

The Duality of Citing Zhu Xi in the Annotations of the *Daodejing* during the Joseon Dynasty

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the characteristics of five Joseon dynasty annotations of the Daodejing, a sutra of Daoism. The Joseon dynasty was a country that adopted Zhu Xi's Neo-Confucianism as its state ideology; as a result, Daoism and Buddhism were considered heresies. In order to investigate how the Daodejing, a book of heresy, was understood in Joseon, this article will focus on how Zhu Xi was cited in the annotations of the Daodejing. The way Zhu Xi was cited in these books can simultaneously reveal the annotators' thoughts about both Laozi and Zhu Xi. Two conclusions were drawn from this study. First, the annotators from the Joseon dynasty understood dao as a metaphysical system of Neo-Confucianism and Zhouyi 周易 (Book of Changes). In so doing, they attempted to ascertain the common characteristics between Confucianism and Daoism. Secondly, there were two different purposes in the citations of Zhu Xi in the annotations of the Daodejing: to seek new alternative systems of thought using Zhu Xi's authority and to defend the academic conformity of Neo-Confucianism by reinterpreting Laozi's thoughts in the perspective of Neo-Confucianism.

Keywords: *Daodejing*, Zhu Xi, Daoism, duality, heresy

Introduction

In studying Daoism of the Joseon dynasty (1392-1897), we face two different interpretations. One is *byeokdobul* 闢道佛 (“denouncing Buddhism and Daoism”), and the other is *iyu seongno* 以儒釋老 (“understanding of the *Daodejing* through a Confucian perspective”). The former reminds us of the status of heresy that Daoism held in the Joseon dynasty while the latter reminds us of the underestimated academic evaluation of Daoism.

However, the characteristics of Daoism in the Joseon dynasty cannot be fully comprehended by those two interpretations alone. To begin, it is without doubt that Neo-Confucianism was a state ideology which was institutionalized throughout the Joseon dynasty. Thus, Neo-Confucians understood and considered Daoism as “black magic” (*sasul* 邪術; *xieshu* in Chinese) that abandoned “ethical” awareness and only pursued “longevity.” They also believed that some phrases from Laozi’s *Daodejing* 道德經 (Classic of the Way and Virtue), such as *juesheng qizhi* 絕聖棄智 (“to stop the perfect human and throw away wisdom”) and *jueren qiyi* 絕仁棄義 (“to stop benevolence and throw away justice”), criticize the notion of sage (*shengren* 聖人), the ideal human being in Confucianism. Additionally, they understood that those thoughts negated the major Confucian moral laws, such as *ren* 仁 (benevolence) and *yi* 義 (justice).

Despite the biased understanding of Daoism, five annotations of the *Daodejing*¹ were published from the sixteenth to nineteenth century and many Confucian scholars wrote essays about the *Daodejing*. Furthermore, the *Daodejing* was mentioned more than 100 times in the *Joseon wangjo sillok* (Annals of the Joseon Dynasty) and more than 1,500 times in literary works written during that period.² This aspect cannot be explained by

1. They are: *Suneon* 醇言 (Pure-Minded Words) by Yi I (1536-1584); *Sinju dodeokkyeong* 新註道德經 (New Commentary on the *Daodejing*) by Bak Se-dang (1629-1703); *Dodeok jigwi* (Interpretations of the *Daodejing*) by Seo Myeong-eung (1716-1787); *Chowon damno* 椒園談老 (Chowon Yi Chung-ik’s Commentary on the *Daodejing*) by Yi Chung-ik (1744-1816); and *Jeongno* 訂老 (Corrections for *Daodejing*) by Hong Seok-ju (1774-1842). For details, see Y. Kim (2009, 71-79).

2. Refer to the database of the Institute for the Translation of Korean Classics (<http://db.itkc.or.kr>).

byeokdobul alone.

Furthermore, *iyu seongno*, the notion that *Daodejing* was understood through the perspective of Confucianism, is too simple of an analysis. It is not entirely clear how Confucian scholars of the time understood *Daodejing*. It is also unclear whether the term “Confucianism” refers to the school of Zhu Xi (Zhuxixue 朱子學) or the school of Wang Yangming (Yangmingxue 陽明學) or if it refers to the criticism of the doctrines of Zhu Xi and so on. So the notion of *iyu seongno* is not appropriate to represent the characteristics of Daoism during the Joseon dynasty, either.

The table below shows the number of the citations of Zhu Xi in the five annotations on the *Daodejing*, produced during the Joseon period.

Table 1. Number of the Citations of Zhu Xi

Author	Book	Number
Yi I 李珣	<i>Suneon</i> 醇言	5
Bak Se-dang 朴世堂	<i>Sinju dodeokkyeong</i> 新註道德經	2
Seo Myeong-eung 徐命膺	<i>Dodeok jigwi</i> 道德指歸	18
Yi Chung-ik 李忠翊	<i>Chowon damno</i> 椒園談老	0
Hong Seok-ju 洪奭周	<i>Jeongno</i> 訂老	7

Among the citations of Zhu Xi in these books, excluding those that quoted Zhu Xi word-for-word, Zhu Xi's perspective can be divided into two categories: understanding *dao* 道 in the *Daodejing* from the view of Daoist thought, and understanding Daoist tradition as the nourishing-life theory (*yangsaengnon* 養生論) in the *Daodejing* from the view of Daoist religion. Thus, this section will focus on these two major points.

