

Neo-Confucianism as the Dominant Ideology in Joseon

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From Buddhism to Neo-Confucianism

Medieval Korea was riddled with serious external and internal problems. External problems included invasions by the Red Turbans, a powerful Chinese brigand force, invasions by Japanese marauders in late Goryeo and pressures from Ming China. Internal problems included expanded agricultural estates, abuses by the Buddhist establishment and the general woes of the population. In tackling these problems, the newly rising scholar-officials (*sinheung sadaebu*) embraced Neo-Confucianism as an ideology of reform that confronted Buddhism.¹

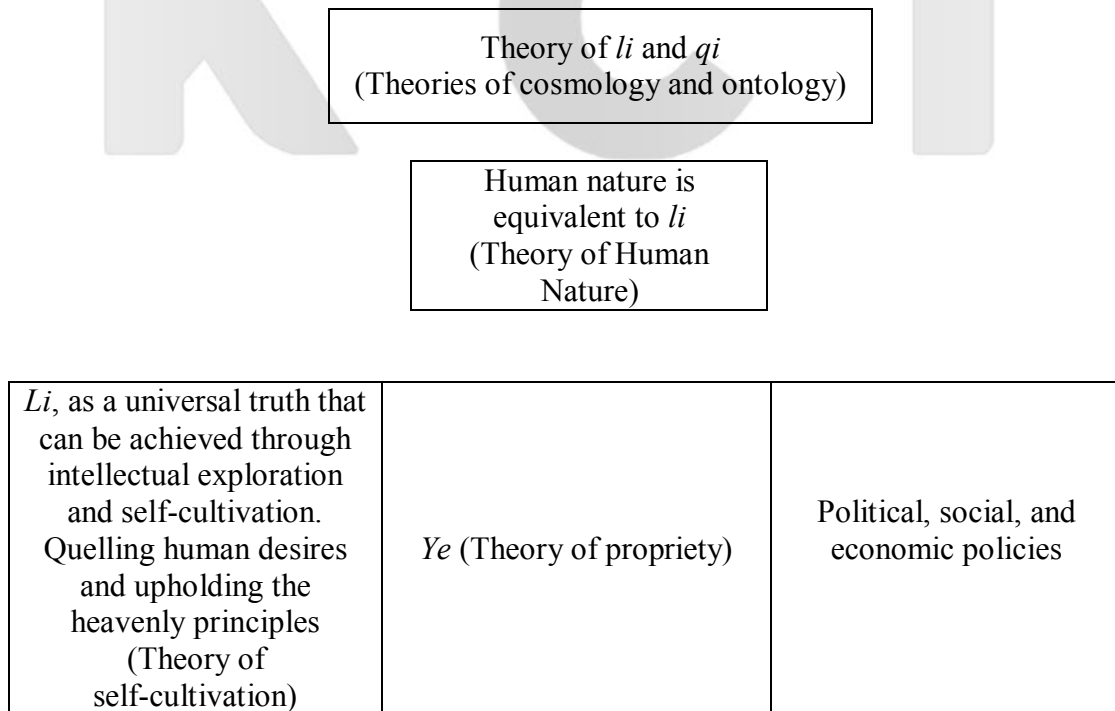
Neo-Confucianism is a version of Confucianism that was established during the Chinese Song dynasty that provided a philosophical alternative to Buddhism and Taoism, both of which had acquired a great deal of strength until that period. Neo-Confucianism was based on the theory that *li* and *qi* (*i* and *gi* in Korean) combined to drive the creation and evolution of the universe, with *li* as universal and immutable

¹ Diversely called by scholars as new Confucianism, Song doctrine, Chengzhu school, Zhu Xi's Neo-Confucianism, Zhu Xi doctrine, "Learning of the Way" (*Daoxue*), and the Leaning of Principle (*Lixue*), Neo-Confucianism is somewhat confusing. Generally, however, new Confucianism and Song doctrine denote the entire Confucianism of Song China, while Neo-Confucianism refers to a scholastic system of thought based on discourses on "principle and material force" and "mind-and-heart and human nature." This system of thought was initiated by Zhou Dunyi and integrated by Zhu Xi. As a new version of Confucianism, Neo-Confucianism is an ideology that reflects the interests of landowners, particularly

principles and *qi* as phenomenological and variable forces. The theory of *li* and *qi* constitutes the doctrinal foundation of Neo-Confucianism that sought to explain nature, man, and society.²

