

THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF SAGE POLITICS: THE POLITICAL PHILOSOPHIES AND NEO-CONFUCIAN BASES OF YI HWANG AND YI I*

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Yi Hwang and Yi I, who were one generation apart, played a central role in Chosŏn's academic and political areas. They took the inner sage and outer sovereign as their academic ideal and accomplished great achievements regarding the *liji-simsŏng* theories related to Neo-Confucianism based on Zhu Xi's philosophy. They have more in common with each other than they have differences. Nevertheless their philosophies were quite dissimilar. Yi Hwang made 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*. And he focused on mindfulness as a method of practice in order to materialize *li* without distortion by external environments or personal desires. Yi I attempted to offer a logical basis for the relationship between *li* and *ki* by strictly following the concept of definitions and examples from the *liji* theory. This perspective may be conducive to explaining phenomena, however, this fails to offer a force able to change the psychophysical component of the self and guide society into further good. For this reason, Yi I notes the will and intention of mind-heart to turn from vice to virtue through self-cultivation. While Yi Hwang's *Ten Diagrams on Sage Learning* focused on the learning and cultivation of the ruler, Yi I's *Essentials of Sage Learning* emphasized the roles of the wise and ethical subordinates around the king. Given that Yi Hwang and Yi I were both intellectuals and public officials, it is difficult

* This work was supported by a grant from The Academy of Korean Studies funded by the Korean Government (MEST) (AKS-2011-AAA-2102). The first draft of this article was presented at 'The American Philosophical Association 2013 Pacific Division Meeting' at the Westin St Francis in San Francisco, 27-30 March 2013, and the developed version of it in terms of political philosophy was presented at the conference of Center for East Asian and Comparative Philosophy, "Confucianism, Law, and Politics in Korea: Past and Present" at City University of Hong Kong, 5-6 December 2013. This article is indebted to the discussants of the conferences and the reviewers of this journal.

to separate their academic pursuits from their political practices. Therefore, their theoretical differences can explain their worldly and political choices.

Keywords: T'oegye, Yi Hwang, Yulgok, Yi I, universal principle, mindfulness, purification of psychophysical components, will of the mind, *Ten Diagrams on Sage Learning*, *Essentials of Sage Learning*

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 Chosŏn dynasty, which made use of Neo-Confucianism based on the philosophy of Zhu Xi and the national civil service examination known as the *kwagŏ* to maintain a system supporting such a state ideology and supply the governing body with intellectuals to embody and practice this ideology. Chosŏn upheld Neo-Confucianism as a national ideology from the establishment of the country in 1392 until its collapse in 1910. The goal of this article is to compare the philosophies of two prominent Chosŏn 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 which is then interpreted and practiced in actual politics.

The emergence of the two Confucian scholars Yi Hwang (pen name: T'oegye; 1501–1570) and Yi I (pen name: Yulgok; 1536–1584), was of great import to the history of the Chosŏn dynasty. Originating in China, Neo-Confucianism became firmly entrenched as the Chosŏn state philosophy and ideology under the name of Chosŏn Sŏngnihak (朝鮮性理學) thanks to the academic and political efforts of these two scholars. The seed of the factional (*bungdang* 朋黨) politics that characterizes the political affairs of mid- to late-Chosŏn was also sown by the groups surrounding the two literati. While Yi Hwang and Yi I, who were thirty-five 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

Chosŏn were starkly divergent.¹ Abandoning all official positions at the age of forty-nine, 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 twenty-nine years of age and held a number of influential positions, remaining near the center of political power until his death.

While both assumed Neo-Confucianism based on 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 article 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 Chosŏn 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 Chosŏn's governing class.

This article attempts to establish two main points: namely, that the theories of these two scholars, who accomplished great achievements regarding the *ligi-simsŏng* theories (理氣心性論) related to Neo-Confucianism, can serve as the philosophical foundations that explain their worldly and political choices and philosophies of politics; 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-simsŏng* theories and political choices simply based on the cases of these two scholars, since even similar *ligi-simsŏng* 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 these 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* (*naesŏng oevang*, 內聖外王) as their academic ideal and were both intellectuals and public officials allowed to interact directly

¹ Most of the scholars in this area have explained that Yi Hwang and Yi I were adversarial and tried to find the differences in philosophical or political aspects. The papers in the next footnote show this point of view. Of course, the present author will compare the positions of the two and clarify the distinctions, too. However, the writer's viewpoint is that Yi I inherited Yi Hwang's critical view of the philosophy and politics of the time and developed his theories reflecting the changes of the age. Because this issue will be explicated concretely in another paper by the author, here just the point of view is revealed. Nevertheless, a partial explanation will emerge in the next section.

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 Chosŏn Sŏngnihak 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 these two scholars, their relationship in terms of the *ligi-simsŏng* theories, which are the ultimate embodiment of their academic accomplishments, remains unclear.² This article 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 (CH'ULCH'Ŏ, 出處)

Early in the spring of 1558, a twenty-three-year-old Yi I paid his first visit to the fifty-eight-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' (*ch'ulch'ŏ*, 出處). At that time, Yi Hwang, retired from court politics since the age of forty-nine, had spent the last ten years dedicating himself to his personal learning and teachings in his hometown of Andong in Kyŏngsang Province, while Yi I was studying the scriptures and teachings of Confucianism in preparation for the *kwagŏ* exam. Yi I had been absorbed in Buddhism in Mt. Geumgang at nineteen 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 royal in-laws were still maintaining their hold on power

² 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 Neo-Confucian theories (Ch'oe Chinhong, 2009), while others view the issue from the perspective of inner morality and situationalistic political orientation or subjective interiority and objective exteriority (Pak Ch'ung-sŏk, 2010; Sŏ Kŭn-sik, 2012). Also, some link Yi Hwang's theory on the 'mutual issuance of *li* and *ki*' (*ligi hoballon*, 理氣互發論) and Yi I's on the 'release of *ki* with *li* mounting it' (*kihal isŭng ilto sŏl*, 氣發理乘一途說) to issues of the political realities in which they were situated (Yi Sang-ik, 2001). While these studies reflect some of the achievements of the existing research on these two scholars, they cannot illuminate the relationship between their political thoughts/positions and Neo-Confucianism in a systematic manner.

and manipulating state affairs, which was the reason Yi Hwang had retired from politics nine years previously.

From the time of his first public appointment after passing the *kwagŏ* exam at the age of thirty-four (1534) until his return to his hometown in 1549, Yi Hwang served sixteen years in politics during a period considered a terrible ordeal for literati.³ At the time when he had just passed the *kwagŏ* exam, the Hun'gup'a (勳舊派, meritorious elite) faction dominated power after massacring the Sarimp'a (士林派, Confucian scholar-officials) faction, including Kim Koeng-p'il and Ch'o Kwang-cho, through a series of literati purges including the Muo Sahwa (Literati Purge of 1498), Kapcha Sahwa (1504), and Kimyo Sahwa (1519). Furthermore, during the period when Yi Hwang was in office, the royal in-laws seized power through the Eulsa Sahwa (1545) and Chŏngmi Sahwa (1547), designed to debilitate both the Sarim and Hun'gu 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 royal in-laws.⁴ With his repeated appeals for resignation rejected, he finally simply abandoned P'ung-gi, 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 one of the royal in-laws. Yi Hwang chose to *move back* (*ch'ŏ*, 處) believing that he could not put his academic ideology into practice within the political reality in which he was situated.