By focusing on these two major points in the following sections, this article reviews how the five annotations of the *Daodejing* in the Joseon period represent the perspective of Zhu Xi. Why should Zhu Xi be the focus in a study of the *Daodejing* annotations? In trying to understand Daoism, a system of thought that was considered the antithesis to Confucianism, the way the authors cited Zhu Xi can shed light on the overall

perception of both Laozi and Zhu Xi. The projection and criticism of the school of Zhu Xi shown in these books will be analyzed. Finally, it will be argued that diverse thoughts and interpretations were allowed during the Joseon period, contrary to the conventional presumption to generalize the characteristics of Daoism within the frames of *byeokdobul* and *iyu seongno*.

Understanding *Dao* in *Daodejing* through Zhu Xi's Perspective

The annotators of the *Daodejing* during the Joseon period emphasized the places where Confucianism and Daoism coincided in order to explicitly argue that the *Daodejing* was not a book of heresy. Their attitude seems to equate Laozi's *dao* with *taiji* 太極 (Great Ultimate) of Neo-Confucianism and they found the basis of correspondence from Zhu Xi and *Zhouyi* 周易 (Book of Changes). In this regard, Yi I quoted Zhu Xi's perspective on Laozi's explanations of how "all things in the universe" are formulated from *dao* by writing, "The *Dao* produced One; One produced Two; Two produced Three; Three produced All things."³

Zhu Xi stated that *dao* is the same as *taiji* in the *Zhouyi*. One (*yi* 一) as an odd number of *yin* 陽, two (*er* 二) as an even number of *yang* 陰, and three (*san* 三) is a combination of both odd and even numbers. Thus, it is said that "two bears three." This is the same as the reason that two plus one equals three. So, this is the maxim that "three begets all things in the universe (*wanwu* 萬物)." Therefore, the combination of odd number and even number bears "all things in the universe."⁴

One can recognize that Yi I understood Laozi's *dao*, the fundamental

3. "道生一, 一生二, 二生三, 三生萬物" (*Daodejing*, ch. 42).

4. "朱子曰, 道即易之太極, 一乃陽之奇, 二乃陰之耦, 三乃奇耦之積. 其曰二生三, 猶所謂二與一爲三也. 其曰三生萬物, 即奇耦合而萬物生也" (*Suneon* 醇言, ch. 1). In his *Suneon*, Yi I referred to Dong Sijing's 董思靖 annotation in *Taishang laozi daodejing jijie* 太上老子道德經集解 (A Collection of Commentaries on Laozi's *Daodejing*) in the Song period (960-1279). The annotations in this chapter are also from Dong Sijing's book.

ground of “all things in the universe,” as *taiji* in the *Zhouyi*, and showed the shared points of thought between Laozi and Confucians. Furthermore, Bak Se-dang not only considered *dao* as *taiji*, but also understood it through the perspective of Zhu Xi’s system of substance (*ti* 體) and function (*yong* 用). Understanding *dao* as substance and “name” (*ming* 名) as function (*yong* 用) in chapter one of the *Daodejing*, he explained that these relationships arise from the same source (*yi* 源 一源).

Zhu Xi stated: “principle (*li* 理) refers to being exceedingly secret and hidden, not easily seen, while shape (*xian* 象), on the other hand, refers to being exceedingly revealed; however, substance (*ti* 體) and function (*yong* 用) come from the same source, and there is no gap between the two.” It means that, from the view of principle, function stands at the center as soon as substance goes out, in the so-called “one source,” and from the stance of shape, there are hidden, secret things as soon as shape is exposed and revealed, indicating that there is no so-called gap. Further, Zhu Xi stated, substance and function come from the same source (*tiyong yiyuan* 體用一源) and is absolute principle, meaning that all things in the universe definitely have been set, while there seems to be no impetus in absolute calmness. From the perspective of shape, which is exceedingly revealed, there is no difference between being seen and not being seen (*xianwei wujian* 顯微無間), meaning that there is no place in which principle does not exist when all things are once faced. When one talks of principle, let substance lead and leave function behind. For the most part, substance is exemplified, yet principle of function is also already equipped. Certainly, this is unification. Also when one talks of an affair (*shi* 事), one forefronts something revealed and leaves behind something hidden. Thus, as soon as one goes out for an affair, he or she could see substance of principle. This is because there is no gap between the two.⁵

5. “朱子曰至微者理也，至著者象也。體用一源，顯微無間。蓋自理而言，則即體而用在中，所謂一源也。自象而言，則即顯，而微不能外，所謂無間也。又曰，體用一源者，以至微之理言之，則沖漠無朕，而萬象昭然已具也。顯微無間者，以至著之象言之，則即事即物，而此理无所不在也。言理，則先體而後用。蓋舉體，而用之理已具，是所以爲一源也。言事，則先顯而後微。蓋即事而理之體可見，是所以爲無間也” (*Sinju dodeokkyeong*, ch. 1).