Based on the theory, Neo-Confucian thinkers systematized a theory of innate human nature intended to explicate the workings of the human mind and emotions, as well as a theory of self-cultivation as the means of putting the advocated moral code into practice. This approach was epitomized into the maxims such as *xingjili* (human nature as equivalent to *li*) and *jujing qiongli* (*li*, being a universal truth, can be achieved through intellectual exploration and self-cultivation). *Ye* (propriety) is the vehicle for translating the ideals of Neo-Confucianism into realities in society by means of quelling human desires and upholding the heavenly principles. 여기에 여러 정치•사회•경제정책들이 성리학의 기본 이념에 입각하여 구체화되었다.
(번역이 빠짐)

The following diagram outlines the structure of Neo-Confucianism.



small and medium-sized ones under the landowner-tenant peasant system.

² Ko Yeong-jin, *Joseon sidae sasangsa-reul otteoke bolgeosin-ga?* (Understanding the History of Thought in the Joseon Period) (Seoul: Pul Bit Publishing Co., 1999). references와 일치

As discussed above, Neo-Confucianism is not simply a metaphysical philosophy but a comprehensive system of thought attempting to explain all aspects of nature, man, and society in a consistent fashion. Neo-Confucianism dominated medieval Korea, defining and influencing all aspects of life, much in the manner that capitalism defines and influences all spheres in the modern age.

Neo-Confucianism contains both a theory of justice that stresses appropriate mutual relationships between social superiors and inferiors with a view to sustaining social order, and the theory that “principle is one but its manifestations are many” (*liyi fenshu*),” designed to ease conflicts between landowners and tenant peasants. The theory of justice, rooted in Confucius idea of the "rectification of names" (*zhengming*),³ saw people’s social positions in life as fixed, and viewed the resulting discrimination arising from their positions as a matter of course. This discrimination was, therefore, applied to relationships between ruler and ruled, father and son, and husband and wife, thus constituting social ethics. Propping up this Neo-Confucian definition of social ethics was the theory that “principle is one but its manifestations are many.”

Based on Confucian ethics of “benevolent government” (*renzheng*) and “rule by virtue” (*dezhi*), Mencius expounded the “kingly way” (*wang-tao*) of peaceful rulership and formulated the idea of people-based politics (*minben zhengchi*). These ideas provided a theoretical foundation for Neo-Confucianism to play an affirmative role in Korean history, despite the limitations of its inherent class discrimination.

The Neo-Confucian scholar-officials, who consisted mainly of rural landowners or clerks in local authorities, emerged as a political force in Goryeo's later years. In their struggle against the aristocratic families of influence, who had expansive agricultural estates and were responsible for aggravating socioeconomic predicaments, they adopted Neo-Confucianism as an ideology that could take up the tasks of the times, which Buddhism had failed to address.

Confucianism which was introduced into Goryeo is that Chinese scholars studying in northern China adopted Neo-Confucianism of Southern Song (북방의 한인 유학자들은

³ 「必也正名乎！」 ("What is necessary is to rectify names." *Lunyu* 13:3); 「君君、臣臣、父父、子子。」 ("Let the lord be a lord; the subject a subject; the father a father; the son a son." *Lunyu* 12.11).

北宋의 漢人 儒學者라는 뜻입니까?) 원나라 때 중국 북쪽 지역에 살았던 한족(중화민족) 유학자라는 뜻입니다.(이 문장은 전체적으로 손볼 필요가 있음)

and made it into the official scholarship. As the demands for Neo-Confucianism increased, different approaches were introduced besides Zhu Xi's Neo-Confucianism of Southern Song, such as an approach combining Zhu Xi and Lu Jiuyuan.

Amidst such diverse philosophies, it is understandable that the newly rising scholar-officials were split over policy matters. The moderate reform faction led by Yi Saek and Jeong Mong-ju confronted the radical reform faction of Jeong Do-jeon and Jo Jun on issues such as land system reform, coping with the Buddhist establishment, and founding a new dynasty. Their diverging approaches to resolving the socioeconomic problems of the times stemmed from their differing socioeconomic bases and ideological inclinations.

The moderate reform faction, which enjoyed a better socioeconomic foundation than its radical counterpart, placed emphasis on the *Chunqiu* (Spring and Autumn Annals), and closely followed the Neo-Confucian approach to human nature and the kingly way. Following its interests, this faction called only for the reform of the management of institutions, while maintaining Goryeo rule intact.

