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

Kim Hyoung-chan

Abstract

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

Keywords: Neo-Confucianism, Korean Confucianism, Sage Learning, Toegye, Yi Hwang, Four-Seven debate, cultivation, theory and practice
Heart Combines and Governs Nature and Emotions.\textsuperscript{1}

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

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

Since the end of the nineteenth century, the rapid and forceful inflow of Western culture greatly undermined the academic foundation of Korean traditional philosophy. As a result, scholars in Korea found themselves reevaluating and restructuring their traditional philosophy according to the framework of the modern sciences imported from the West. Therefore, among many areas of traditional Korean philosophy, they focused on those to which it was relatively easy to apply a Western academic framework. As for Korean Confucianism, particularly well-studied areas were igi (principle and matter) theory and simseong (mind-heart and human nature) theory. Indeed, they were very important themes within Confucianism in the Joseon era, but the main reason for the attention they received was their theoretical characteristics. Igi theory explains the origination and operation of the universe and objects with the two concepts of i and gi; simseong theory explains the structure and operation of humans' moral nature based on igi theory. For studies centered on igi and simseong theories, the research methods of Western modern philosophy were relatively easy to apply, as it focuses on clear concepts and elaborate logic. The Four-Seven theory, which developed from serious debate among Neo-Confucian scholars, was indeed a very appropriate subject for igi- or simseong-focused research.

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

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

---

\textsuperscript{1} "Simtong seongjeong doseol" 心性情欲 (Diagram and Explanation for the Mind-Heart Combines and Governs Nature and Emotions), in Yi H. (1988, vol.1, 7:22b-25a).

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

\textsuperscript{3} Some researchers criticize the igi theory-based research trend. However, the author uses the term "igi- and simseong-based" research to indicate that the main trend of research should be studied based on simseong theory, and igi theory is to be used as a framework for analysis.
broaching the subject of dohak in studying Toegye's philosophy was deemed proper and insightful. However, previous works on the dohak-based approach in studying Toegye's philosophy failed to provide an objective and logical explanation concerning some essential issues as follows: the role of the theoretical research process and outcomes in realizing the goal of practicing morality; the intervention of moral judgment, behavior or intention in theoretical study; the assessment method to determine whether Toegye's philosophy successfully connected theoretical study and practice of morality. Indeed, it is a considerably difficult task considering that it should solve the problem of "linguistic presentation of practice" or "of orientation toward practice." Research conducted through the dohak-based approach can hardly achieve the status of a modern philosophical theory until the problem is solved. This situation may be the reason why the dohak-based approach did not attract support from many scholars.

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

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

**From Zhu Xi’s Philosophy to Toegye’s Philosophy**

This paper agrees with the argument of some researchers that most studies on Korean Confucianism including Toegye’s philosophy tend to focus on igi and simseong theories, and fail to fully examine other remarkable characteristics of Korean Confucianism. Most igi- and simseong-based studies adopt the main concepts—igi, gi, sim, seong, emotion, Four Beginnings, Seven Emotions, human mind, moral mind, natural law, human desire, perception, and issuance—from Korean Confucian scriptures, and offer logical analyses of these concepts. However, since the main concepts and theoretical system of Korean Confucianism are intertwined with the practical goal of realizing Confucian (or Neo-Confucian) ideology in a social context, research methods based on clear concepts and elaborate logic alone cannot cover the essence and totality of Korean philosophy. Despite this limitation, however, the igi- and simseong-based methodologies in studying Korean Confucianism are undoubtedly faithful to that of the modern learning system as it approaches Korean Confucianism by using non-contradictory concepts and a verifiable logical structure, which is why many scholars have so far studied Korean Confucianism with a focus on the notions of igi and simseong. Moreover, granting that this research method has its own problems, no alternatives have yet been developed to replace it in the field of Korean Confucianism. Therefore, the paper believes that igi and simseong theories are undeniably a standard in the research of Korean Confucianism. However, it should be also noted that the paper attempts to identify areas of Korean Confucianism in which this research method is less applicable, by more strictly applying the most widely examined igi and simseong theories.