If we interpret the first sentence of the *Daodejing*, “道可道非常道, 名可名, 非常名” (“The *dao* that can be expressed is not the eternal *dao*. The name that can be named is not the eternal name.”) through the perspective of the relation between *substance* and *function* as argued by Bak Se-dang, “if we conceive *dao* as just *dao*, it is not the eternal *dao* (*changdao* 常道) because there is no *function*. If we conceive name (*ming* 名) as just name, it is not the eternal *name* (*changming* 常名) because there is no *substance*.”⁶ Thus, Bak believed that the true eternal *dao* and eternal *ming* become truthful when the substance in *dao* and the function in *ming* are unified.

In addition to Yi I and Bak Se-dang, Seo Myeong-eung, who was a teacher of King Jeongjo 正祖 (1752-1800) and a member of the Soron 少論 (Young Doctrine) faction in the late Joseon period, insisted that *dao* is *taiji* and *ming* is *yin* 陰 and *yang* 陽.⁷ Hong Seok-ju, a great scholar of the Noron 老論 (Old Doctrine) faction and a prominent politician, argued that “*dao* is one and also *taiji* in the *Yijing* 易經 (Book of Changes).”⁸ Yet, Yi Chung-ik, who never mentioned Zhu Xi, did not conceive Laozi’s *dao* as *taiji* but understood *dao* to be the origin of all action and *ming* as the appellation of objects.⁹ His interpretation was quite similar to that of Wang Bi 王弼 of the Qin dynasty (221-206 BC) in China, which is known as the most commonly circulated woodblock-printed version of the *Daodejing*.¹⁰

Then, it seems necessary to question the implications of the interpretation that annotators¹¹ of the *Daodejing* in the Joseon dynasty quoted Zhu Xi, thus leading them to understand *dao* as *taiji*. To answer this question requires a close examination of how *dao* has been understood in the

6. “道而但可爲道, 則無其用而體不能自立, 非所謂常道矣. 名而但可爲名, 則無其體而用不能自行, 非所謂常名矣” (*Sinju dodeokkyeong*, ch. 1).

7. “道者, 易所謂太極, 是也. . . 名者, 易所謂陰陽, 是也” (*Dodeok jigwi*, ch. 1).

8. “道之妙, 亦一而已. 然散在萬物, 萬物皆有是道, 此所謂衆妙也. . . 而所謂一者, 不可見, 此易所謂太極, 子思所謂 所謂上天之載無聲無臭, 周子所謂 所謂無極之真, 程子所謂 所謂冲漠無朕也” (*Jeongno*, ch. 1).

9. “椒園談老, 道之可道者, 行之緣而跡之寄也. 名之可名者, 形之喻而物之號也” (*Chowon damno*, ch. 1).

10. “可道之道, 可名之名, 指事造形, 非其常也. 故不可道, 不可名也” (*Nojaju*, ch. 1).

11. Yi Chung-ik is an exception since he did not understand *dao* as *taiji*.

history of the annotation of the *Daodejing* because *dao* is the most pivotal concept in understanding the *Daodejing*. In the book of the Wang Bi version of the *Daodejing*, *dao* was conceived as “nothingness” (*wu* 無), the root of all things in the universe, which is the core of the philosophy of Wang Bi.¹² In Heshanggong’s 河上公 commentary on the *Daodejing*, *dao* is represented as the *dao* from the perspective of natural longevity (*ziran changsheng* 自然長生).¹³ Namely, it was understood as a way for longevity and truth. During the Tang dynasty (618-907) in China, Cheng Xuanying 成玄英, influenced by Buddhism, understood *dao* as *xutong* 虛通,¹⁴ which refers to the transcendence of the world of language and distinction and also means “nothing left,” emptiness, and *nirvana*.

Dao in the *Daodejing* has been understood in multiple ways, depending on the philosophical trends and world views of annotators. What was designated as “the root of the universe” or “the origin of existence” depended on the metaphysical system an annotator ascribed to. As previously discussed, Wang Bi understood that eventual truth is “nothingness,” and this nothingness is projected through the world view of the Qin dynasty in China. Heshanggong designated *dao* as it is. This *dao* is the *dao* of the natural longevity, a product of the Huang-Lao School (Huang-laoxue 黃老學). Also Cheng Xuanying’s *dao* was discussed in relation to emptiness (*kong* 空) as it was affected by Buddhism. Thus the fact that the annotators in the Joseon dynasty understood *dao* as *taiji* 虛通 that they were affected by the metaphysical system of Neo-Confucianism of the Song dynasty in China.¹⁵

Yet, the metaphysical system of thought proposed by Zhu Xi’s Neo-Confucianism that the Joseon annotators of the *Daodejing* became more hardened when it was authorized. Through understanding the *Daodejing*, Hong Seok-ju refuted the Western notion of Lord of Heaven with Zhu Xi’s thoughts. The following quote shows how he understood “道沖而用之

12. “萬物萬形，其歸一也。何由致一。由於無也。由無乃一” (*Laozi zhu* 老子注, ch. 1).

13. *Laozi zhigui* 老子指歸, ch. 1.

14. *Laozi yishu* 老子義疏, ch. 1.

15. However, the general content of annotations are not under the influence of Neo-Confucianism. This point will be discussed in the next section of this article.