Upon returning to his hometown, Yi Hwang re-contemplated Neo-Confucianism based on Zhu Xi's philosophy, which had served as the national ideology over the more than 150 years since the establishment of Chosŏn. 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 leaned excessively toward the details of theory, leading to a failure of proper appreciation of theory by overlooking the aspect of practice⁵, Yi Hwang sought to supplement Zhu Xi's

³ 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 Yi Sang-ŭn (1999, pp. 29–44).

⁴ Wolch'ŏn Cho Mok (月川 趙穆), one of Yi Hwang's most outstanding students, describes the conditions of the intellectual society at that time as follows: "As it was right after the Eulsa Sahwa when (T'oegyŏ was) working at Sŏnggyun'gwan, the foremost education institution in Chosŏn, in his twenties, the behavior of the literati became more dissolute every day." (Chŏng Sun-mok, 1997, pp. 162–163)

⁵ Yi Hwang, "Chŏnsŭmnok nonbyŏn" (傳習錄論辯, Argument on instructions for practical living), *T'oegyŏjip* (退溪集, Collected works of Yi Hwang) (*Han'guk munjip ch'onggan*, [Korean literary collection in classical Chinese], 韓國文集叢刊), 30:418a (i.e. *Han'guk munjip ch'onggan*, Vol. 30, the

philosophy by paralleling his theory with practical instruction.⁶ He thoroughly reviewed the process of the development of Chinese Neo-Confucianism and published his *Chujasö chöryo* (朱子書節要, Anthology of Zhu Xi's letters) and the *Songye wonmyöng ihak tongnok* (宋季元明理學通錄, History of Neo-Confucianism in the Song, Yuan and Ming dynasties). This allowed him to explore the theories of Zhu Xi in greater depth and grasp the need to complement them with a theory of practical cultivation. So he turned his attention toward the *Xinjing fuzhu* (心經附註, Supplementary annotations to the classic of the mind-heart). Despite criticism of this work for its inclination toward Wang Yang-ming's philosophy,⁷ he included the theory of cultivation of the mind-heart and nature (*simsöng suyangnon*, 心性修養論) based on mindfulness (*kyöng*, 敬) 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 *Mujin yukechoso* (戊辰六條疏, Memorandum on six points presented in 1568) and *Sönghak sipto* (聖學十圖, Ten diagrams on sage learning), both of which he presented to King Sönjo in 1568.⁸ Furthermore, he worked to distribute his philosophy through teaching, helping intellectuals check the central power from outside the system by establishing an ideological legitimacy and foundation for a politics of public opinion through a Confucian academy-building campaign, and developing a community compact to allow the doctrine of Confucianism to permeate the daily lives of ordinary people.⁹

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 *kwagö* 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' (*ch'ulch'ö*, 出處):

upper right side on p. 418; hereinafter the citation of *Han'guk munjip ch'onggan* will follow this format).

⁶ Kim Hyoungchan (Kim Hyöng-ch'an) (2007b)

⁷ Yi Hwang, "Simgyöng huron" (心經後論, Remarks on the classic of the mind-heart), *T'oegyeyip*, 30:410b.

⁸ For details about the political situation and academic process at the time of Yi Hwang's life, see Kim Hyoungchan (2007a).

⁹ For a detailed explanation about Yi Hwang's academy-building campaign, see Cho Chun-ho (2006).

While reading the *Hanshi* (漢史, History of the Han dynasty), I considered the decision of the *sibao* (K. *sabo*, 四皓) about the issue of *moving forward and moving back* to be wrong, but I did not dare to state that publicly. However, when I asked T'oegye 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 in the *Xingli daquan* (性理大全, Great collection of Neo-Confucianism) that 'the four old men (*sibao*) seem to be maneuvering learned men, rather than Confucian scholars.' Then I found confirmation that I wasn't wrong.¹⁰

This quotation appears at the beginning of Yi I's writing *Swae ōn* (瑣言, Small stories). 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* as the highlight of the meeting.

Sibao (四皓) refers to four old men who lived as hermits in Shangshan (商山) during the reign of Emperor Gaozu (高祖) of Han (漢). They were referred to as *sibao* since all four of them were in their eighties and had gray beards and 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 Han Dynasty, discouraged the attempt by asking the four old men to emerge and serve the crown prince.¹¹ Wondering whether it was a proper decision for the *sibao* 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 Kangnŭng, filled with deep respect for Yi Hwang. Mentioning that "ancient sages' 'fear of younger generations' (*husaenggaoe*, 後生可畏) was correct,"¹² Yi Hwang identified 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 *kwagŏ* 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 had made the right choice, but the political situation began to shift in the following year. Upon the death of Queen Munjŏng in 1565, King Myŏngjong attempted to consolidate control by driving out the deceased queen's relatives and bringing in Sarimp'a (Confucian scholar-officials faction) members. Although he died two years later

¹⁰ Yi I (李珣), *Swae ōn* (瑣言, Small stories), *Yulgok chŏnsŏ* (栗谷全書, Complete works of Yi I) (*Han'guk munjip ch'onggan*), 44:301d.

¹¹ Sima Qian (司馬遷), Liuhoushijia (留侯世家), *Shiji* (史記, Historical records).

¹² Yi Hwang, "Tap Cho Sa-gyŏng, Muo" (答趙士敬, 戊午), *T'oegyejip*, 30:46c.

without yet seeing the results of his efforts, his successor King Sŏnjo, who ascended to the throne at the age of seventeen, followed in his will to restore power to the Confucian scholar-officials.

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 Myŏngjong 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 Chosŏn. Yi Hwang promptly returned to his hometown after meeting the newly enthroned King Sŏnjo, but Yi I, enjoying the full endorsement of the new king, led the dawning of the era of the Confucian scholar-officials.¹³

3. UNIVERSAL PRINCIPLE (*LI*, 理) AND WILL (*ŪI*, 意)

While Yi Hwang's philosophy spans a wide range of areas including *ligi-simsŏng* (理氣心性) theories, studies of rites (*yebak*, 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 Neo-Confucianism, is the Neo-Confucian term for those patterns that define appropriate behavior, both by individuals and by society overall as well as by the state. In this regard, Yi Hwang's interpretation of *li* greatly impacts on the Neo-Confucian theories in Chosŏn.

