neo-Confucian) ideology in a social context, research methods based on clear concepts and elaborate logic alone cannot cover the essence and totality of Korean philosophy. Despite this limitation, however, the *igi*- and *simseong*-based methodologies in studying Korean Confucianism are undoubtedly faithful to that of the modern learning system as it approaches Korean Confucianism by using non-contradictory concepts and a verifiable logical structure, which is why many scholars have so far studied Korean Confu-

cianism with a focus on the notions of *igi* and *simseong*. Moreover, granting that this research method has its own problems, no alternatives have yet been developed to replace it in the field of Korean Confucianism. Therefore, the paper believes that *igi* and *simseong* theories are undeniably a standard in the research of Korean Confucianism. However, it should be also noted that the paper attempts to identify areas of Korean Confucianism in which this research method is less applicable, by more strictly applying the most widely examined *igi* and *simseong* theories.

More concretely, this paper focuses on the parts or areas that have so far been largely difficult for applying *igi*- and *simseong*-based studies of Toegye's philosophy and reviews the issues that cannot be resolved by applying the main concepts and logic of *igi* and *simseong* theories, hence intentionally or unintentionally overlooked. To that end, the paper examines the relationship between *domunhak* ("following the path of inquiry and study") and *jondeokseong* ("honoring the good inborn qualities of one's nature"); the concept of the issuance of *i* (*ibal*); and the interpretation of *cheon* (*tian*, Heaven) as a transcendental being. These three subjects are difficult to explain neatly with the logic of the *igi* and *simseong* theories. However, such difficulty indicates that they reflect the primal characteristics of Toegye's philosophy outside the *igi* and *simseong* context.

Domunhak and *Jondeokseong*

Neo-Confucianism is a theory whose main tenet is that people can and should form a harmonious society structured on the foundation of Confucianism according to their inborn moral nature. It advocates the necessity and inevitability for humans to build a morally ideal society on the following grounds: (1) all beings and their actions are composed of a combination of *i* (principle or law) and *gi* (matter or energy); (2) in nature, there is a constant principle (*i*), which is the law of physics and at the same time the law of ethics, and its contents are represented by the four virtues (origination, flourishing, benefiting, and firmness); (3) the four virtues in nature are given to

an entity, a product of nature, and becomes its moral nature (*seong*) made up of five moral virtues (benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and belief); (4) the clearer and purer the *gi* is that is combined with *i* (or nature), the more completely *i* (or nature) is revealed; and (5) in all of existence, *gi* of human beings is the clearest and purest, and of that, *gi* of the mind-heart is the clearest and purest.

The ultimate goal of Neo-Confucianism is not only to build a logically strong theory based on these assumptions but also to realize the ideology of Neo-Confucianism in daily life through practice and cultivation of what is learned from the theory. So, the issue is, regardless of the strength of the theory, whether people are able to actually put it into practice in their daily lives. Human life is too complicated to be explained with this theory, and in many cases, those who have a good rational understanding of the theory still engage in illogical judgments and behavior.

Moreover, Yi Hwang had to face the situation that the idealism of Neo-Confucianism as a national ideology was being rapidly undermined through a series of political changes lasting 150 years since the foundation of the Joseon dynasty, though Neo-Confucian scholars were still deeply involved in politics. When Yi Hwang became a public official, however, the long-standing confrontation between Hungupa supporters (meritorious elites who contributed to the foundation of Joseon) and Sarimpa supporters (Neo-Confucian literati) had already unravelled, and maternal relatives of the royal family were dominating state power. The continued political strife inflicted sacrifice on Sarimpa intellectuals, who were the most dedicated to Neo-Confucianism, leading to Yi Hwang's decision to retire from the political scene where it was too difficult to realize Neo-Confucian ideals. He returned to his hometown of Andong, where he opened the Dosan Seodang (*seodang*: private Confucian school) to study and teach Neo-Confucianism, and instituted the Ye-an Hyangyak (*hyangyak*: community compact) to spread its ideals. This was the setting that he established to commit himself to Neo-Confucianism.⁷