或不盈. . . 吾不知誰之子, 象帝之先” (“*Dao* is empty but its usage is eternal. . . I do not know whose son I am. It seems to be ahead of Lord on High.”) in chapter four of the *Daodejing*.

Someone once asked me if Laozi’s Lord on High (Shangdi 上帝) refers to the Lord of Heaven in Western Catholic Church? My response is that the Lord of Heaven can be seen probably as an object because it has a figure and it is to be worshipped. There is a difference here. What Laozi said means that *taiji* bears *liangyi* 兩儀 (the two effects, i.e. *yin* and *yang*, produced by *taiji*), as stated in the *Yijing*, and that this reason (*lizhi* 理致) existed prior to the foundation of the heaven and the earth, as Zhu Xi said. Then, how is the God of the West comparable to this? So, a Confucian sage says, “What Heaven does is soundless and odorless.” Laozi, however, said, “I do not know whose son I am” and that “the complex one comes before the Heaven and the World.” Since these words are quite confusing, some people, unenlightened people, are easily seduced by such delusion. A “sage” in Confucianism does not speak out bluntly about something so lofty.¹⁶

In this chapter, Hong Seok-ju explains the differences of the gods in the East and the West. To do so, he used the logic of Zhu Xi and the *Yijing*. In understanding *xiangdi zhixian* 象帝之先 (“It seems to be ahead of Lord on High.”), he warned that this God should not be understood as the Lord in Catholic Church (Legge 1891, ch. 4). This issue might have been raised when he wrote *Jeongno* 訂老 at the beginning of the nineteenth century with the expansion of Western Learning. *Di* 帝 (literally, “emperor”) in “象帝之先” used to be translated into “God,” and understood as the God of Christianity, when it was introduced to the West.

He emphasized that the phrase “象帝之先” in the *Daodejing* means that “*taiji* bears *yin* and *yang*” or that “there was *principle* prior to the foundation of the Heaven and the World.” And also *taiji* and *principle*

16. “曰洋人之稱天主也, 形象之, 尊奉之, 殆若有一物可見者. 然此其所以悖也. 老子之所云, 則易所謂太極生兩儀, 朱夫子所謂未有天地, 先有此理者也. 豈可與洋人比哉. 然聖人之言此也, 則曰上天之載無聲無臭而已. 老子則不然, 曰吾不知誰之子, 又曰有物混成, 先天地生. 其為辭, 鼓舞恍惚, 易以使不知者惑. 此聖人所以不敢輕語高遠也” (*Jeongno*, ch. 1).

cannot be subjects of debates since they are metaphysical things, the state of things before shape was formed. They are neither objects for worship nor tangible objects, like the Western God. One should not take them as objects of debate if one is truly a sage of Confucianism. Hong criticized that the *Daodejing* of Daoism brought confusion to the people regarding this. He also projected a thought structure grounded upon the theory of *taiji*, *yin*, and *yang*, which conceives *taiji* as *principle*, into the understanding of the *Daodejing*. Thus, the annotators of the Joseon dynasty understood the *dao* of the *Daodejing* as a metaphysical system from Zhu Xi's Neo-Confucianism and *Yijing*, and they argued that it should not be understood as the God of Western Learning.

Defense and Alternatives through Zhu Xi: *The Duality of Quoting Zhu Xi*

In the annotations of the *Daodejing*, the chapters in which Zhu Xi is quoted the most frequently are those that are related to “nourishing-life” (*yangsheng* 養生). Particularly, Seo Myeong-eung and Hong Seok-ju both frequently used Zhu Xi's thought in their writings, in which they argued about nourishing-life. Among the two thinkers' views, there was a clear, if not fundamental, distinction: Seo tried to supplement the view of nourishing-life by quoting Zhu Xi's words; Hong, quoting Zhu Xi's opinion, tried to argue that the discussions regarding nourishing-life were part of an empty discourse.

Seo quoted Zhu Xi's words the most frequently among the five annotators. For instance, in understanding *gushen busi* 谷神不死 (“The valley's spirit never dies”), he believed that *gu* 谷 refers to “empty valley” and said that “the only right interpretation of it is Zhu Xi's, even though it is understood differently by various individuals.”¹⁷ In understanding the meaning of the edge of the boundary (*jiao* 徼) in “常有欲，以觀其徼” (“One who is filled with greed can only see the edges of boundary of the all”) in chapter

17. “谷神之解，人各異說，惟朱子所解，乃其正意。谷，虛谷也” (*Dodeok jigwi*, ch. 6).

one of the *Daodejing*, he also followed Zhu Xi's perspective. Given what has been discussed here and about *dao* in the previous section, it seems that Seo faithfully followed Zhu Xi's thoughts in his understanding the *Daodejing*. However, at closer inspection of chapter one of his *Dodeok jigwi*, we can see that this is not the case:

Laozi said that “prenatal change” (*xiantianyi* 先天易) only refers to *yin* and *yang* and did not refer to the Five Primary Elements (*wuhang* 五行). Only *taiji* acquires the silence of *yin* and this is the true formation of the Heaven and the World. *Dao* ought to exist there at that time. Thus, it is *dao*, which is the foundation of how one strengthens the body and mind, enlightens people and rules the country. One controls possessing something (*you* 有) with nothingness (*wu* 無). One controls *fullness* with *emptiness*; and one controls *strength* with *weakness*. Laozi had no regard for even benevolence and justice because they are given from the Five Primary Elements. In writing the *Daodejing*, he believed that words are molded after harmony. So he formulated paragraphs and chapters based on the art of divination or fortunetelling. Confucius said that a “wise man calls *dao* wisdom,” and in *Zhongyong* 中庸 (Doctrine of the Mean) it is said that a “wise man is excessive.” Both of these point to the *Daodejing*. However, Laozi made a key point in reasoning change (*yi* 易). So, Shao Yong 邵雍 said that Laozi acquired *substance* of *change* and Zhu Xi said that “Laozi understood this *dao*.” . . . Likewise, Confucians previously recognized Laozi in many different ways.¹⁸

In the above quotation, “Laozi had no regard for even benevolence and justice because they are given from the Five Primary Elements” is an explanation of the passage “eradicate benevolence, discard justice” (*jueren qiyi* 絕仁棄義) found in chapter nineteen of the *Daodejing*. *Daodejing* faces off against Confucianism by denying benevolence justice. At the same

18. “蓋老子見大易專言陰陽，不言五行，遂以為太極具於陰靜之中者，乃天地始生之本然而道於是乎在也。故修身理性化民治國，皆是道之推焉，而以無制有，以虛制實，以靜制動，以柔弱制強剛，雖如仁義，亦以五行所稟，而不屑為也。其為此書，自以其言侔擬造化，且凡分章作節，皆以易數立象。孔子曰知者見之謂之知，又曰知者過之，指老子也。然其於易理則看得深切。故邵子曰，老子得易之體，朱子曰老子見得此箇道理，又曰至妙之理，有生之意 . . . 其許與老子亦已多矣” (*Dodeok jigwi*, ch. 1).

time, Seo quoted Shao Yong's opinion that "*Daodejing* acquired *substance of change*."

Seo understood that the *Daodejing* only holds the truth system of *prenatal change* and mentioned only *yin* and *yang*, not the Five Primary Elements.¹⁹ He also considered talking about the Five Primary Elements from the perspective of the truth system of the *postnatal* period. Therefore, Seo opinioned that the passage "eradicate benevolence, discard justice" was not Laozi's denial of benevolence and justice, but rather an evidence that Laozi did not find it worthwhile to argue about benevolence and justice due to the simplicity of prenatal change, reflected in the *Daodejing*.

Moreover, Seo used his own system to divide the eighty-one chapters of the *Daodejing* into paragraphs and phrases²⁰ because he believed that the number 81 in the *Daodejing* embodies the *Yijing* 易經.²¹ The meaning of 81 in the *Daodejing* is as important and significant as the number 12, the number of disciples of Christ, is in Western culture. He believed that *prenatal change* is reflected in the simplicity of the original text of the *Daodejing*. In this way, Seo Myeong-eung, who argued that the *Daodejing* followed the system of *prenatal change*, quoted that the words of Shao Yong and then immediately quoted Zhu Xi's statement that "Laozi understood this to be *dao*." It is easily misunderstood that Zhu Xi agreed with Shao Yong's opinion but in fact he did not. That remark was the beginning sentence of a question in the *Zhuzi yulei* 朱子語類 (Classified Conversations of Zhu Xi).²² Surprisingly, as a response, Zhu Xi insisted that Shao Yong's remark "Laozi acquired substance of change" was from Shao Yong's misunderstanding. Rather, Zhu Xi explained how Laozi's and Mencius's

19. "盖老子見大易專言陰陽，不言五行，遂以爲太極具於陰靜之中者，乃天地始生之本然而道於是乎在也" (*Dodeok jigwi*, ch. 1).

20. Seo divided paragraphs and passages of the 81 chapters of the *Daodejing* based on the art of divination. He divided the *Daojing* 道經 (Scripture of the *Dao*), the first half, in 36 chapters and the *Dejing* 德經 (Scripture of the Virtue), the latter half, into 45 chapters. Then, he again divided it into chapters of "Taiyang 太陽" (Great Yang), "Taiyin 太陰" (Great Yin), "Shaoyang 少陽" (Lesser Yang), and "Shaoyin 少陰" (Lesser Yin).

21. "亦以五行所稟，而不屑爲也。其爲此書，自以其言倖擬造化，且凡分章作節，皆以易數立象" (*Dodeok jigwi*, ch. 1).

22. "甘叔懷說，先生舊常謂老子也見得此箇道理，只是怕與事物交" (*Zhuzi yulei*, vol. 125).

understandings of *substance* and *function* were different.²³ And Zhu Xi stated that Cheng Yi 程頤 took “the most wondrous *li*, in which there is the meaning of the ceaseless production of heaven and earth” (至妙之理, 有生之意焉) from the *Daodejing*. Yet, this statement by Zhu Xi is merely his judgment regarding the chapter of “Gushen busi 谷神不死,” not his agreement with the remark “Laozi acquired substance of change” as Seo argued.²⁴ Namely, we can see that Seo, relying on Zhu Xi’s authority, argued for the validity of his own interpretation of the *Daodejing* as the system of prenatal change.