The propositions that most clearly reveal Yi Hwang's position on *li* are “*li* issues” (*libal*, 理發),¹⁴ “*li* moves” (*lidong*, 理動),¹⁵ and “*li* comes by itself” (*lijado*, 理自到).¹⁶ While these three propositions were derived from the perspectives of the mind-nature theory, ontology, and epistemology, respectively, they are closely related through coherence in Yi Hwang's argument.¹⁷ The point of debate here is that terms that imply physical movements, such as “issue” (*pal*, 發), “move” (*tong*, 動) and “come by itself” (*chado*, 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*¹⁸ theory endorsed in the philosophy of Zhu Xi

¹³ Serving in a number of posts including taxation minister, personnel minister, and defence minister, Yi I remained at the center of political power until he died of illness.

¹⁴ Yi Hwang, “Tap Ki Myŏng-ŏn non sadan ch'iljŏng, chei sŏ” (答奇明彦-論四端七情, 第二書), *T'oegyeyjip*, 29:419c.

¹⁵ Yi Hwang, “Tap Chŏng Cha-jung, pyŏlchi” (答鄭子中-別紙), *T'oegyeyjip*, 30:101c-102a.

¹⁶ Yi Hwang, “Tap Ki Myŏng-ŏn, pyŏlchi” (答奇明彦-別紙), *T'oegyeyjip*, 29:466c-467b.

¹⁷ For details about the context in which these three propositions were raised, see Kim Hyoungchan (2011) and Mun Sŏg-yun (2001).

¹⁸ In accordance with McCune-Reischauer romanization rules *ki* becomes *gi* when it follows a

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 *ki* (氣), which is matter/energy. According to the *ligi* theory, there is no disagreement that actions such as issuance, movement, and ‘coming by itself’ are of themselves the roles of *ki*, given that *li* can be materialized only through the help of *ki*. The crux of Yi Hwang’s argument was that even though *li* may be revealed by means of assistance from *ki*, the ideal morality of *li* is able to materialize holistically when it is not hindered by *ki* and that *li* in those situations can be described with such predicates as “issue,” “move,” and “come by itself.” This argument is clearly different from the position of Yi I, who underlines the changes of the psychophysical component (*kijil*, 氣質) of the self for the complete actualization of *li*.

From Yi Hwang’s perspective, *li*, as a counter-concept to *ki*, is not limited to simply the principle of nature and moral 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),”¹⁹ Yi Hwang believed that *li* (理), Dao (K. To, 道), and the Great Absolute (T’aegük, 太極) were equal to the Mandate of Heaven that flows freely in the universe.²⁰ According to Yi Hwang, *li* exists ubiquitously in the universe as a dominating force that controls *ki* and allows the materialization of ethical ideals into reality despite not possessing mobility. Where the character of *li* is fully realized, we can describe it as issuing, moving, or coming by itself focusing on the agency of *li*, even though those phenomena occur with assistance of *ki*.

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 mindfulness and keep *söng* (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 undistortedly. Yi Hwang’s emphasis on the attitude of mindfulness (敬) as a key method of learning and practice that remains relevant from the unaroused state (*mibal*, 未發) in which the view ‘*söng* = *li*’ has not yet emerged, through the aroused state (*ibal*,

syllable that ends in a vowel, as in ‘*ligi*.’

¹⁹ Zhu Xi (朱熹), Taijitushuojie (太極圖說解, Commentary on the “Explanation of the Diagram of the Great Ultimate”), *Zhuzi Quanshu* (朱子全書, Complete works of Zhu Xi) 13, p. 72.

²⁰ Yi Hwang, Chesip Sukhüngyamaejamdo (第十夙興夜寐箴圖, Ch. 10, Diagram of the admonition on ‘Rising early and retiring late’), *T’oegyeyip*, 29:212d-213a; Ch’önmyöngdosöl husö (天命圖說後敘), *T’oegyeyip*, 30:407d; Tap Sin Gye (答申啓), *T’oegyeyip*, 30:364d-365b.

已發) in which it is revealed in the form of emotions, as well as in the awe and mindfulness toward the Mandate of Heaven (Ch'ŏnmyŏng, 天命) and the Lord on High (Sangje, 上帝) as the origin of the view 'sŏng = *li*' can be understood in this context.²¹

While Yi Hwang's attitude toward *li* (= *sŏng*) was somewhat religious, Yi I attempted to offer a logical basis for the relationship between *li* and *ki* by strictly following the concept of definitions and examples from the *ligi* theory of Neo-Confucianism. Regarding the relationship between *li* and *ki*, Yi I emphasized that the two can neither remain apart nor be intertwined. As Zhu Xi pointed out, *li* precedes *ki* from the viewpoint of principle, but the opposite is true from the perspective of phenomenon.²² However, this is simply one way to promote understanding of the relationship between the two: *li* and *ki* can neither be separate at any moment nor be mixed in any circumstance. In that sense, *li* and *ki* are one and at the same time two, and two but at the same time one (一而二, 二而一).²³

As to the roles of *li* and *ki*, Yi I clearly defines that "what arises is *ki* and what causes arousal is *li*."²⁴ While this implies a criticism of Yi Hwang's attempt to distinguish *four beginnings* (*sadan*, 四端) and *seven emotions* (*ch'ilchŏng*, 七情) as the issuance of *li* (with *ki* following it) (*libal [igisujŏ]*, 理發[而氣隨之]) and the issuance of *ki* (with *li* mounting it) (*libal [igisŏngjŏ]*, 氣發[而理乘之]), respectively, he was simply strictly following the definition of the two concepts in Neo-Confucianism. Based on this understanding, Yi I describes the relationship between *li* and *ki* through the proposition "*li* is universal and *ki* is particular (*lit'onggiguk*, 理通氣局)."²⁵ In other words, *li* is accepted across the universe as the universal principle or norm while *ki*, as matter or energy, is restricted by time, space, and environment; all existence in the universe is constructed of and operates as a combination of *li* and *ki* in the "never apart and never mixed" relationship.

A problem arises, however, insofar as although such a perspective may be conducive to explaining phenomena it may be 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 *ki*, *li* emerges in diverse forms of phenomena, resulting in the vast spectrum of virtue and vice

²¹ This is based on Yi Hwang's theories on four beginnings and seven emotions (*sadan ch'ilchŏng sŏl*, 四端七情說) and on awe and mindfulness toward the Lord on High. For further details, see Kim Hyoungchan (2010, 2011).

²² Zhu Xi, *Zhuzi yulei* (朱子語類, Classified conversations of Master Zhu Xi) 1, p. 3.

²³ Yi I, *Sŏnghak chibyŏ* (聖學輯要, *Essentials of sage learning*), *Yulgok chŏnsŏ*, 44:458d.

²⁴ Yi I (李珣), "Tap Sŏng Ho-wŏn" (答成浩原), *Yulgok chŏnsŏ*, 44:194d-195a.