In Andong, Yi Hwang focused his study on Zhu Xi's philosophy, which was the state ideology and foundation of learning and education. In China, criticism of Zhu Xi's philosophy was rising, and Wang Yangming's philosophy was gaining popularity. Nevertheless, the former was the most advanced philosophy in Northeast Asia at the time. By excerpting Zhu Xi's writings, Yi Hwang put together *Jujaseo jeoryo* (Essentials of Zhu Xi's Correspondence) and authored *Songgye wonmyeong ihak tongnok* (A History of Chinese Neo-Confucianism) to elucidate the genealogy of Zhu Xi's philosophy.⁸ Works such as these clearly show that he was very faithful to Zhu Xi's philosophy. Of the three books that he valued most, attention should first be given to *Xinjing fuzhu* (Selected Scriptures on the Mind-Heart with Notes).⁹ While the other two books, *Xingli daquan* (Great Compendium on Human Nature and Principle) and *Zhuzi quanshu* (Complete Works of Zhu Xi) were generally admired as the most basic, *Xinjing fuzhu* did not draw much interest from Zhu Xi's followers and was even criticized for favoring Yangming's philosophy. However, Yi Hwang disapproved of such criticism and recommended the book to his disciples. He set a high value on it, calling it equal in importance to the *Four Books* or *Jinsilu* (Reflections on Things at Hand).¹⁰

The reason for Yi Hwang's emphasis on *Xinjing fuzhu* was that it was an appropriate guideline for combining theoretical study (*domunhak*) and cultivation of mind-heart and nature (*jondeok-seong*). He believed that Confucian study was biased towards theory, when theory and practice should be mutually complementary in Confucianism.¹¹ This trend continued since Zhu Xi, and *Xinjing* (Selected Scriptures on the Mind-Heart) and *Xinjing fuzhu* were written in

7. Regarding the life of Yi Hwang, refer to "Toegye seonsaeng yeonbo" (A Chronological Record of Master Toegye) in Yi H. (1988, vol. 3); Kim H. (2007a, 245-251).

8. For details regarding the influence of Neo-Confucian books on the process of Yi Hwang's philosophy, refer to Yi S. (1999, 83-107).

9. The fact that Yi Hwang paid special attention to *Xinjing fuzhu* (Selected Scriptures on the Mind-Heart with Notes) is an important basis for some researchers to define Toegye's philosophy as the "learning of the mind-heart."

10. "Simgyeong huron" 心經後論 in Yi H. (1988, vol. 2, 41:11b).

11. "Simgyeong huron" in Yi H. (1988, vol. 2, 41:13a-b).

order to correct this imbalance:¹² Zhen Dexiu, a follower of Zhu Xi's ideas, wrote and edited *Xinjing* by collecting writings related to the cultivation of personality, and Cheng Minzheng from the Ming dynasty authored *Xinjing fuzhu*, adding his comments to *Xinjing*. While Zhu Xi made great efforts at strict analysis and reinterpretation of scriptures on the basis of his systematic theory, these books gave primary attention to the cultivation of personality.

However, "cultivation" is a subject to which it is difficult to apply research methods based on *igi* and *simseong* theories. Between *domunhak* and *jondeokseong*, the former means to learn and study Confucian scriptures and theories, while the latter means to practice what is learned and studied. *Xinjing fuzhu* is a book about *jondeokseong*, which repeatedly emphasizes the practice of "mindfulness" (*gyeong*): this became a very important part of Yi Hwang's philosophy. The "mindfulness" method, by which one maintains a tension of consciousness and focuses on the "event" that one is facing, was important in studying and practicing to apply the theoretical study of Neo-Confucianism to daily life. Yi Hwang tried to use it to complement the attitude of *domunhak* in Zhu Xi's philosophy, and strengthen the discipline of *jondeokseong*. He consistently emphasized the attitude of "mindfulness" both for studying and living daily life in *The Ten Diagrams on Sage Learning*, which contains the key components of Neo-Confucianism.¹³ He suggested the concept of "mindfulness" as a substitute for the critical mind in *Xinjing* and *Xinjing fuzhu*, stating