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

**Domunhak and Jondeokseong**

Neo-Confucianism is a theory whose main tenet is that people can and should form a harmonious society structured on the foundation of Confucianism according to their inborn moral nature. It advocates the necessity and inevitability for humans to build a morally ideal society on the following grounds: (1) all beings and their actions are composed of a combination of i (principle or law) and gi (matter or energy); (2) in nature, there is a constant principle (i), which is the law of physics and at the same time the law of ethics, and its contents are represented by the four virtues (origination, flourishing, benefiting, and firmness); (3) the four virtues in nature are given to
In Andong, Yi Hwang focused his study on Zhu Xi’s philosophy, which was the state ideology and foundation of learning and education. In China, criticism of Zhu Xi’s philosophy was rising, and Wang Yangming’s philosophy was gaining popularity. Nevertheless, the former was the most advanced philosophy in Northeast Asia at the time. By excerpting Zhu Xi’s writings, Yi Hwang put together Jujaseo jeoryo (Essentials of Zhu Xi’s Correspondence) and authored Songgye wonmyeong ihak tongnok (A History of Chinese Neo-Confucianism) to elucidate the genealogy of Zhu Xi’s philosophy. Works such as these clearly show that he was very faithful to Zhu Xi’s philosophy. Of the three books that he valued most, attention should first be given to Xinjing fuzhu (Selected Scriptures on the Mind-Heart with Notes). While the other two books, Xingli daquan (Great Compendium on Human Nature and Principle) and Zhuzi quanshu (Complete Works of Zhu Xi) were generally admired as the most basic, Xinjing fuzhu did not draw much interest from Zhu Xi’s followers and was even criticized for favoring Yangming’s philosophy. However, Yi Hwang disapproved of such criticism and recommended the book to his disciples. He set a high value on it, calling it equal in importance to the Four Books or Jinsilu (Reflections on Things at Hand).

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

7. Regarding the life of Yi Hwang, refer to “Toegye seonsaeng yeonbo” (A Chronological Record of Master Toegye) in Yi H. (1988, vol. 3); Kim H. (2007a, 245-251).
8. For details regarding the influence of Neo-Confucian books on the process of Yi Hwang’s philosophy, refer to Yi S. (1999, 83-107).
9. The fact that Yi Hwang paid special attention to Xinjing fuzhu (Selected Scriptures on the Mind-Heart with Notes) is an important basis for some researchers to define Toegye’s philosophy as the “learning of the mind-heart.”
10. “Simgyeong huron” 心經論 in Yi H. (1988, vol. 2, 41:11b).
11. “Simgyeong huron” in Yi H. (1988, vol. 2, 41:13a-b).
order to correct this imbalance. Zhen Dexiu, a follower of Zhu Xi’s ideas, wrote and edited Xinjing by collecting writings related to the cultivation of personality, and Cheng Minzheng from the Ming dynasty authored Xinjing fuzhu, adding his comments to Xinjing. While Zhu Xi made great efforts at strict analysis and reinterpretation of scriptures on the basis of his systematic theory, these books gave primary attention to the cultivation of personality.

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

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

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

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

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

14. Kim T. (1997); Takahashi (1984)
15. “Jeonseup rok byeon” in Yi H. (1988, vol. 2, 41:27a).
16. “Jeonseup rok byeon” in Yi H. (1988, vol. 2, 41:26a-b).
Issuance of Gi and Issuance of I

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

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

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

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

\(^{17}\) Refer to Kim H. (1996, 13-33).

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

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

\(^{20}\) “Dap Ki Myeong-eon” in Yi H. (1988, Vol. 1, 16:24a).

\(^{21}\) “Dap Ki Myeong-eon” in Yi H. (1988, Vol. 1, 16:32a).

\(^{22}\) “Dap Ki Myeong-eon” in Yi H. (1988, Vol. 1, 16:20a, 16:21b).

\(^{23}\) “Yeo Ki Myeong-eon” in Yi H. (1988, Vol. 1, 16:1b).
Then Yi Hwang made a stronger argument regarding the concept of "i comes into being of itself" by discussing the process of perception. He said, "I insisted on the wrong argument before, because I just stuck to Zhu Xi's idea that "i does not feel, think, fathom nor make up. Thereupon, I thought 'I can reach the ultimate point (geukcheo) of the principle of things (mulli). But how can i reach the ultimate point of itself?" He went on to say that he recognized the fact that one perceived i of an object as i "approached of itself" (ijado). However, Yi made another assumption. It was the idea that the issuance or approach of i implied that when the human mind approached wholeheartedly, nothing could not be perceived. The issuance of i cannot be achieved only with i, but it can be issued when one's mind approaches to it. Therefore, he said, "It concerns me whether my investigation of things (gyeongmul) is incomplete, but not whether i comes into being of itself or not." This means that one should be concerned only with whether or not his/her mind is working properly.

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

I and the Heavenly Mandate

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

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

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

27. Yoon Sasoon believes that the effort to harmonize people with nature through "what is to be" and "what should be" are important implications of Toegye's philosophy. See Yoon Sasoon (1986).
physical aspects, included the theory that people should obey the principle of nature and cultivate their own education and practice.