²⁵ Yi I (李珣), "Tap Sŏng Ho-wŏn" (答成浩原), *Yulgok chŏnsŏ*, 44:210d-211a.

encountered in the world. However, this explanation fails to offer a force able to change this psychophysical component (*kejiil*, 氣質) and guide society into further good. Confucianism or Neo-Confucianism, which aims for ‘inner sage outer sovereign’ (*naesōng oewang*, 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 a Neo-Confucian theory. For precisely this reason, Yi I notes the will and intention (*ijji*, 意志) to turn from vice to virtue through self-cultivation.²⁶

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 *ki*, his *ligi* theory applies to all existence, including animals, plants, and humans, but humans stand in a unique position compared to other objects composed of the universe and nature. This is based on the traditional Confucian notion that human beings 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 human beings affect the universe and nature. The “Ch’ōndo ch’aek” (天道策, Proposal on the Way of Heaven), which was his response on taking top place in the *kwagō* exam in the winter of 1558, well explains such a relationship between nature and human beings, although it may need to be taken into consideration 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 human beings within the framework of *ligi* theory in a succinct and logical manner.

According to Yi I, alone among all the constituents of nature human beings correspond to the heart of the universe and affect nature and the universe to that same degree. When a wise king rules, the universe, Heaven and Earth operate in harmony as well, but turbulent times bring about unpredictable natural events.²⁷ Therefore, human behavior does not fall simply within the sphere of human society, but affects the entire universe.²⁸

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 *ijji* (意, will) of humans. According to him, *ijji* is a core function of the mind and when nature (*sōng*, 性) is manifested as emotions (*chōng*,

²⁶ For how Yi I came to turn the human will toward self-cultivation to overcome the limitation of his *ligi* theory, see Kim Hyoungchan (1996).

²⁷ While Yi Hwang also endorses the mutual communication between the universe and human beings, he is critical of Yi I’s position that human behavior directly interacts with the universe. Yi Hwang, “Mujin yukchoso” (戊辰六條疏, Memorandum on six points), *T’oegyedip*, 29:192b-194d.

²⁸ Yi I, “Ch’ōndo ch’aek” (天道策, Proposal on the Way of Heaven), *Yulgok chōnsō*, 44:309c-312d.

情), it carefully analyzes (*kyegyosangnyang*, 計較商量) and makes observations (*chōngch'al*, 精察).²⁹ In other words, *ūi* refers to the functions of conscious awareness, judgment, and the will of the mind.

In the sense that *ūi* analyzes and observes only upon the manifestation of emotions, however, the role of *ūi* begins just after the arousal of the mind.³⁰ 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 the mind of Dao 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.

Yi Hwang’s emphasis on the attitude of mindfulness, in which a person concentrates on ‘*sōng=li*’ from an unaroused state of moral emotion, stems from his viewpoint that ‘*sōng=li*’ itself actualizes pure goodness, like the flow of the Mandate of Heaven. Therefore, he focuses on the character of *li*, with propositions such as ‘*li* issues,’ ‘*li* moves,’ and ‘*li* comes by itself,’ and describes the study and cultivation necessary to realize *li*, stressing mindfulness and awe toward *li* and the Mandate of Heaven as the origin of *li*. However, the *ūi* (will) that Yi I observed was not the good will in itself. “While good emotions issue directly and evil ideas cannot emerge if the analysis of the will follows *li*, evil ideas can come out if the analysis does not adequately grasp the notion of righteousness”³¹ because *ūi* analyzes from the moment that emotions occur. According to Yi I, a good emotion does not in itself emanate the potentiality of ‘*sōng=li*.’ Rather, this good emotion is revealed only when one makes *ūi* work in accordance with *li* at the moment that ‘*sōng=li*’ responds to external objects and the emotion is released. Yi I’s emphasis on making *ūi* sincere (*sōngūi*, 誠意) as a means of study and cultivation stems from his idea that the operation of *ūi* in accordance with the rule of *li* is the key to ethical judgment and action. Without *ūi*, sincerity is meaningless. This is the fundamental difference from Yi Hwang’s position because Yi Hwang does not pay attention to *ūi*.

Of course, both Yi Hwang and Yi I emphasize mindfulness (*kyōng*, 敬) and sincerity (of will) (*sōng[ūi]*, 誠[意]), because these are the basic attitudes required for the study of Neo-Confucianism. However, comparing these two scholars in terms of their methods of study and cultivation, Yi Hwang placed a greater emphasis on mindfulness, and Yi I emphasized the sincerity (of will). It is

²⁹ Yi I, “Tap Sōng Ho-wōn” (答成浩原), *Yulgok chōnsō*, 44:194d-195a.

³⁰ Yi I, “Tap An Ūng-hyu” (答安應休), *Yulgok chōnsō*, 44:251d-252a.

³¹ Yi I, “Örok” (語錄, Quotations) Vol. 1, *Yulgok chōnsō*, 45:232b.

common to contrast these philosophies of the two by the mindfulness and the sincerity in the academic world of Korean philosophy, as their emphases in these issues are very clear. The point that we need to focus on here is that the difference originates from whether the scholars focus on *li* or *üi*.³²

4. MINDFULNESS (*KYÖNG*, 敬) AND CHANGES OF THE PSYCHOPHYSICAL COMPONENT (*KIJILBYÖNHWA*, 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 'Chönsümnok nonbyön' (傳習錄論辯, Arguments against instructions for practical living),³³ which explicates this argument, influenced a great number of Chosön 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 *Xinjing fuzhu* (心經附註, Supplementary annotations to the classic of the mind-heart). Authored by Zhen Dexiu (真德秀), Zhu Xi's disciple, and commentated by Cheng Minzheng (程敏政), 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* (*Sishu*, 四書) or *Reflections on Things at Hand* (*Jinsilu*, 近思錄).³⁴ Focusing on the

³² Many scholars explain the differences between the two persons contrasting Yi Hwang's mindfulness and Yi I's sincerity. However, it seems that they overlook the point that the differences between Yi Hwang's mindfulness and Yi I's sincerity stem from the distinction between *li* and *üi* to which they paid attention respectively. Even the scholars (Yi Ki-yong (1995), Chöng Wön-jae (2001)), who perceive Yi I's concern for *üi*, focus on sincerity rather than *üi* in his cultivation theory. The issue will be clearly explicated in another presentation of the present author because it goes beyond the aim of this article to reveal the relationship between the *ligi-simsöng* theories and the political philosophies.

³³ Yi Hwan, Chönsümnok nonbyön (傳習錄論辯), *T'oegyedip*, 30:416b-419b.

³⁴ Han'gang Chöng Ku (寒岡 鄭逮), one of Yi Hwang's disciples, published *Simgyöngbalhwi* (心經發揮) to offer an uncontroversial textbook of self-cultivation based on Zhu Xi's philosophy by excluding contentious writings from the *Xinjing* (心經, Classic of the mind-heart) due to their inclination towards Wang Yang-ming's philosophy and complementing it with writings by Zhu Xi and the five philosophers of Northern Song (Bei Song wuzi, 北宋五子). Chöng Ku, *Simgyöngbalhwi sō* (心經發揮序), *Han'gang chönjip* (寒岡全集, Complete works of Chöng Ku) *ba* (下), pp. 69–70.

concept of mindfulness or devout attention (*kyōng*, 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 *Simbak* (心學, Learning of the mind-heart) by placing it at the center of his learning system that parallels *chondōksōng* (尊德性, honoring the good inborn qualities of one's nature) with *tomunbak* (道問學, following the path of inquiry and study).