12. "Simgyeong huron" in Yi H. (1988, vol. 2, 41:11b-12a). It is another problem whether Zhu Xi himself was really biased toward theoretical study or not. Zhu Xi also emphasized that theoretical study must always be accompanied by mental cultivation when he debated the problem with Liu Jiuyuan. Modern scholars like Qian Mu (1971) and Chen Lai (1987) insisted that Zhu Xi's philosophy was not biased. However, even in his day, it was often said that Zhu Xi focused largely on theoretical study. And Yi Hwang thought that Zhu Xi's followers focused mainly on theoretical study no matter what Zhu Xi himself might have argued.

13. In "Presenting *The Ten Diagrams on Sage Learning* to King Seonjo," Yi Hwang insisted that the King should always assume an attitude of mindfulness (持敬), and constantly emphasized "mindfulness" in almost all the diagrams or supplementary explanations in *The Ten Diagrams on Sage Learning*.

that *domunhak* should be revised and *jondeokseong* should be intensified. Therefore, some scholars claim that "the learning or philosophy of mindfulness" is an important feature of Yi Hwang's philosophy.¹⁴

Yi Hwang established his own philosophical framework, but advocated the importance of practice more than any other scholars of Neo-Confucianism. He criticized Yangming's philosophy for overlooking the importance of moral practice and training despite its great emphasis on practice. However, he agreed with Wang Yangming's opinion as expressed in his criticism of popular attitudes of Zhu Xi's followers. Wang stated, "These days, people say they will put it into practice after they learn it correctly, but they never start practicing it nor do they learn it well."¹⁵ Yi Hwang noted that learning without practice is meaningless, and no learning can be true knowledge without being followed by practice as Wang did. However, Yi Hwang deemed that Wang's philosophy mainly concentrated on internal cultivation and failed to pay due attention to practical learning and daily effort. Yi Hwang compared Wang Yangming's philosophy with Buddhism, saying, "Wang Yangming swept everything away and reduced it all to the original mind-heart, then spoke ambiguously . . . only because he was worried that external things might cause troubles upon the mind-heart."¹⁶

While accepting Wang Yangming's criticism of Zhu Xi's overemphasis on tedious theoretical study, Yi Hwang tried to create a more elaborate theoretical framework based on Zhu Xi's philosophy, where people could practice human morality in daily life more actively. If it was the "mindfulness" that he focused on to strengthen the aspect of *jondeokseong*, his theoretical work on *domunhak* was developed through the debate on the Four Beginnings and Seven Emotions, and the most critical issue that he raised in the process was the issuance of *i*.

14. Kim T. (1997); Takahashi (1984)

15. "Jeonseup rok byeon" 傳習錄辯 in Yi H. (1988, vol. 2, 41:27a).

16. "Jeonseup rok byeon" in Yi H. (1988, vol. 2, 41:26a-b).

Issuance of Gi and Issuance of I

In Neo-Confucianism, *i* means principle or law, and *gi* means matter or energy. All beings are made up of a combination of *i* and *gi*, and the movement or operation of mind and matter also occur via a combination of *i* and *gi*. *Gi* is what puts existence into motion, while *i* gives that motion a particular orientation. While these are the basic principles related to the concepts of *i* and *gi*,¹⁷ Yi Hwang argued that “*i* arises” (*ibal*), or “*i* comes into being of itself” (*ijado*). It is notable that Yi Hwang, a leading scholar of Neo-Confucianism in Joseon, made this argument, as it entailed an incorrect usage of the concepts and a violation of the basic principles of the philosophy. This argument became one of the key issues in the Four-Seven debate, which was the most important academic debate in the history of Joseon Confucianism, and remained a bone of contention for Joseon Confucianism afterwards.¹⁸

The Four-Seven debate began in 1559 between Yi Hwang and his disciple Ki Dae-seung. It centered on how to explain the way the inborn moral nature of human beings is revealed in life from the perspective of *igi* theory.¹⁹ The Four Beginnings and the Seven Emotions refer to emotions that are manifested in human nature. Among them, the Four Beginnings (the compassionate mind, the shameful and disliking mind, the modest and deferential mind, and the approving and disapproving mind) refer to emotions of moral nature expressed through the medium of clear and pure *gi* (matter), while the Seven Emotions (joy, anger, sorrow, fear, love, hate, and lust) refer to emotions manifested through diverse *gi*. Therefore, the Four Beginnings are pure goodness while the Seven Emotions may be either good or bad.