By contrast, the radical reform faction, many of whose members lacked a solid socioeconomic base and some of whom had questionable backgrounds, put emphasis on the *Zhouli* (Rites of Zhou) and sought institutional reforms and a balance between the kingly way from the hegemonic way (*badao*). They advocated a drastic reform of Goryeo's ruling system, and went as far as justifying an alteration of dynasty (*yeokseong hyeongmyeong*; lit. "surname-change revolution"), insisting that a corrupt regime forsaken by the population had to be replaced under heavenly mandate. Indeed, the radical reform faction played a crucial role in founding the Joseon dynasty.

The shift of dominant ideology from Buddhism to Neo-Confucianism in late Goryeo and early Joseon dynasty represents a development in the history of Korean thought, which corresponds to the rearrangement of the Korean medieval society.

The Establishment of a Confucian Monarchy

Neo-Confucianism was the dominant ideology throughout the Joseon dynasty, but its weight and role varied throughout the 500-year history of the dynasty, according to changing historical situations. Fifteenth-century Korean society did not permit a full-blown adoption of Neo-Confucianism. The ruling elites of the new dynasty were preoccupied with urgent tasks such as tackling internal and external problems that had accumulated since late Goryeo, establishing new administrative systems and institutions in the wake of dynastic change, and enhancing the wealth and military strength of the country.

In an effort to resolve such issues, the ruling elite showed interest in the different versions of Confucianism such as the Lu Jiuyuan School, Lu Zuqian's Historical School, and Chen Liang and Ye Shi's Utilitarian School.⁴(조그만 글씨로 주 처리)They embraced even Buddhism, Taoism, and folk beliefs. The ruling elite did not accommodate Neo-Confucianism in its entirety, but rather embraced only the parts they deemed necessary, and supplemented the philosophy with other systems of thought as needed. They therefore accommodated only some aspects of Neo-Confucianism, and adopted the *Rites of Zhou*, laden with legal elements, as an ideological model for revamping institutions. As evidence, a considerable proportion of important systems were established in the fifteenth century, such as the six codes, the five principal rites of the state, a bureaucracy centered on prime ministers, and the practice of military recruitment from among peasants. These all found their ideological basis in the *Rites of Zhou*.

The compilation of the *Gyeongguk daejeon* (National Code), Joseon dynasty's political canon, and *Gukjo oryuei* (Five National Rites) meant a completion of Confucian mode of governance represented by penal administration and education in Joseon society. Based on this, the centralized bureaucracy of the fifteenth century was supported economically by the Rank Land Law (*gwajeonbeop*) and ideologically by the theory of the unity and oneness of heaven, human beings, mind-and-heart and human nature. This does not mean, however, that scholars at the time were not interested in or ignorant of Neo-Confucian theories. Recent studies of prominent scholars as Jeong

⁴ School of Lu Jiuyuan, Zhu Xi's strong rival, was strongly oriented towards the so-called "learning of the mind-and-heart" (*xinxue*); school of Lu Zuqian, who had scholastic interaction with Zhu Xi, was very encyclopedic; and schools of Chen Liang and Ye Shi, both rivals of Zhu Xi, had a utilitarian trend.

Do-jeon, Kwon Geun, Byeon Gye-ryang, and Yang Seong-ji reveal that theories of *i* and *gi* reached a considerably high standard and did not significantly deviate from Zhu Xi's overall viewpoints.

Jeong Do-jeon, who played a leading role in founding Joseon dynasty and mapping out its ruling institutions, authored *Simgiiri pyeon* (On Mind, Material Force, and Principle) and *Bulssi japbyeon* (Array of Critiques against Buddhism) to refute Buddhism and Taoism. In these books, he expounded Neo-Confucian theories, ranging from the cosmos to the governance of human beings and the state.

Kwon Geun, who led Korean scholarship following Jeong Do-jeon, authored *Iphak doseol* (Diagrammatic Treatise for the Commencement of Learning) among others works, and laid the basis for Neo-Confucianism in Korea by comprehensively systematizing all the issues of early Neo-Confucian philosophy, which were to be points of controversy in the world of thought. He incorporated theories of *li* and *qi*, the Four Beginnings and Seven Emotions, and self-cultivation in his scholarship, issues that were to later become controversial. He paid particular attention to human nature and emphasized reverence as a key to self-cultivating ([Ch. jing; Kr. gyeong](#)). His scholarship was original and comparable in standard to his Chinese counterparts.