Yi Hwang explains mindfulness (*kyōng*, 敬) with “focusing the mind and not letting it wander” (*chuil mujōk*, 主一無適), “being well-ordered and even-minded, grave and quiet” (*chōngje ōmsuk*, 整齊嚴肅), and “being clear-minded and alert” (*sangsōngsōng*, 常醒醒).³⁵ Lying at the core of his *Learning of the Mind-heart*, this refers to the attitude of focusing, contemplating, passing judgments based on the moral principles of ‘*sōng* = *li*’, and taking action regarding the event one is facing, whatever it may be from one's own moral nature to external objects. Mindfulness 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 ‘*sōng* = *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. Mindfulness is an attitude of learning, cultivation, and practice that materializes *li* without hindrance 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 mindfulness as the origin of moral nature and consequently come to materialize *li*.³⁶

While Yi I agreed that the moral ideals of Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism represented by *li* need to be attained, he turned greater attention to the psychophysical component than to *li* itself as a method for 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, the psychophysical component, which serves as an intermediary in the actualization of *li*, must be unblemished. While originally clear and homogeneous, *ki* 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 the movement of *ki*, and the process of the movement creates detritus (*sajae*, 渣滓). Due to this detritus, *ki* comes to possess a variety of characters ranging from clear to muddy, pure, and mixed (*ch'ōngt'aksūbak*, 清濁粹駁).³⁷ Such

³⁵ Yi Hwang, *Chesa Taebak* to (第四大學圖, Ch. 4, Diagram of the *Great Learning*), *T'oegyedip*, 29:205a.

³⁶ Kim Hyoungchan (2011).

³⁷ Yi I, Tap Sōng Ho-won (答成浩原), *Yulgok chōnsō*, 44:218a. *Chil* (質) refers to the *ki* (氣) that has

diversity of *kei*, 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 *kei* (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 *kei* combined with *li*, and *li* is not permitted to select the *kei* 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 Chosŏn dynasty.

According to Yi I, *üi* (意, will) serves as a trigger to purify the psychophysical component. Given that *üi* 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 *kei* but instead a special phenomenon in the human mind through which *li* and *kei* are combined. Yi I fails to elucidate precisely why the human mind possesses the function of *üi*³⁸ but does go on to say that the psychophysical component of the self can be purified and then manifested and that vice can be transformed into virtue by means of this *üi*.³⁹ The concept of *üi* may have been inevitable in Yi I's *ligi-simsŏng* theory (理氣心性論). Of course, Yi I did not invent *üi*. Zhu Xi had already defined it as a function for the mind-heart to analyze (*kyegyŏ*, 計較).⁴⁰ However, in his focus on and search for the meaning and role of *üi* in the process of debating four beginnings (*sadan*, 四端) and seven emotions (*ch'ilchŏng*, 七情) with Sŏng Hon (成渾), Yi I discussed how to change the moral emotions that have already been revealed into good emotions, and developed this discussion into an argument about the human mind and the mind of Dao. The fact that the analysis of *üi* is added to the manifestation of moral emotions implies the deliberate intervention of the human mind in the natural transformation of *kei*. From the perspective of Yi I, who believes that

reached the stage in which it is condensed so that it can be easily perceived by sensory organs. It is called *hyŏng* (形) when it has taken a concrete shape. *Ki-chil* (氣質, psychophysical component) and *hyŏng-chil* (形質) are terms that cross the boundaries of *kei*, *chil*, and *hyŏng*.

³⁸ Here, he seems to be referring to the *üi* (意) of *sŏng-üi* (誠意, to make the will sincere), one of the eight items cataloged in the *Daxue* (大學, Great learning). In the *Guben daxue* (古本大學, Great learning—Old version), *sŏng-üi* (誠意) was considered a more important method of learning and cultivation than “perfecting knowledge by investigating the principle of things” (*kyŏngmulch'iji*, 格物致知).

³⁹ For further details on the relationship between Yi I's *üi* (意) and change of the psychophysical component (*kijil pyŏnhwa*, 氣質變化), see Kim Hyoungchan (2009).

⁴⁰ Zhu Xi, *Zhuḗi yulei* (朱子語類), *Zhuḗi quanshu*, pp. 231–232.

transforming an impure psychophysical component into a pure one is critical to the actualization of Sage Learning (Sōnghak, 聖學) to lead the turbid world toward good, *ŭi* plays the role of impelling not only individuals but the entire universe toward the good. Therefore, in order to make the will (*ŭi*; 意) work in accordance with *li*, Yi I paid close attention to study and cultivation to make the will sincere (*sōngŭi*, 誠意).

5. TWO TEXTS ON SAGE POLITICS

Yi I discussed the issue of the state funeral with Yi Hwang upon the death of King Myōngjong (1567), bewailed the news of Yi Hwang's death (1570), and presented a request for Yi Hwang's inclusion in 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 his friend, Ugye Sōng Hon in 1572, two years after the death of Yi Hwang, Yi I clearly expressed his view on the *ligi-simsōng* theory as explained above and critiqued Yi Hwang's arguments. In 1575, he authored for King Sōnjo a new textbook on Sage Learning, from a more distinct point of view than that of the *Ten Diagrams on Sage Learning* (聖學十圖, *Sōnghak sipto*) published for the king in 1568 by Yi Hwang.

When Yi Hwang first published the book, Yi I expressed a divergent view on aspects of the *Ten Diagrams on Sage Learning* in terms of content and order⁴¹ 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, *Sōnghak chibyō*) to King Sōnjo, 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 (*kyōngyōn*, 經筵, classics mat).⁴²

(1) *Ten Diagrams on Sage Learning* and politics as the realization of Heaven's Dao and the mind-heart and nature

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

⁴¹ Yi I, "Sang T'oegye sōnsaeng munmok" (上退溪先生問目), *Yulgoke chōnsō*, 44:182a-184b.

⁴² According to Chi Tu-hwan (1995), the *Essentials of Sage Learning* (聖學輯要) was officially adopted as a textbook for royal lectures as late as the late seventeenth century.

Memorandum on Six Points (戊辰六條疏, *Mujin yukechoso*) to the eighteen-year-old King Sŏnjo 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 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.⁴³

The *Ten Diagrams on Sage Learning* is a work summarizing Sage Learning by means of ten diagrams and accompanying commentaries. However, almost 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 the method of practice and education. As Yi Hwang described it, this method of explanation beginning from the universe and its origination follows the system of *Reflections on Things at Hand* (近思錄, *Jinsilu*).⁴⁴ 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 dealing with politics, but is instead focused on the cultivation of personality.