17. Refer to Kim H. (1996, 13-33).

18. The debate over the issuance of *i* has continued to date. Refer to Moon S. (2001, 2003); Lee S. (2004).

19. Refer to Kim H. (1996, 45-64) with regards to the Four-Seven debate and details of the issuance of *i* and “*i* comes into being of itself.”

Yi Hwang argued that “the Four Beginnings are the issuance of *i*, and the Seven Emotions are the issuance of *gi*,”²⁰ and later accepting Ki Dae-seung's opposing idea, suggested that “in the case of the Four Beginnings, *li* issues first, followed by *gi*, while in the Seven Emotions, *gi* issues first, mounted on by *i*.”²¹ What Ki Dae-seung argued was that since the Four Beginnings are included in the Seven Emotions, all of them are therefore a combination of *i* and *gi*, and the two are intertwined and inseparable. Given the traditional use of the concepts of *i* and *gi*, Ki's point was a reasonable one. In principle, emotion, whether defined as the Four Beginnings or the Seven Emotions, is revealed in human mind-heart when the *i* that is given to an entity is issued with the help of *gi*.

On the other hand, Yi Hwang argued that the Four Beginnings and the Seven Emotions are all emotions but can be divided as “what it refers to” (*soji*) or “where it comes from” (*sojongnae*), and that from this perspective, *i* is also issued, not to mention *gi*.²² In other words, he argued that what matters is not whether *i* has the function of issuance, but whether the Four Beginnings and the Seven Emotions can be separately defined in the view of “what it refers to” or “where it comes from.” Then they can be separated as the issuance of *i* and the issuance of *gi*. Yi Hwang paid attention to the necessary differentiation of the Four Beginnings as pure goodness from the Seven Emotions which are either good or bad.²³ In conformity with the general use of the concepts, he put forward the assumption of “what it refers to” or “where it comes from” in order to persuade Ki Dae-seung. He seemed to try to use the terms “the issuance of *i*” and “the issuance of *gi*,” to clarify the distinction between vice and virtue in terms of practicing moral nature, and ultimately to emphasize the active practice of good nature.

20. “Dap Ki Myeong-eon” 答奇明彦-論四端七情第一書 (改本) in Yi H. (1988, Vol. 1, 16:24a).

21. “Dap Ki Myeong-eon” 答奇明彦-論四端七情第二書 in Yi H. (1988, Vol. 1, 16:32a).

22. “Dap Ki Myeong-eon” 答奇明彦-論四端七情第一書 (改本) in Yi H. (1988, Vol. 1, 16:20a, 16:21b).

23. “Yeo Ki Myeong-eon” 與奇明彦 in Yi H. (1988, Vol. 1, 16:1b).

Then Yi Hwang made a stronger argument regarding the concept of “*i* comes into being of itself” by discussing the process of perception. He said, “I insisted on the wrong argument before, because I just stuck to Zhu Xi’s idea that “*i* does not feel, think, fathom nor make up. Thereupon, I thought ‘*I* can reach the ultimate point (*geukcheo*) of the principle of things (*mulli*). But how can *i* reach the ultimate point of itself?’” He went on to say that he recognized the fact that one perceived *i* of an object as *i* “approached of itself” (*ijado*). However, Yi made another assumption.²⁴ It was the idea that the issuance or approach of *i* implied that when the human mind approached wholeheartedly, nothing could not be perceived. The issuance of *i* cannot be achieved only with *i*, but it can be issued when one’s mind approaches to it.²⁵ Therefore, he said, “It concerns me whether my investigation of things (*gyeongmul*) is incomplete, but not whether *i* comes into being of itself or not.”²⁶ This means that one should be concerned only with whether or not his/her mind is working properly.