From its outset, the Joseon court was greatly interested in agricultural development. They saw the task of properly feeding and clothing the population as the primary role of Confucian royal rule, as it is defined by the heavenly way on earth.⁵ The state published an agricultural manuals including *Nongsa jikseol* (Straight Talk on Farming) to develop and propagate agricultural techniques, and increase the population. The fact that the technique development and population increase were the top two priorities of the local magistrates' seven-point task list demonstrates the significance the state placed on these issues

Increase in population, meaning an increase in farming labor force, was assisted by health care and medicine. To this end, the government published medical books like the *Hyangyak jipseongbang* (Compilation of Native Korean Prescriptions), and enforced programs designed to develop and diffuse indigenous medicine. Outcome of

⁵ Such a perception is evident in this edict of King Sejong: "The state considers the population as its foundation and the populace attach greatest importance to food. Accordingly, the court should give priority to agriculture as the source of feeding and clothing the populace." *Sejong sillok* (Annals of King Sejong), *gwon* 105, seventh lunar month of the 26th year of King Sejong's reign.

these programs was reflected in the evaluations of local officials. The development of medicine, agricultural techniques, and increased population created an epochal transformation of farm economy. Led by the government, this program resulted in a major growth in agricultural productivity, enabling repeated cultivation of land without having to let it lie fallow and expanding farmland.

The sciences of astronomy and meteorology saw a great advance, especially under King Sejong. In direct relations with the Kings' agricultural policy, a gauge to measure rainfall was created and calendar science refined, culminating in a work called the *Chiljeongsan* (Calculation of the Motions of the Seven Celestial Determinants). The epoch-making scientific and technological achievements during Sejong's rule epitomized the acme of state planning manifested in the enforcement of an agricultural policy.⁶

As Neo-Confucianism became its dominant ideology, the Joseon dynasty began to propagate Neo-Confucian social ethics. The Three Bonds and Five Relations (*samgang oryun*) constituted the basic virtues of Neo-Confucian social ethics. The Five Relations or Five Human Relationships between father and son, ruler and minister, husband and wife, between brothers, and between friends were set up as unchanging, eternal truths, i.e., the social manifestation of the Heavenly Principle (*tianli*). The Three Bonds stressed the bonds between father and son, husband and wife, and ruler and subject. The Three Bonds and Five Relations applied to all social relationships including wife and concubine, legitimate and illegitimate child, master and serf, and landowner and tenant.

In the process of institutional improvement and national and economic strengthening in the fifteenth century, practical ethical and ritualistic aspects of Neo-Confucianism were stressed over its philosophical aspects in Joseon. By publishing the *Samgang haengsil do* (Conduct of the Three Bonds with Pictures), *Sohak* (Lesser Learning; Korean version of *Xiaoxue*) and *Juja garye* (Zhu Xi's Family Rituals; Korean version of *Zhuzi jiali*), the Joseon dynasty displayed a great interest in the enforcement of Neo-Confucian social ethics and Confucian rituals.

The *Xiaoxue* (Lesser Learning) was compiled by Liu Zicheng, a disciple of Zhu

⁶ Yi Tae-jin, *Uisul-gwa in-gu, geurigo nongjeop gisul* (Medicine, Population, and Agricultural

Xi, at his master's behest that the teachings of the three ancient Chinese kingdoms of Xia, Shang, and Zhou be revived. These teachings outlined ways of realizing self-cultivation (*xiushen*), regulating the family (*qijia*), ordering the state (*zhiguo*), and bringing peace to the world (*pingtianxia*) through nourishing the basics of learning in the everyday affairs of life. 脚註로 처리 (The traditional Confucian ethic praises the moral obligation of personal self-cultivation, which can only be pursued within the confines of the family, whose well-being must be looked for. In addition, if the self-cultivated person cares for his country, then life under Heaven becomes peaceful and harmonious too). The book, which already drew attraction in Goryeo's later years as an aid to Neo-Confucian cultivation of the mind, was adopted as a centerpiece of official scholarship by the Joseon dynasty. The government encouraged its publication in provinces, and made it a required subject in the state examinations. However, it failed to become influential because education on the *Lesser Learning* was compulsory and perfunctory, and because students considered its content banal and studied it with reluctance, just to pass the government examination.