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

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

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

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

---

28. “Mujin yukjoso” (Six-Article Memorial of 1568)  in Yi H. (1988, Vol. 1, 6:36b-59b).
29. “Mujin yukjoso” in Yi H. (1988, Vol. 1, 6:56a-b).
30. Zhu Xi (1986, Vol. 1, 3).
31. Yi Dong-hwan said that in the case of Yi Hwang, the “holy Lord on High” was non-substantialized and characterized in his igi theory; however, “the personified heaven with cognition and dignity existed resolutely in his learning of mind-heart.” Yi D. (1996). Yi Hwang’s viewpoint seems contradictory, but it is sometimes pointed out as the cause for why some scholars in the Toegye school, like Yi Ik, Kwon Cheol-sin, and Jeong Yak-yong, interpreted heaven (cheon) as a personified being. On this point, see Yi W. (1980); Yi D. (1990, 1996); Yeo (2004); Kim H. (2005).
32. Explaining that heaven would concretely warn the king of disasters, Yi Hwang emphasized that the king should maintain a consistent attitude with mindfulness and sincerity. “Mujin yukjoso” in Yi H. (1988, vol. 1, 6:56b-58b).
grams on Sage Learning explains the key contents of Neo-Confucianism from the origin of the universe to the method of cultivating the mind-heart. But in chapters 9 and 10, he discussed the proper idea toward study and daily life, and emphasized that people should always hold the sangje in awe (gyesin gonggu; to be cautious and fearful) and maintain a prudent attitude (sindok; to be cautious when one is alone). It is a basic Neo-Confucian attitude that domunhak and jondeokseong are the means by which one can perfect one’s ethical nature and become a Sage King (seonghyeon) or a Sage Intellectual (seongwang). However, Yi Hwang seems to have thought that an external control like an absolute or transcendent being was also needed for humans who are easily tempted by idleness or desire.

**Practice of Theory versus Theory of Practice**

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

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

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

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

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

---

33. “Seonghak sipdo” 儒學十論 in Yi H. (1988, vol. 7:31b, 7:34b-35a).

34. Though he respected Yi Hwang, Jeong Yak-yong later criticized Yi and put the “Lord on High” at the top of his own theoretical system, possibly because he thought that stronger external compulsion was needed in the 19th century than in the age of Yi Hwang. On this issue, see Kim H. (2005).
life. Such efforts, making up for the lack of practical aspects of Zhu Xi’s philosophy, served to form the main characteristics of Toegye’s philosophy, strengthening the practical value of Neo-Confucianism through spontaneous human will.

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

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

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

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

---

35. On the issue that value judgments intervened in the theory formation process in Korean Confucianism, see Kim H. (2007b).
36. “Simgyeong huron” in Yi H. (1988, vol. 2, 41:13a-b).
REFERENCES

Ahn, Byung-ju (An, Byeong-ju). 1987. “Toegye-ui hangmungwan: Simgyeong huron-eul jungsim-euro” (A Study of Toegye’s Perspective on Learning: On Simgyeong huron). Toegyehak yeongu (Review of Toegye Studies) 1.

Chen, Lai (陳來). 1987. 朱熹哲学研究 (A Study of Zhu Xi’s Philosophy). Beijing: Chinese Social Science Publishing Co.

Hong, Wonsik. 2001. “Toegyehak gujok seonjwe reul munneunda” (Questioning the Existence of Toegye’s Philosophy). Oneul-ui dongyang sasang (Issues in East Asian Philosophy) 4.

Kim, Hyoung-chan (Kim, Hyeong-chan). 1996. “Igiron-ui ilwonhwa yeongu” (A Study of the Monistic Tendency in I-Gi Theory). PhD diss., Korea Univ.

Kim, Kihyun (Kim, Gi-hyeon). 1988. “Toegye cheolhak-ui inganhakjeok ihae” (A Humanistic Understanding of Toegye’s Philosophy). PhD diss., Korea Univ.

Kim, Tae-yeong 1997. “Hanguk yuhak-seoung seongyejang sasang” (Sincerity and Mindfulness in Korean Confucianism). Toegyehak yeongunonchong (Collective Theses on Toegye Studies) Vol. 3. Daegu: Toegye Research Center, Kyungpook University.

Kim, Kihyun (Kim, Gi-hyeon). 1988. “Toegye cheolhak-ui inganhakjeok ihae” (A Humanistic Understanding of Toegye’s Philosophy). PhD diss., Korea Univ.

Lee, Kwangho (Yi, Gwang-ho). 1993. “Yi Toegye hangmung mun-roi cheyong-jeok gujok-e gwanhan yeongu” (A Study of the Structure of Yi Toegye’s Philosophical Theory). PhD diss., Seoul National Univ.

Lee, Seung-Hwan (Yi, Seung-hwan). 2004. “Toegye mibal seol icheong” (Rectifying Some Misunderstandings regarding Toegye’s Conception of Wei-fa). Toegye hakbo (Journal of Toegye Studies) 116.

Moon, Sukyoon (Mun, Seok-yun). 2001. “Toegyeseo ibal-gwa ilong, ido-ui uimi-e daehayeo” (A Study of the Meanings of “the Issuance of It,” “the Movement of It,” and “I Comes into Being of Itself”). Toegyehak yeongu nonchong (Collective Theses on Toegye Studies) 110.