Yi Hwang argued that “*i* issues” and “*i* comes into being of itself,” even though he knew that he could be criticized for a violation of the principle and incorrect use of the basic Neo-Confucian concepts. What he intended to highlight was human beings’ active role in accurately perceiving the laws of the universe, distinguishing good and evil, and practicing virtue. Indeed, a logically strong theory is needed to teach people to adhere to moral practice and build an ideal society based on Neo-Confucianism. However, to encourage them to put these ideas into practice, Yi Hwang had to emphasize voluntary and active will despite the danger of people misusing the concepts. Yet, Yi Hwang seems to have thought that more should be done. He also focused on *cheonmyeong* (the heavenly mandate) as an additional, external element for inducing people to voluntarily practice morality.

24. Yoon Sasoon (1980, 32) pointed out that this assumption was a limitation of Yi Hwang’s theory.

25. 無情意 無計度 無造作.

26. “Dap Ki Myeong-eon” 答奇明彥-別紙 in Yi H. (1988, Vol. 1, 18:30a-31b).

I and the Heavenly Mandate

In Neo-Confucianism, *i* is the law of natural physics and the ethical norm for all beings. It is called different names: the “law of nature” (*cheolli*), which emphasizes the meaning of law universally applied to nature; *do* (*dao*; the Way) or *dori* (*daoli*; the law of the Way), which focuses on the norm of life that all beings including humans must follow; and the “Ultimate Great” (*taegeuk*; *taiji*), which means the fundamental principle for all beings and creation. In Neo-Confucianism, all of these notions are included in the concept of *i*.

The law of natural physics operates independently from the will of human beings and other entities. However, as for an ethical norm, there are many cases where exceptions are made depending upon individual desire, will, or other circumstances.²⁷ In Neo-Confucianism, the source of this ethical norm does not lie in an order from an absolute being or in human consensus, but in nature itself. As there is a law of physics in nature, there are also ethical norms to be followed by beings belonging to nature including those with extraordinary abilities, i.e. a sage who discovers and learns such laws and norms from nature and teaches them by means of words, writing, and behavior.

Ancient Chinese people believed in *shangdi* (*sangje*, or Lord on High), the absolute ruler and a transcendental being that resides in *cheon* (heaven) and rewards or punishes people for their virtue or vice according to the heavenly mandate. However, using the respect and fear of a ruler who wields absolute power to maintain social order was gradually ruled out with the development of Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism, which replaced the concept of a transcendental being with the law and norms of nature. In particular, Zhu Xi’s philosophy, which developed during the eleventh and twelfth centuries in China based on ancient Confucianism and had strong meta-

27. Yoon Sasoon believes that the effort to harmonize people with nature through “what is to be” and “what should be” are important implications of Toegye’s philosophy. See Yoon Sasoon (1986).

physical aspects, included the theory that people should obey the principle of nature and cultivate their own education and practice.

Yi Hwang, on the other hand, emphasized the concept of a transcendental being (the Lord on High) as Heaven (or the heavenly mandate), even though he based his philosophy on Zhu Xi's philosophy. It seems a serious contradiction that his theory reflected the "issuance of *i*" as the metaphysical substance and argued that "*i* comes into being of itself," while interpreting Heaven or the heavenly mandate as a transcendental being. We need to examine why he tried to interpret Heaven as a transcendental being despite its drawbacks, and what the relationship was between *i* and this interpretation of Heaven.

Yi Hwang's interpretation of Heaven as an ultimate or transcendental being is evident in *Mujin yukjoso* (Six-Article Memorial of 1568), which he dedicated at the age of sixty-eight to King Seonjo. *Mujin yukjoso* explains the six principles that a newly enthroned king should observe to become a great ruler: the first and second principles are about the importance of promoting the stability of the kingdom; the third and fourth relate to the relationship between politics and philosophy; the fifth addresses the relationship between the monarch and the officials; and the last deals with the relationship between Heaven and the king, in which he advised that when Heaven (the Lord on High or the heavenly mandate) loves a king and bestows a mandate upon him, it should be accomplished with "mindfulness" and "sincerity" (*seong*).²⁸ At the same time, he made it clear that he was not arguing for sentimental reciprocity between heaven (or nature) and humans, where minute details of nature are directly related to human behavior, as argued by Dong Zhongshu in the Han dynasty of China. Thereby, he cautioned against overly relying upon the external existence of Heaven.²⁹

In the last principle, Yi Hwang's interpretations of Heaven often

28. "Mujin yukjoso" (Six-Article Memorial of 1568) 戊辰六條疏 in Yi H. (1988, Vol. 1, 6:36b-59b).