The *Zhuzi jiali* (Zhu Xi's Family Rituals) was composed, reflecting the phases of the times when Song China retreated south in the face of enemy invasion and its social framework was shifting to a small family system. The book stressed family succession following the legitimate eldest son based on ancestor rituals worshipping up to the fourth generation, which was manifested in the medieval patriarchal order of control.

Zhu Xi's family rituals were observed mainly by the scholar-officials, though wellborn commoners were not excluded. Based on them, the state encouraged the observation of *gamyoje* (family shrine system prescribing that ancestor worship shrines be kept at home), *samnyeonsang* (three-year mourning rituals prescribing that memorial rites be held for twenty seven months after the death of an ancestor), and *chinyeong* (according to which the bridegroom is supposed to go to the bride's house, spend the night there, and bring the bride home in a wedding ceremony), even forcing the scholar-officials to observe these rituals. Like the *Sohak* (Lesser Learning), Zhu Xi's Family Rituals was taught at official schools and was a required subject in the state examination, the outcome of which was reflected in officials' promotion.

Technology) (Seoul: Taehaksa, 2002).

Until the end of the fifteenth century, however, Zhu Xi's family rituals were not properly observed even by the scholar-officials, since the state permitted not only Confucian but Buddhist, Taoist, and even folk belief-based rites as well. The existence of traditional methods of mutual help and labor sharing, like *hyangdo* (a religious community consisting of the believers of folk religions, Buddhism, and Taoism(삭제); lit. "incense disciples") and *gye* (mutual assistance association), decreased the importance of Neo-Confucian rituals. A century had to pass before the country accommodated Neo-Confucian social ethics and widely enforced Confucian rites.

The Settlement(Establishment를 두번 사용하는 것은 적절치 않은 것 같음) of Neo-Confucianism

Joseon dynasty society was dominated by a meritorious elite, who were awarded for their merit in a series of citations since Sejo's usurpation of power. At the same time, the rural Neo-Confucian literati (*sarim*) emerged in the central government under King Seongjong from the end of the fifteenth century. In an effort to eliminate social hypocrisies through Neo-Confucian ideals and institutions, the literati censored corrupt and illegal acts committed by the elite, campaigned to restore the local government advisory committee (Yuhyangso), propagated village codes (*hyangyak*), and established private academies (*seowon*). Neo-Confucianism emerged on the central stage as an ideological weapon to attack the establishment dominated by the meritorious elite.

As opposed to the status the *Lesser Learning* occupied in the fifteenth century, the Neo-Confucian literati attached importance to the work. Zhu Xi demanded that the book be learned prior to the study of the Daehak(Great Learning), the essence of Neo-Confucianism. The *Lesser Learning* was compiled as a course of learning not only for self-cultivation and regulating the family but also for governing people and the state. Because of its newfound importance, the literati stressed the *Lesser Learning*, as the starting point in renovating the scholarship of the time and improving established institutions. As a result, the book became a criterion distinguishing the Neo-Confucian literati from the meritorious elite.

The ideological feature of the literati involved in the Purge of 1519 (Gimyo Sahwa) is manifested in Jo Gwang-jo's assertion that the Learning of the Way (Daoxue) should be revered, people's hearts be rectified, the sages emulated, and ideal politics promoted. The Learning of the Way, nearly identical with Neo-Confucianism, was a discipline stressing the practical aspects of morality and ethics. Here, ideal politics refer to the three ancient Chinese kingdoms of Xia, Shang, and Zhou. Jo Gwang-jo advocated the implementation of ideal governance in accordance with Neo-Confucian ideals by rectifying one's heart and emulating the sages.⁷

Based on such recognition, the literati led by Jo Gwang-jo (the so-called Gimyo litterati) made an effort to promote the rule of right (*jichi*) for the purpose of establishing a moral pattern of government in reality, by presenting the theory that a sage-philosopher should be made a rule and pushing for a number of reform policies, such as the implementation of the examination for the learned and virtuous (*hyeollyanggwa*) and the abolishment of the National Taoist Temple (Sogyekseo). To establish Neo-Confucian social order, they drove for the practice of the *Lesser Learning* and propagation of village codes. The publication of books on rituals and social modes like the *Iryun hyaengsildo* (Illustrations of Stories Exemplifying the Two Confucian Virtues) and *Gyeongmin pyeon* (Book for the Supervision of People) and their annotation in Korean as well as the enforcement of Zhu Xi's family rituals further supported their efforts.⁸ But their efforts to realize the Neo-Confucian ideals and realize the rule of right met full-blown resistance because of the so-called "eliminating erroneous deed" (*wihun sakje*) incident caused by Jo Gwang-jo and finally received a severe blow in the Purge of 1519.