The *Ten Diagrams on Sage Learning*, totaling ten chapters, features a diagram, writing and a 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 effective way to understand Yi Hwang's intention 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 Dao of Heaven (Ch'ŏndao, 天道) but they are about upholding the moral principles of humanity and accumulating virtuous achievements”⁴⁵ while the following five chapters are “based on the mind-heart and nature (*simsŏng*, 心性) and the gist is striving for daily learning and cultivating a mind of awe and mindfulness.”⁴⁶ Identifying the Dao of Heaven and the mind-heart and nature as the two core theories of Sage Learning, Yi Hwang summarized the two concepts in chapters 1–2 and 6–7, respectively, and corresponding practice methods in 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

⁴³ Yi Hwang, “Chin Sŏnghak sipto ch'a” (進聖學十圖劄, Address presenting the ten diagrams on sage learning to King Sŏnjo), *T'oegyŏjip*, 29:197d-200a.

⁴⁴ Yi Hwang, “Cheil Taegükto” (第一太極圖, Ch. 1, Diagram of the Supreme Ultimate), *T'oegyŏjip*, 29:201c.

⁴⁵ Yi Hwang, “Cheo Paengnoktong kyu to” (第五白鹿洞規圖, Ch. 5, Diagram of rules of the White Deer Hollow Academy), *T'oegyŏjip*, 29:206c.

⁴⁶ Yi Hwang, “Chesip sukhŏngyamaejamdo” (第十夙興夜寐箴圖, Ch. 10, Diagram of the admonition on ‘rising early and retiring late’), *T'oegyŏjip*, 29:213a-b.

daily learning and cultivating a mind of awe and mindfulness” has its basis in the Dao of Heaven and the mind-heart and nature and solely through such daily practice should the Tao of Heaven and the mind-heart and nature be manifested. Sage politics, which was not mentioned at all in this book, would flow as a natural consequence of such learning and cultivation.⁴⁷

In order to understand Yi Hwang’s discussion about the mind-heart and nature and the Dao of Heaven in the *Ten Diagrams on Sage Learning* correctly, we should pay attention to “Ch. 6, The diagram of the saying, “The mind combines and governs nature and feelings,”” in which Yi Hwang complemented in person and in particular the last two chapters on cultivation which underlined the attitude of mindfulness and awe toward the Mandate of Heaven and the Lord on High. Ch. 6 consists of one diagram made by Cheng Fuxin (程復心), a Neo-Confucian scholar of Yuan China, and two diagrams that Yi Hwang drew and added himself. Even though the first diagram by Cheng Fuxin showed the basic relationship between the mind-heart, nature, and emotion from Zhu Xi’s point of view, Yi Hwang did not seem to be satisfied with it. The second drawing by Yi Hwang described an ideal state in which mind-heart controls nature and emotions (*simt’ongsöngjöng*, 心統性情). The third illustration included Yi Hwang’s theory of ‘four beginnings’ and ‘seven emotions’ (*Sadan ch’ilchöng söl*, 四端七情說), referring to how moral emotions should be distinguished based on the criteria of virtue and vice. This shows his belief that human beings could tell in which direction they should go by identifying moral emotions as virtue or vice according to their origin.

Given that the purpose of Ch. 6 is to enable an ordinary king to become a Sage King through study and cultivation, it can be said that Yi Hwang focused on the third illustration. The key point in his theory of Four Beginnings and Seven Emotions is that we should clearly define our aim as human beings by classifying the moral emotions according to the standard of virtue or vice. Yi stated, “the essence of the matter is this: that which includes both *li* and *ki* and combines and governs the nature and the feelings is the mind; and the moment of the nature’s issuance as feelings is the subtle wellspring of the whole mind, the pivot of ten thousand transformations, the separation point of good and evil.”⁴⁸ He insisted that we should study deeply in order to preserve the mind-heart and develop our

⁴⁷ This explanation on the composition and contents of *Ten Diagrams on Sage Learning* is a summary of a part of the present writer’s bibliographical notes on this book. *Yökbü wa haesöl Sönghak sipto* (*Translation with notes on ‘Ten Diagrams on Sage Learning’*) (2009).

⁴⁸ Yi Hwang, Cheyuk Simt’ongsöngchöngdo (第六心統性情圖, Ch. 6, Diagram of the saying, “the mind combines and governs the nature and the feelings”), *T’ögyejip*, 29:207d. The English translations of *Ten Diagrams on Sage Learning* in this article are adopted from Michael Kalton’s translations with revisions.

nature with the attitude of mindfulness at the moment when the nature would be revealed and be transformed into emotions.⁴⁹

While Yi Hwang consistently emphasized mindfulness as the basic attitude to be studied and cultivated, we need to pay attention to the fact that he finished the *Ten Diagrams on Sage Learning* by showing mindfulness and awe toward the Lord on High and the Dao.⁵⁰ For Yi Hwang, who saw *li* (理, principle), Dao (道, Way), and Great Absolute (T'aegük, 太極) as the flow of the Mandate of Heaven (天命), the *Lord on High* and Dao were alternative ways of expressing *li*. While Zhu Xi's philosophy (*sōngjūngni*, 性即理) internalized *li*, the universal principle/law that both fills and flows through the universe/nature from the origin of being, as the moral nature of humans, 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 mindfulness.

This mindfulness is one of the core concepts in Yi Hwang's theory of study and cultivation, so some modern scholars refer to his theory as a philosophy of mindfulness (*kyōngbak*, 敬學).⁵¹ While the mindfulness in Zhu Xi's philosophy was interpreted as "focusing the mind and not letting it wander" (*chuil mujök*, 主一無適), "being well-ordered and even-minded, grave and quiet" (*chōngje ömsuk*, 整齊嚴肅), "always being clear-minded and alert" (*sangsöngsöng*, 常惺惺) and so on, "mindfulness" originally referred to having a reverent attitude while facing a god. So mindfulness should be understood as the manner in which one focuses on a god with a devout, solemn, and fearful attitude. In this regard, mindfulness already includes the idea of awe. If a person focuses his/her mind on the object of mindfulness and awe in a sincerely reverent manner, it would make no difference whether it is *li*/Dao as the universal law or the Lord on High as the personalized god.

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 Neo-Confucianism was formed. 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 necessity of awe and mindfulness for the Lord on High. This emphasis could

⁴⁹ Yi Hwang, Cheyuk simt'ongsöngjōngdo (第六心統性情圖, Ch. 6, Diagram of the saying, "The mind combines and governs the nature and the feelings"), *T'oebyejip*, 29:207d-208a.

⁵⁰ Yi Hwang, Chegu Kyōngjaejamdo (第九敬齋箴圖, Ch. 9, Diagram of the Admonition for Mindfulness Studio) and Che sip Sukhūngyamaejamdo (第十夙興夜寐箴圖, Ch. 10, Diagram of the Admonition on 'rising early and retiring late'), *T'oebyejip*, 29:211a-213b.

⁵¹ Kim Taeyōng (1983), Takahashi Susumu (1984).

lead to Yi Hwang being criticized for inconsistency, 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.⁵²

Although the psychophysical component (*keijil*, 氣質) could interrupt the materialization of *li*, Yi Hwang directed his attention to the ‘moral nature (*sōng*, 性)/universal principle (*li*, 理)/the Mandate of Heaven (Ch’ōnmyōng, 天命)/Lord on High (Sangje, 上帝).’ According to Yi, the most effective way of materializing the moral nature and principle involves focusing on it with an attitude of mindfulness, beginning from the unaroused state of mind-heart and through the process of arousal. In addition, this 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.