29. "Mujin yukjoso" in Yi H. (1988, Vol. 1, 6:56a-b).

subtly border on transcendental being and physical nature. Heaven, which loves a king and bestows a providence of good or evil upon him in advance, obviously refers to a transcendental being. On the other hand, Yi Hwang criticized the mysticism contained in Dong Zhongshu's theory, and drew a line between nature and humans. He was not free from the Neo-Confucian viewpoint that replaced the concept of *sangje* with the law and norms of nature, even though he tried to interpret heaven as an absolute or transcendental being. This paradoxical situation is parallel with his need to consider the fundamental rule of the concept of *i* as lacking feeling, thinking, fathoming, or making up,³⁰ even though he seemed to argue in favor of *i*'s spontaneity.³¹

From the first to the fifth principle, Yi Hwang carefully advised kings to discuss scholarship and politics, solve the complicated relationship between a king and his subjects, and wisely rule the state. In the sixth and the last principles, he confirmed the king's duties and gave a general warning to kings. Here, Yi Hwang tried to use the concept of heaven as a transcendental being in order to guard against autocracy and complacency on the part of the king.³² This does not confirm that he really believed in a transcendental being, but he certainly recognized the social usefulness of heaven as such and tried to take advantage of it. *The Ten Diagrams on Sage Learning*, which he wrote after he had dedicated the "Six Article Memorial of 1568" to the king, clearly presented his ideas about Heaven. *The Ten Dia-*

30. Zhu Xi (1986, Vol. 1, 3).

31. Yi Dong-hwan said that in the case of Yi Hwang, the "holy Lord on High" was non-substantialized and characterized in his *igi* theory; however, "the personified heaven with cognition and dignity existed resolutely in his learning of mind-heart." Yi D. (1996). Yi Hwang's viewpoint seems contradictory, but it is sometimes pointed out as the cause for why some scholars in the Toegye school, like Yi Ik, Kwon Cheol-sin, and Jeong Yak-yong, interpreted heaven (*cheon*) as a personified being. On this point, see Yi W. (1980); Yi D. (1990, 1996); Yeo (2004); Kim H. (2005).

32. Explaining that heaven would concretely warn the king of disasters, Yi Hwang emphasized that the king should maintain a consistent attitude with mindfulness and sincerity. "Mujin yukjoso" in Yi H. (1988, vol. 1, 6:56b-58b).

grams on Sage Learning explains the key contents of Neo-Confucianism from the origin of the universe to the method of cultivating the mind-heart. But in chapters 9 and 10, he discussed the proper idea toward study and daily life, and emphasized that people should always hold the *sangje* in awe (*gyesin gonggu*; to be cautious and fearful) and maintain a prudent attitude (*sindok*; to be cautious when one is alone).³³ It is a basic Neo-Confucian attitude that *domunhak* and *jondeokseong* are the means by which one can perfect one's ethical nature and become a Sage King (*seonghyeon*) or a Sage Intellectual (*seongwang*). However, Yi Hwang seems to have thought that an external control like an absolute or transcendental being was also needed for humans who are easily tempted by idleness or desire.

Practice of Theory versus Theory of Practice

Neo-Confucianism is a theoretical system built to explain and argue that the ideal life consists of following the moral nature of a human being as a part of nature while working to create a harmonious society. Yi Hwang was a scholar who further developed this system in terms of *simseong* theory and cultivation theory, based on Zhu Xi's philosophy. When the concepts and logic of Neo-Confucianism or Zhu Xi's philosophy are strictly applied to his theory, however, the following three problems should be considered: the relation between theoretical study and personality cultivation, the concept of the issuance of *i*, and the interpretation of Heaven as a transcendental being.