Qian, Mu (拳). 1971. A Compendium of Zhu Xi’s Philosophy. Taipei: Sanmin Shuju.

Shin, Gui-hyeon (Sin, Gwi-hyeon). 1987. “Toegyeseo ibal-gwa ilong, ido-ui uimi-e daehayeo” (A Study of Toegye Yi Hwang’s Xinjing fuzhu and Characteristics of His Study of the Mind-Heart). Minjok munhwa nonchong (Journal of Korean Cultural Studies) 8.

Takahashi, Susumu (龍崎敏). 1984. “Dong asia-e isseoseo gyeong cheolhak-ui seongnip-gwa jangseok” (Formation and Development of “Mindfulness” in East Asia). Toegyehak yeongu (Review of Toegye Studies) 44.

Yi, Dong-hwan. 1990. “Dasan sasang-e isseoseo-ui ‘sangje’ doip gyeongno-e daehan seoseoljeok gochal” (An Introductory Study of the Import Route of Sangje in Dasan’s Thought). Minjoksa-ui jeongae-wa geu munhwa (The Development of National History and Culture). Vol. 2. Seoul: Tamgudang.

Yi, Wu-seong (Yi, U-seong). 1980. “Hanguk-yuhak-eseui seonggyejang sasang” (Sincerity and Mindfulness in Korean Confucianism). Toegyehak yeongunonchong (Collective Theses on Toegye Studies) Vol. 3. Daegu: Toegye Research Center, Kyungpook University.

Yoon, Kwonjong (Yu, Gwon-jong). 2004. “Toegye-sa Dasan-ui simseong ron bigyo” (A Comparative Study of the Mind-Heart & Human Nature
Theory of Toegye and Dasan). Toegye hangmaek-ui jiyeokjeok jeongae (The Regional Development of the Toegye School). Seoul: Bogosa.
Yoon, Sasoon (Yun, Sa-sun). 1980. Toegye cheolhak-ui yeongu (A Study of Toegye’s Philosophy). Seoul: Korea University Press.
_________. 1986. “jonjae-wa dangwi-e gwanhan Toegye-ui ilchisi” (Toegye’s Unification of “What Is to Be” and “What Should Be”). In Hanguk yuhasang ron (Korean Confucian Ideology). Busan: Yeuleumsa.
Zhen, Dexiu, and Cheng Minzheng. 2005. Xijing fuzhu 心經附註 (Selected Scriptures on the Mind-Heart with Notes). Daejeon: Hakmin Munhwasa.
Zhu, Xi. 1986. Zhuzi yulei 左顧 (Classified Conversations of Master Zhu Xi). Vols. 1-10. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju.

GLOSSARY

| English | Chinese |
|---------|---------|
| Cheng Minzheng (Ch.) | 程敏政 |
| Chen Lai (Ch.) | 陳來 |
| cheollii | 天理 |
| cheon | 天命 |
| cheonmyeong do | 道道學 |
| dohak | 道理 |
| domunhak | 道問學 |
| Dong Zhongshu (Ch.) | 丹山書堂 |
| dori | 道理 |
| Dosan Seodang | 了然書堂 |
| Gobong | 高峯 |
| geukcheo | 極處 |
| gyongmul | 極物 |
| gyesin gonggu | 道隠應虎 |
| Hungupa | 助用派 |
| ibal | 理義 |
| igi | 理義 |
| l-gi hobal | 理義互發 |
| ihak | 理學 |
| ijado | 理自到 |
| Jinsilu (Ch.) | 近思錄 |
| jondeokseong | 尊德性 |
| Jujaese jeryeo | 朱子書簡要 |
| Liu Jiuyuan (Ch.) | 陸九淵 |
| mulli | 物理 |
| Qian Mu (Ch.) | 錢穆 |
| sangie | 上帝 |
| Sarimpa | 士林派 |
| Seonghak | 師學 |
| Seonghak sipdo | 師學十圍 |
| seonghyeon | 師賢 |
| seongwang | 師王 |
| shangdi (Ch.) | 汝神 |
| sim | 心 |
| simhak | 心學 |
| sindok | 儒學 |
| soji | 所志 |
| sojongnae | 所從來 |
| Songye wonmyeong ihak | 宋學元明理學 |
| tongnok | 洞錄 |

Toegye’s Philosophy as Practical Ethics

| English | Chinese |
|---------|---------|
| taeguk | 太極 |
| taiji (Ch.) | 太極 |
| tian (Ch.) | 天 |
| Xinjing (Ch.) | 心經 |
| Xinjing fuzhu (Ch.) | 心經附註 |
| simseong | 心性 |
| tao (Ch.) | 道 |

(Ch.: Chinese)