This enables us to understand why Yi Hwang edited *Ten Diagrams on Sage Learning* in a way that focused on the king’s own study and self-cultivation as the real center of political management. In “Address Presenting the Ten Diagrams on Sage Learning to King Sōnjo” Yi Hwang stated as follows.

This is even more important in the case of one who rules others. His single mind is the place where the beginnings of myriad affairs originate, the place where a hundred responsibilities come together. Manifold desires attack it in unison and all sorts of deceits try to bore their way in. If one is but once slack and heedless it will run wild, and if this continues it becomes like the collapse of a mountain or the boiling of the sea: who can control it then!⁵³

In the philosophy of Yi Hwang, the crucial point of politics depends on how to preserve, foster, and study the mind-heart of the king that *li* settles in, as the king is the crux of the political system. In this book, Yi Hwang revealed his point of view on politics, namely, that the most ideal life and politics are not to bother oneself with peripheral elements but to holistically preserve ‘*sōng/li*/Dao/the Mandate of Heaven/the Lord on High’ as the universal law and the moral standard of nature and society with an attitude of mindfulness and awe, and enable it always to flow out into the world naturally.

⁵² For more details, see Kim Hyoungchan (2010).

⁵³ Yi Hwang, Chin Sōnghak sip-to ch’a (進聖學十圖箚, Address presenting the *Ten Diagrams on Sage Learning* to King Sōnjo), *T’oegyepip*, 29:198a.

(2) *Essentials of Sage Learning* and the politics of the psychophysical component based on the orthodox line of Dao

In comparison to *Ten Diagrams on Sage Learning*, 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' (*susin*, 修身), 'stabilizing the family' (*chega*, 齊家), 'ruling the state' (*ch'iguk*, 治國), and 'bringing peace throughout the world' (*p'yŏngch'ŏnba*, 平天下) from among the eight items of the *Great Learning* (*Daxue*, 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, Yi 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* (*Sishu Liuqing*, 四書六經). He highly valued the *Extended Meaning of the Great Learning* (*Daxue yanyi*, 大學衍義) published by Zhen Dexiu (眞德秀) 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."⁵⁴ 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 (*susin*, 修身) from its very conception, Yi I had in mind a textbook for Sage Learning spanning the entire range of 'cultivating the mind and body,' 'stabilizing the family,' 'ruling the state,' and 'bringing peace throughout the world.' With this aim clearly revealed through the book's organization, its chapters progress from 'cultivating oneself' (*sugi*, 修己), 'properly governing one's family' (*chŏngga*, 正家), 'practicing state governance' (*wijŏng*, 爲政), and to the last chapter devoted to the 'lineage of sages' Dao' (Ch. *shengxian daotong*; K. *sŏnghyŏn tot'ong*, 聖賢道統), underlining that Sage Politics should be based on the orthodox learning transmitted from Fuxi (伏羲) and Confucius to Zhu Xi. Yi I also 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' and 'bringing peace throughout the world' stem from the ruler's learning and cultivation and expand 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 *Essentials of Sage Learning* is devoted to self-cultivation. Unlike Yi Hwang, however,

⁵⁴ Yi I, *Sŏnghak chibyŏ-seo* (聖學輯要-序, Introduction for *Essentials of Sage Learning*), *Yulgok Chŏnsŏ*, 44:422d.

who was solely focused on the preservation and achievement of ‘moral nature’ (*sŏng*, 性)(= *li* = Mandate of Heaven = Lord on High), the most important point in Yi I’s version of self-cultivation was changes of the psychophysical component of the self.

Yi I argues that the first purpose of learning is to change the psychophysical component of the self. Furthermore, he presents the case of a person whose violent character changed into a warm personality after he had read the *Analects of Confucius* diligently, and another case of a scholar improving his physique (“bones and sinews”)⁵⁵ through restraining greed and studying hard.⁵⁶ He asserts that if a student has not seen anyone who has undergone psychophysical changes, this would be because this person has only pursued broad knowledge and an outstanding command of rhetoric.⁵⁷

However, we need to observe that, in terms of self-cultivation, Yi I places the establishment of *chi* (志, intention) ahead of a transformation of the psychophysical component. According to Yi, everyone, and not only the ruler, should establish a goal when they set out to learn. In the *The Secret of Expelling Ignorance* (*Kyŏngmong yogyŏl*, 擊蒙要訣), a book offering educational guidelines, which he wrote for beginners two years after completing the *Essentials of Sage Learning*, he similarly promoted the establishment of *chi* as the first step in learning.

In Yi I’s view, *chi* here presupposes the establishment of *ŭi*. In other words, the operation of *ŭi*, which analyzes and observes, occurs upon an arousal of emotions, and *chi* is the establishment of a responding mental orientation. 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, *ŭi*, and *chi*. For the convenience of explanation, however, Yi I placed emotion first, followed by *ŭi* and then *chi*.⁵⁸ In sum, the transformation of the psychophysical component occurs through the functioning of emotion, *ŭi*, and *chi*, and this transformation lies at the center of the success of Sage Learning, which for Yi I means ‘cultivating the mind and body,’ ‘stabilizing the family,’ ‘ruling the state,’ and ‘bringing peace throughout the world,’ as well as Sage Politics. In other words, will and intention (*ŭiji*, 意志) purify the psychophysical component of the self and actualize the ideology of *li*. The education of a ruler practices this at the level of

⁵⁵ Yi I, “Sŏnghak chibyŏ,” *Yulgok chŏnsŏ*, 44:473b-c. The scholar in this case is Cheng Yichuan (程伊川). “Physique” or “bones and sinews” (Ch. *jīnggǔ*; K. *keūn’gol*, 筋骨) might be somewhat exaggerated expressions but Cheng Yichuan and Yi I both tried to explain that mental study and cultivation could cause physical changes through words.

⁵⁶ On the methods and the effects for changing the psychophysical component, see Kim Hyoungchan (2009, p.203).

⁵⁷ Yi I, “Sŏnghak chibyŏ sŏ,” *Yulgok chŏnsŏ*, 44:471a.

⁵⁸ Yi I, “Sŏnghak chibyŏ,” *Yulgok chŏnsŏ*, 44:458b-d.

personal learning and cultivation, and the politics of a ruler means applying it to actual operations.

Yi Hwang focused on the study and cultivation of the mind-heart of the king or the nature of the mind-heart, and saw the ideal politics was found in the idea of morality being revealed and proliferating from nature in the single mind of the king. However, Yi I regarded the king as *li* and the officials around him as the psychophysical component of the self. He argued that the idealized and pure goodness of the king is a central point of politics and that his function is realized through the excellent persons around him who operate as the psychophysical component. He stated,

I consider there to be nothing more urgent in the learning of a ruler than changing his psychophysical component, and nothing more urgent in the ruler's governance than receiving recommendations on and employing wise and honest talent. The changes of the psychophysical component 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.⁵⁹

According to Yi I, the core of the education of a ruler lies in purifying the psychophysical component of the self 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 the psychophysical component of the self is learning and cultivation at the personal level and the governance of a ruler that utilizes wise subordinates transforms the psychophysical component surrounding the *li* of the country, which is 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.