Seo not only discussed the method of interpretation of *prenatal change*, but also emphasized parts of the *Daodejing* that can be understood through the nourishing-life theory, relying on Zhu Xi’s perspective. In regards to the passage, “He who possesses the mother of the state may continue long. His case is like that (of the plant) of which we say that its roots are deep and its flower stalks firm: this is the way to secure that its enduring life shall long be seen,”²⁵ Seo wrote the following:

In the third passage, Laozi talks about “the frugality of reverencing Heaven.” Normally, to conceive of “nourishing-life” as “the reverence of Heaven” is the same as “to preserve the mind and nourish the human nature to serve the Heaven,” argued by Mencius. The phrase “If you possess the mother of the state” (*youguo zhi mu* 有國之母)—which can be understood in the same meaning as “the mother of all things of the world” (*wanyu zhi mu* 萬物之母) and “the mother of all under heaven” (*tianxia zhi mu* 天下之母) in the previous section—means that one body becomes the basis of a country. Since humanity’s essence (*jing* 精) and energy (*ki* 氣) are given from the Heaven, run widely, and always correspond with the way of Heaven, if one can preserve life and make it

23. “朱子語類,「老氏」,「康節嘗言,老氏得易之體,孟子得易之用,非也。老子自有老子之體用,孟子自有孟子之體用。將欲取之,必固與之,此老氏之體用也,存心養性,充廣其四端,此孟子之體用也” (*Zhuzi yulei*, vol. 125).

24. “問,谷神不死。曰,谷之虛也,聲達焉則響應之,乃神化之自然也,是謂玄牝。玄,妙也。牝是有所受而能生物者也。至妙之理,有生之意焉。程子所以取老氏之說也” (*Zhuzi yulei*, vol. 125).

25. “有國之母,可以長久,是謂深根固抵,長生久視之道” (*Daodejing*, ch. 59; English translation is from Legge [1891]).

long-lasting, this is the same as a man who rules a country cultivating virtues. It is also a *dao* to serve Heaven. The word *shi* 視 (looking) in “*jiushi* 久視” means “looking inward” (*neishi* 內視). Zhu Xi stated that “the purpose of cultivation is to improve and nourish the body even when it is healthy. It is the “repeated accumulation in advance” (*zhongji* 重積). To nourish a body after losing its health cannot be considered “repeated accumulation in advance.” To treasure the virtue of “early submission” (*zaofu* 早服) is to realize this before losing his or her health. It has been asked, “What is the use of cultivation if the frailty of my body is already like a house, with one collapsed side, while I support the other side of it?” Come to think of it, even a rigid person who distinguishes a heresy, like Zhu Xi, takes the *Daodejing* when it comes to the cultivation. We can see the sage’s generous and open-mindedness in embracing others’ strengths.²⁶

Seo Myeong-eung believed that the above paragraph showed “the frugality of reverencing Heaven” and “nourishing-life” is the very “reverence of Heaven.” He also likened “nourishing-life” with “preserving the heart and cultivating the inner nature” (存其心養其性) of Mencius, and believed that “A body of one is the body of a country.” In other words, to cultivate one’s body, namely running one’s own *essence* and *energy* and having longevity, is “the reverence of Heaven.” Again, he specifically understood *jiushi* 久視 (distant vision) in the original text as *neishi* 內視 (inward vision). Seen here, *neishi* 內視 is one of the Daoist disciplines that appeared in *Huangtingjing* 黃庭經 (Scripture of the Yellow Court). It is a way to fulfill immortality by communing with the gods of one’s organs in one’s own body.

To secure the legitimacy of his view of nourishing-life theory in the *Daodejing*, Seo again quoted the phrase *zaofu* 早服, which Zhu Xi interprets as “a way to nurture the body before it becomes weak,” and likened

26. “第三節言事天之齋. 蓋以養生爲事天, 猶孟子所謂存其心養其性, 所以事天也. 有國之母, 如上文萬物之母, 天下之母, 言一身爲一國之本也. 人之精氣得之於天, 其流行運用與天道常相應, 若能先事保蓄長久其生, 如有國之重積德, 則是亦事天之道也. 久視之視, 亦內視也. 朱子曰, 修養者, 此身未有所損失, 而又加以蓄養, 是謂早服, 而重積, 若待其已損而後養, 則養之方足, 以補其所損, 不得謂之重積矣. 所以貴早服者, 早覺未隕而蓄之也. 如某此身已衰, 如破屋東扶西倒, 雖欲修養亦何能有益邪. . . 愚按以朱子辨異之嚴也. 而其於修養, 取老子如此. 此可見聖賢取人爲善, 廣大公平之心也” (*Dodeok jigwi*, ch. 59).

it with *jide* 積德 (having mercy and cultivating virtues). Seo then argued that Zhu Xi clearly distinguished heresy but accepted *Daodejing* in regards to the matter of cultivation.