Yi Hwang based his philosophy on the concept of theoretical study (*domunhak*), a strong point of Zhu Xi's philosophy, and added personality cultivation (*jondeokseong*) to it as a solution to the lack of practical aspects in Zhu Xi's philosophy. Theoretical study and personality cultivation were disparate matters, but Yi strengthened cultivation theory in *Xinjing fuzhu* and consistently emphasized the role

33. "Seonghak sipdo" 聖學十圖 in Yi H. (1988, vol. 7:31b, 7:34b-35a).

of "mindfulness" to help bridge the gap between *domunhak* and *jondeokseong*.

Yi Hwang's arguments on the issuance of *i*, and "*i* comes into being of itself" aimed to attract moral spontaneity by elucidating the idea that human perception and behavior can always be aligned with the law of nature through will and effort. The Four-Seven debate was set off when Yi Hwang created confusion over the use of major concepts such as the issuance of *i*. However, the debate allowed many Neo-Confucian scholars in Joseon to extend the range of their arguments by refining those concepts, and to discuss how to effectively combine and incorporate ethical cultivation and practice into a Neo-Confucian theoretical framework in line with the established concepts.

Yi Hwang's emphasis on the role of Heaven as a transcendental being also ran counter to the Confucian and Neo-Confucian tradition, which had ruled out the element of a transcendental being. Nevertheless, Yi Hwang seems to have anticipated creating moral tension by assuming that the concept of Heaven signified a transcendental being. In contrast with the issuance of *i* theory where one is encouraged to practice ethics voluntarily, this method set up a transcendental being that would inspire awe and fear and induce people to engage in moral practice.³⁴

Yi Hwang's emphasis on *Xinjing fuzhu* and personality cultivation has been liable for criticism for being too partial toward Yang-ming's philosophy, and the issuance of *i* remains a complicated point of dispute in Korean Confucianism to date. The introduction of a transcendental being was also dangerous since it could invoke heresy. It should be noted that those three issues were raised when Yi Hwang's theoretical formation practice was affected by his efforts to more actively realize the ideology of Neo-Confucianism in real

34. Though he respected Yi Hwang, Jeong Yak-yong later criticized Yi and put the "Lord on High" at the top of his own theoretical system, possibly because he thought that stronger external compulsion was needed in the 19th century than in the age of Yi Hwang. On this issue, see Kim H. (2005).

life.³⁵ Such efforts, making up for the lack of practical aspects of Zhu Xi's philosophy, served to form the main characteristics of Toegye's philosophy, strengthening the practical value of Neo-Confucianism through spontaneous human will.

Scholars who criticize *igi-* and *simseong-*focused research and define Yi Hwang's philosophy as *dohak*, *simhak*, or the "learning of mindfulness" point out the importance of cultivation theory in Toegye's philosophy. However, his cultivation theory cannot stand without consideration of his philosophical goal, the so-called pursuit of the virtuous life and morally ideal society. The reverse is also true. Yi Hwang's mindfulness-centered cultivation theory was not meant to substitute or dominate theoretical aspects of Zhu Xi's philosophy, but rather to complement its lack of practical aspects. Yi Hwang emphasized that theoretical study (*domunhak*) and self-cultivation (*jondeokseong*) must always go side by side.³⁶

Yi Hwang's notion that *domunhak* and *jondeokseong* should accompany each other and be realized in moral life resulted in a logical defect, namely, "the issuance of *i*." Contrary to the general tendency in Neo-Confucianism, which tried to locate a self-sufficient theoretical system in nature and society by means of certain physical laws and ethical principles, he adopted the concept of an external existence such as a transcendental being. Nevertheless, considering the fact that Yi Hwang's philosophy could be completed by individual and social lives rather than by logical description, such ambiguous uses of concepts and logical jumps need to be understood in the context of self-cultivation or practice of theory. Yi Hwang attempted to complement the lack of practical aspects in Zhu Xi's philosophy with the mental cultivation theory in *Xinjing fuzhu* and mindfulness philosophy, while trying to adapt *domunhak* and *jondeokseong* to his theory of the Four Beginnings and the Seven Emotions and "the issuance of *i*." Moreover, he used the external device of a transcen-

35. On the issue that value judgments intervened in the theory formation process in Korean Confucianism, see Kim H. (2007b).