Here we should also pay attention to the “Lineage of sages’ Dao” (聖賢道統), the last chapter of *Essentials of Sage Learning*. Yi I intended to include this in the book without reference to the composition of the *Great Learning*. This chapter does not describe the royal line, but the lineage of Dao transmitted to Zhu Xi from Fuxi (伏羲) by the way of Zhougong (周公), Confucius, and Mencius. Yi I does not deny the fact that the single mind (*ilsim*, 一心) of the king is also very significant in politics.⁶⁰ However, he points out that the king could pass down

⁵⁹ Yi I, *Sŏnghak chibyŏ-chinch’a* (聖學輯要 - 進筭, Address presenting the Essentials of Sage Learning to King Seonjo), *Yulgok chŏnsŏ*, 44:420d.

⁶⁰ Yi I, *Sŏnghak chibyŏ-chinch’a*, *Yulgok chŏnsŏ*, 45:61a.

Dao with the assistance of his sage subordinates after the hereditary system for the succession to the throne had been settled.⁶¹ This means that the hereditary system of the throne had led to the roles of government officials becoming as important as that of the king, since the officials with the lineage of the Dao assisted and checked the royal authority.

In Yi I's view, these officials in the line of Dao effectively had a more significant role than the king with his royal line, so he sees altering the psychophysical component as the crucial point of politics. In order for him to achieve the politics of a Sage King, the king's learning should be Neo-Confucianism based on Zhu Xi's philosophy, and he must be accompanied by officials who had inherited the lineage of Dao. Of course, almost all Neo-Confucian intellectuals, including Zhu Xi himself and Yi Hwang, tried to ensure that the academy (*sŏmŏn*, 書院) was a public square based on both truth and the lineage of Dao, with the responsibility of holding the central power in check. According to the methods of Sage Learning in the *Ten Diagrams on Sage Learning*, this kind of check can only function to assist study and governance that is based on a single mind and the mindfulness-awe of the king himself. However, Yi I thought that the ethical and practical roles of the officials in assisting and checking the king were more significant. Thus, the authority and power of the king is realized and checked by able people who have inherited the lineage of the Dao. Of course, in the sense that the will and intention of the king play a decisive role in gathering these outstanding individuals around the throne, the king, with his will and intention, works alongside these intellectuals based on the lineage of the Dao, and together they complete the model of Sage Politics.

6. CONCLUSION

Yi Hwang and Yi I, who were one generation apart, each played a central role in Chosŏn's academic and political arenas. They have more in common with each other 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 opposing schools and political factions that later split Chosŏn'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

⁶¹ Yi I, "Sŏnghak chibyo-chinch'a," *Yulgoŭk chŏnsŏ*, 45:80c.

discrepancies to denounce others and strengthen their own positions. 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 article has attempted to interpret the departures in their academic perspectives as they relate to their political choices and thought. They shared a goal of forging a nation and society that achieves moral ideals represented by *li*. 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 emphasizes ‘stabilizing the family,’ ‘ruling the state,’ and ‘bringing peace throughout the world’ to bring about these 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. That means that the universal principle and law exists within human beings. Yi Hwang emphasized the study of the unaroused state of ‘*sōng = li*’ undisturbed by the psychophysical component of the self in order to fully preserve and materialize the internalized universal principle in actuality. Believing *li* to be the flow of the Mandate of Heaven, he considered *li* itself to be a driving factor in the actualization of morality. The role of human beings 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 the psychophysical component of the self interrupts learning and cultivation was a secondary 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, the Lord on High, as its origin, remains an object for awe and mindfulness. In this regard, human beings should study from an unaroused state while remaining continuously alert with awe and mindfulness for the Lord on High so that ‘*sōng = 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 ‘moral nature’ (= *li* = Dao = Mandate of Heaven = Lord on High), while human beings 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. In this regard, as we can see from the composition of the *Ten Diagrams on Sage Learning*, Sage Politics is not artificial governance. Rather, it diffuses naturally from the study and cultivation of the Sage King toward the world. There, it is more crucial to

concentrate on the study and cultivation of the Sage King than the environmental elements, and the king is the central figure in the performance of governance.

Meanwhile, Yi I turned to the role of the psychophysical component surrounding *li* rather than the pure and complete *li* itself. Whether or not *li* or *sōng* can be fully materialized depends on the psychophysical component. However, if the principle of the *ligi* theory of “what arises is *ki* and what causes the arousal *li*” is strictly applied, Yi I’s argument fails to provide a driving force able to manipulate the psychophysical component. Here, Yi I viewed *īi* and *chi* as functions of mind. He argues that human beings, one of the three main elements of the universe along with Heaven and Earth, can purify the psychophysical component of nature and society, which is constructed of *li* and *ki*, by means of their *īi* or conscious perception, judgment, and will. Of course, given that *īi* could be oriented toward evil as well as good, it is always necessary to make the *īi* sincere (*sōngīi*, 誠意) in order to let it follow *li*. According to Yi I, once one’s nature is manifested as an emotion, the direction of the mind is determined (*chi*, 志) and the psychophysical component is purified through *īi* or the function of perception, judgment, and will. As a result, the person and the world can be changed toward the good. In addition, he considered the relationship between a king and his subjects to be the interaction between *li* and *ki*, and emphasized the role of the significant officials surrounding the king. In this regard, Yi I’s ideal politics of the Sage King is achieved by the Sage King’s will and intention (*īiji*, 意志) to gather able people around him and to have subjects who assist him on the basis of Sage Learning.

Valuing awe and mindfulness for the Lord on High, and efforts to draw to the fore the purity and completeness of ‘*li* = *sōng*’, Yi Hwang underscored the importance of the study of unarousal at the personal level. In the meantime, Yi I purported that moral emotions can be converted into virtue (*sōn*, 善) by analyzing and observing as well as by purifying the revealed emotion and transforming the psychophysical component. His emphasis was on the study of the arousal after ‘*li* = *sōng*’ 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* and *Ten Diagrams on Sage Learning* are focused on the learning and cultivation of the ruler, Yi I’s *Essentials of Sage Learning* addresses in a practical way political aspects ranging from self-cultivation to ‘stabilizing the family,’ ‘ruling the state,’ and ‘bringing peace throughout the

world.’ Furthermore, the Toegye school and Namin (南人) faction supported monarchism under the governance of a well cultivated ruler, while the Yulgok school and Söin (西人) faction 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 article presents a potential philosophical interpretation to explain their political choices and considerations by comparing the theories of Neo-Confucianism with which they were intimately involved.

Submitted: December 20, 2013

Sent for revision: April 1, 2014

Accepted: May 1, 2014

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