The Gimyo literati's theoretical understanding of the Neo-Confucianism lacked depth, but they contributed to the establishment of the Neo-Confucian worldview in

⁷ Jo Gwang-jo found the theoretical basis of his reform policies in the *Jinsilu* (Reflections on Things at Hand), on which he placed more weight than the *Xiaoxue* (Lesser Learning). Written by Zhu Xi and Lu Zuqian for the benefit of beginners, the book rearranged the essential writings of Zhou Dunyi, Cheng Hao, Cheng Yi, and Zhang Zai. Expounding on Neo-Confucian ideas and systems, the book was compulsory for those interested in Neo-Confucianism.

⁸ The most widely-read ritual books were *Hyohaengnok* (Records of the Deeds of Filial Piety) in the fourteenth century, *Samgang haengsildo* (Illustrations of the Virtues of the Three Bonds) in the fifteenth century, *Iryun haengsildo* (Illustrations of the Two Confucian Virtues) and *Gyeongmin pyeon* (Book for the Supervision of the People) in the sixteenth century. These volumes show that family ethics was stressed in the fourteenth century, ethics involving family members and the ruler-ministers in the fifteenth century, and village community ethics as well as family and ruler-minister ethics in the sixteenth century.

Joseon society. Their emphasis on the fidelity, justice, and practice consequently constituted the uniqueness of Joseon's Neo-Confucianism. In addition, their practical activities made even the meritorious elites to newly understand the essence of Neo-Confucianism and recognize it as the ideology of the times. Thus, Neo-Confucianism began to establish itself as a dominant ideology of the Joseon society.

Victimized in a series of four purges, the literati placed the blame for their failure on the king's lack of scholarship, which caused him to give up the rule of right. They promoted the Learning of the Sage (Shengxue), or learning of the sovereign, paying great attention to the *Great Learning*, which provided the learning with its theoretical basis. Noting that they fell short scholastically and theoretically in driving forward the rule of right, they paid more attention to academic studies than government service and to theoretical aspects than practical ones of Neo-Confucianism.

Subject to continual suppression by the meritorious elites, the literati realized they would never achieve their ideals in the central bureaucracy. Instead, they concentrated their efforts on preparing themselves for the future through a deeper exploration of Neo-Confucianism, training of disciples, and the establishment of private academies (*seowon* 지우기) based on the footholds in their regions. As a result, the rural literati deepened their appreciation of Neo-Confucianism. Seo Gyeong-deok and Yi Eon-jeok devoted treatises on Neo-Confucian worldview and discourses on "principle and material force" and "mind-and-heart and human nature." Debates took place between Jo Han-bo and Yi Eon-jeok on the Great Ultimate and Ultimate of Nonbeing, and between Yi Hwang and Ki Dae-seung as well as Yi I and Seong [Hon](#) on the Four Beginnings and Seven Emotions. The *Zhuzi daquan* (Complete Works of Zhu Xi), introduced in Korea during the last years of King Jungjong, provided the crucial momentum needed to place the country's scholarship of Neo-Confucianism on the right track, by allowing Korean Neo-Confucian scholars access to Zhu Xi's system of thought in its entirety.⁹

⁹ The scholarship of Seo Gyeong-deok and Jo Sik centered on the *Xingli daquan shu* (Great Compendium on Human Nature and Principle), compiled by Hu Kuang in 1415. This indicates that the academic circles of the time had two trends: one attaching importance to the *Xingli daquan shu* and the other giving primacy to the *Zhuzi daquan* (The Complete Works of Zhu Xi). The former trend later

Yi Hwang made a decisive contribution in firmly implementing Zhu Xi-centered Neo-Confucianism in Korean society. In his debate with Ki Dae-seung on the Four Beginnings and Seven Emotions, he asserted: “In the case of the Four Beginnings, *i* is manifest and *gi* follows it; in the case of the Seven Emotions, *gi* is manifest and *i* rides upon it,” articulating the theory of an “alternate manifestation of *i* and *gi*” (*igi hobal*). On the contrary, Ki Dae-seung objected to letting the Four Beginnings and Seven Emotions belong to *i* and *gi* separately. He stressed the function of *gi* and denied the spontaneity of *i*.