36. "Simgyeong huron" in Yi H. (1988, vol. 2, 41:13a-b).

dental being or Heaven to support the human spontaneity to engage in moral practices.

In fact, it has often been found in Korean Confucianism, including Yi Hwang's case, that the intent of highlighting practical aspects intervened in the process of theory formation. Without considering the characteristics of Joseon intellectuals, such a trend would be regarded as a general phenomenon of the era when politics and religion were not separated. However, there are few examples in human history of intellectuals, which could cover all facets of society, from the royal family to private village schools, for almost 500 years as they did in Joseon, by controlling real politics and social education. Joseon Confucianism was established in the course of an ongoing process wherein intellectuals, who studied Neo-Confucianism from a young age, were involved in state administration and applied real-world trials and errors to their studies. It was under these circumstances that their desire to put ethics into practice affected the framework of Neo-Confucian theory to a substantial degree. The practical application of theory was even considered essential to completing a system of theory.

It is impossible to discuss the merits of *igi-simseong* theory in Toegye's philosophy without also examining his cultivation theory. It can be said that Toegye's philosophy is a dynamic system of thought where one's study and cultivation are integrated as a whole and culminates in practical application. Therefore, will to practice found in Toegye's philosophy is not an obstacle to the completeness of his philosophy, but rather one of its main constituents.

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GLOSSARY

Cheng Minzheng (Ch.)	程敏政	<i>ijado</i>	理自到
Chen Lai (Ch.)	陳來	<i>Jinsilu</i> (Ch.)	近思錄
<i>cheolli</i>	天理	<i>jondeokseong</i>	尊德性
<i>cheon</i>	天	<i>Jujaseo jeryeo</i>	朱子書節要
<i>cheonmyeong</i>	天命	Liu Jiuyuan (Ch.)	陸九淵
<i>do</i>	道	<i>mulli</i>	物理
<i>dohak</i>	道學	Qian Mu (Ch.)	錢穆
<i>domunhak</i>	道問學	<i>sangje</i>	上帝
Dong Zhongshu (Ch.)	董仲舒	Sarimpa	士林派
<i>dori</i>	道理	Seonghak	聖學
Dosan Seodang	陶山書堂	Seonghak sipdo	聖學十圖
Gobong	高峯	<i>seonghyeon</i>	聖賢
<i>geukcheo</i>	極處	<i>seongwang</i>	聖王
<i>gyeong</i>	敬	<i>shangdi</i> (Ch.) ▶ <i>sangje</i>	
<i>gyeongmul</i>	格物	<i>sim</i>	心
<i>gyesin gonggu</i>	戒慎恐懼	<i>simhak</i>	心學
Hungupa	勳舊派	<i>sindok</i>	慎獨
<i>ibal</i>	理發	<i>soji</i>	所指
<i>igi</i>	理氣	<i>sojongnae</i>	所從來
<i>I-gi hobal</i>	理氣互發	<i>Songye wonmyeong ihak</i>	宋季元明理學
<i>ihak</i>	理學	<i>tongnok</i>	通錄

<i>taegeuk</i>	太極	Toegye	退溪
<i>taiji</i> (Ch.) ▶ <i>taegeuk</i>		Wang Yangming (Ch.)	王陽明
<i>tian</i> (Ch.) ▶ <i>cheon</i>		Ye-an Hyangyak	禮安鄉約
<i>Xinjing</i> (Ch.)	心經	<i>yungnye</i>	六禮
<i>Xinjing fuzhu</i> (Ch.)	心經附註	Zhen Dexiu (Ch.)	真德秀
<i>simseong</i>	心性	Zhu Xi (Ch.)	朱熹
<i>tao</i> (Ch.) ▶ <i>do</i>	道		
(Ch.: Chinese)			