However, the point of the chapter is that *essence* and *energy* are understood based on the rules of nourishing-life, more specifically *neishi* 內視 (inward vision or introspection) as “the reverence of Heaven.” Above this, after stating Zhu Xi’s annotation about “營魄抱一” (“embracing one’s souls as the One”) in chapter ten of the *Daodejing*, Seo viewed that learning *baoyi* 抱一 (embracing the One) is a turning point that either leads to longevity or an early grave. He used Zhang Liang’s 張良 (d. 186 BC) practice of *bigu* 辟穀 (abstention from cereals) as an example of *baoyi*.²⁷ *Bigu* is a Daoist fasting practice of five grains. In this way, Seo Myeong-eung interpreted the *Daodejing* as a theory of nourishing-life, in his *Dodeok jigwi*.²⁸ He tried to show that the Daoist view of the nourishing-life theory is not a heresy but a theory acknowledged by Zhu Xi. In sum, Seo relied on Zhu Xi’s authority to explain and supplement both the *prenatal change* and nourishing-life theories of Laozi.

Hong Seok-ju took a completely opposite stance from Seo in his *Jeongno*. He criticized the stance of understanding the *Daodejing* from the perspective of the nourishing-life theory. In the preface of the *Jeongno*, he stated that one of the reasons that he wrote the book was to correct the reliance on the *Daodejing* by people who practiced *dan* 丹 (elixir). While Seo tried to supplement his theoretical validity by applying Zhu Xi’s thoughts, Hong, on the contrary, criticized by quoting Zhu Xi’s thoughts, the parts that can be understood as the nourishing-life theory. In refer-

27. The annotation of the question “專氣致柔，能如嬰兒乎” (“Can you concentrate on your *qi*-energy and make it as soft as an infant baby?”) by Zhu Xi, quoted in *Dodeok jigwi* is as follows: “The meaning of ‘to make *qi* 氣 unchanging and to have true softness’ must be studied. The meaning of concentration (*zhuan* 專) is to do only one thing permanently and have no severance within it. Healing is to reach an extreme position” (*Dodeok jigwi*, ch. 10).

28. Since Seo Myeong-eung was interested in the nourishing-life theory, he also wrote *Chamdonggo* 參同攷 (Commentary on the *Cantongqi*), in which he annotated the *Cantongqi* 參同契 (The Seal of the Unity of the Three), the first sutra that appeared in China.

ence to the passages, “Can soul and body be embodied into one and stay together without separation? Can we concentrate and soften *gi* 氣 (energy; *qi* in Chinese) like an infant?”²⁹ he wrote:

Zhu Xi stated the following, “when *hun* 魂 (spirit going up to Heaven when one dies) is combined with *po* 魄 (spirit staying in the world when one dies), and one keeps calmness with movement, associates water with fire, keeps one (*yi* 一) with two (*er* 二), then this is similar to when one climbs up on a wagon and always stays on it. In doing so, *hun* becomes stable and *po* becomes brighter, so neither does the force of the fire of the body hurriedly blaze nor does the force of the water of the body overflow. This is the secret of longevity.” I think people never stop feeling pleasure, anger, anxiousness, and thought. The rising force of the fire never stops, since the fire takes turns in people’s emotions and desire. This accelerates separation and this is the running toward the death . . . one who takes good care of their health, by self-control of essence, keeps cheerfulness and embraces essence through the preservation of *gi*. So, wise and bright substances stay in the mind because one’s emotion does not flame and the one’s mind does not evacuate. Only then can one truly enjoy longevity since the force of the fire of the body comes down and the force of the water of the body goes up. Daoism-practicing people say that lead, mercury, dragon, tiger, boy, and girl are merely amplifications from the shape of fire and water.³⁰

“Embracing *hun* and *po* as one” (*Daodejing*, ch. 10) is a way of nourishing-life, and its ultimate state is likened with a baby. However, Hong Seok-ju understood that, through Zhu Xi’s thoughts on the matters of self-restraint, one can appease one’s anger by controlling one’s emotions and desires. Additionally, he suggested that such self-restraint would lead to

29. “載營魄抱一，能無離乎，專氣致柔，能嬰兒乎” (*Daodejing*, ch. 10)

30. “朱子曰，‘以魂加魄，以動守靜，以火迫水，以二守一，而不相雜，如人登車，而常載於其上，則魂安靜，而魄精明，火不燥，而水不溢，固長生久視之要訣也。’愚謂，魂者，陽之神也，魄者，陰之精也。神象火而常升，精涵水而恒降，其勢不相離，則不已。況人之生也，喜怒憂思，情欲交熾，火之升也，無刻暫息，此皆所以速其離，而日趨於死也。善衛生者，節精以完神，存氣以抱精，使情不炎上，心不驚外，而靈明之體，常守吾方寸之中，則火既降，水常升，真可以長生而久視也。 . . . 而後世修煉之家所指，鉛汞龍虎，嬰兒姪女者，皆即此水火之象，而演之耳” (*Jeongno*, ch. 10).

longevity, believing that the practitioners of Daoism said that lead, mercury, dragon, tiger, boy, and girl were merely amplifications of fire and water. He understood it exclusively as a way of practicing Daoism. Subsequently, in regards to the passage, “one who nurtures his or her life well does not need to avoid wild cows and tigers or dodge blades in a battle field; they are not eaten by tigers.”³¹ In chapter fifty of the *Daodejing*, he stated:

Zhu Xi argued, “One goes from the area of living to the area of death due to greed of wanting to live excessively well. Sound, colors, tastes, shelters, faithfulness, power, and greed are all for living well. Because one pursues only these things immoderately, they will be harmed by people and objects. One who nurtures his or her life well is immortal since he or she is able to keep some detriments away.” I think, for anyone who takes the elixir of eternal life, builds up the body, and has food and medicine to prevent diseases, practicing, aiming, and searching are all for well-being. However, if one obsesses over it, it instead leads to harm.³²

Chapter fifty of the *Daodejing* is a chapter related to the premise that “one who takes good care of his/her health can protect him/herself from various potential dangers.” In *Zhuzi yulei*, Zhu Xi does not understand the chapter as concerning nourishing-life, but as a warning that “excessively greedy deeds” bring one close to various dangers. In other words, for Zhu Xi, the chapter deals with the level of one’s self-restraint and discipline. Quoting Zhu Xi’s opinion, Hong Seok-ju criticized the Daoist practice which strived for eternal life.

Seo Myeong-eung wanted to prove the validity of the nourishing-life theory in Daoism, his major academic interest, by relying on Zhu Xi’s aca-

31. “出生入死. 生之徒十有三, 死之徒十有三. 人之生, 動之死地, 亦十有三, 夫何故. 以其生生之厚. 蓋聞善攝生者, 陸行不避兕虎, 入軍不避甲兵. 兕無所投其角, 虎無所措其爪, 兵無所容其刃, 夫何故. 以其無死地” (*Daodejing*, ch. 50).

32. “朱子曰, 人所以自生而趨死者, 以其生生之厚耳. 聲色臭味, 居處奉養, 權勢利欲, 皆所以生生者, 唯於此太厚, 所以物得而害之. 善攝生者, 遠離此累, 則無死地矣. 愚謂服食以煉形, 藥餌以防病, 營求謀爲以避禍, 皆欲以生其生也, 而用心之過者, 未有不反害其生” (*Jeongno*, ch. 50).

democratic authority. Thus, he discussed the chapter of the *Daodejing* related to the *prenatal change* at length, excessively quoting Zhu Xi. Namely, he tried to develop the status of a heretical study in order to gain wider recognition for it. Taking “the operation of energy (*gi* 氣) through essence (*jeong* 精), nourishing-life through introspection, and the Daoist fast, known as *bigu* 辟穀, as examples, Seo interpreted nourishing-life as the “reverence of Heaven.” However, in relation to *dao*, he criticized the Catholic notion of God by quoting Zhu Xi’s opinion.

Hong Seok-ju warned that the *Daodejing* was being interpreted through the Daoist tradition of the nourishing-life theory. Hong tried to show that the *Daodejing* can be understood through Neo-Confucianism. His interpretation reveals that he actively defended the contemporary philosophy through Zhu Xi’s thoughts.

The directionality of understanding the *Daodejing* was closely related to contemporary societal circumstances of the time. Seo Myeong-eung maintained a flexible position among different political parties and thoughts. With such academic flexibility, he seems to have sought a new way of interpreting the *Daodejing* during the late Joseon period. On the other hand, Hong Seok-ju sought to argue that it was possible to reinterpret the *Daodejing*, a heresy, through the framework of Neo-Confucianism.

In sum, while Seo Myeong-eung reinterpreted the *Daodejing* with new systems of interpretation, that is, the notions of *prenatal change* and *nourishing-life*, by relying on Zhu Xi’s authority, Hong Seok-ju tried to reinterpret the *Daodejing* through Zhu Xi’s logic.

Conclusion

This article reviewed how Zhu Xi’s perspective was applied in interpreting the *Daodejing* by focusing on the annotations of the *Daodejing* in the Joseon dynasty. It also discussed the characteristics of Daoism during the Joseon dynasty. As a result, the following conclusions were drawn. First, the annotators from the Joseon dynasty understood *dao* as a metaphysical system of Neo-Confucianism. In doing so, they attempted to argue for the

commonalities between Confucianism and Daoism. Second, there are two purposes in the use of quotations by Zhu Xi for the annotations of the *Daodejing*: to seek new alternative systems of thought validated by Zhu Xi's authority and to newly reinterpret and defend the academic conformity of Neo-Confucianism with the school of Zhu Xi as the focus.

Yet, the perspectives and stances of the *Daodejing* annotators of Joseon were varied. While Yi I and Hong Seok-ju focused their efforts on reinterpreting the thoughts of the *Daodejing* within the structure of Neo-Confucianism, Seo Myeong-eung attempted to interpret the *Daodejing* as a new system of thought. While Yi I and Hong Seok-ju were in pursuit of the conformity of the *Daodejing* and to further reinterpret the *Daodejing* within the system of Zhu Xi's Neo-Confucianism, Seo Myeong-eung wanted to supplement the theoretical rationality of *prenatal change* and *nourishing-life*, which he was newly pursuing through Zhu Xi's perspective.

There appears a duality of Zhu Xi in the annotative books of the *Daodejing* in the Joseon dynasty. One is the interpretation of Daoism based on Zhu Xi's Neo-Confucianism and the other is the search for new systems of thought by relying on the authority of Zhu Xi. The former was an active effort to seek and embrace new ways of thinking during the period; and the latter was an effort to strongly defend Zhu Xi's Neo-Confucianism. Although the values and social codes of the Joseon dynasty were centered around Confucian thought, there was still room left for interpreting Confucian philosophy from different, non-orthodox perspectives, even those based on systems considered to be heresies.

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