Yi Hwang attempted to formulate his own system of thought by analyzing Korean realities based on Zhu Xi theories. Though he struggled to establish the legitimacy of Neo-Confucianism, he stressed theories on mind-and-heart and self-cultivation in an effort to objectively verify the basis of man's moral acts. Attaching importance to the *Xinjing* (Classic for the Mind-and-Heart), he emphasized “reverence” as a way of implementing self-cultivation (Ch. *jing*; Kr. *gyeong*). It was in this context that he submitted to King Seonjo the *Seonghak sipdo* (Ten Diagrams of the Learning of the Sage), a model of royal governance.

In his debate with Seong Hon, Yi I, who had been influenced by Seo Gyeong-deok and Ki Dae-seung, asserted that the Four Beginnings and the Seven Emotions were not separate from one another, but that the Four should be understood as the “good side” of the Seven and the Four Beginnings and Seven Emotions **occurred** when “*gi* is manifest and *i* rides on it” (*gibal iseung 앞으로*). Yi Hwang, **although(‘---라도’라는 의미가 들어가는 것이 정확)** based on Zhu Xi doctrine, stressed the separation of *i* from *gi* and the dynamism of *i* in explaining reality. By contrast, Yi I attempted to resolve the issues of the time by being faithful to Neo-Confucianism.

Observing the decay in Korean society in the sixteenth century, Yi I presented various means of reforming social ills. Among these were reforming the bureaucracy, revamping the system of governance with a view to enhancing the quality of officials, reforming taxation according to ability to pay, and eliminating tax plundering. His work,

converged with the idea of harmony of the three major thoughts--Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism--as well as encyclopedic schools well versed in numerous fields such as astrology, geography, and medicine.

Seonghak jibyo (Outline of the Learning of the Sage), epitomizes his theories on state governance, a culmination of the learning of the sovereign developed since the early sixteenth century.

Differences in the discourses on “principle and material force” and “mind-and-heart and human nature” manifested in the course of deepening appreciation of Neo-Confucianism stemmed from the political situations the Joseon’s Neo-Confucian scholars faced and the patterns they employed in coping with them. Yi Hwang developed his philosophy out of his criticism of the establishment in the course of fighting the meritorious elite. The characteristics of his philosophy--theories on “high” principle and “low” material force (*igwi gicheon*), the “self-realization” of principle, and emphasis on morality and self-cultivation based on the *i-gi* dichotomy--were instrumental in his attack on the meritorious elite. But his fundamental and ideal approach stressing human nature and mind was inadequate at a time when the state was run by the Neo-Confucian literati. His thought could not effectively address the many socioeconomic problems accumulating since the late fifteenth century, such as landowners' outright seizure of land and the evil practices involving the indirect payment of tribute taxes and evasion of military service through the buying of exemptions, the practice of paying others to take one’s place in compulsory military service.

Yi I's ideas better coped with those problems. Yi I's ideas were fashioned from the stance of a group of Neo-Confucian literati that gripped political power amid **factional strives** and dealt with reality based on public opinion. His theory of “*i* is penetrating and *gi* is limited” (*itong giguk*) and theory of “harmony of basic and fundamental *i* and positive and autonomous *gi*” (*igi-ji myo*) emphasized both the universality and particularity of things, thus providing the theoretical base of his reform policies.

Like Yi Hwang, Seo Gyeong-deok and Jo Sik also based their thought on the criticism of the politics swayed by the meritorious elite. Unlike Yi Hwang, who stressed *i* and morality, however, they emphasized *gi* and practicality. Seo Gyeong-deok stressed *gi* with the intent of effecting changes, showing interest in specific social realities and calling for reform. Censuring social contradictions and criticizing the ruling meritorious elite’s corruption, Jo Sik emphasized reverence (*gyeong*), righteousness (*ui*), and ethical

performances in daily life (*hahak i sangdal*).¹⁰

A deepened appreciation of Neo-Confucianism and theoretical differences as ways of coping with political realities, coupled with a sharp rise in the number of Neo-Confucian scholars in several regions, gave rise to the emergence of schools of thought centered on private academies in the mid-sixteenth century. Emerging first were the Seo Gyeong-deok, Yi Hwang, and Jo Sik schools, to be followed by the Yi I and Seong Hon schools. Following the emergence of the Neo-Confucian literati in the central bureaucracy during King Seonjo's reign, political cliques clustered around the philosophical schools of thought. Members of Seo Gyeong-deok, Yi Hwang, and Jo Sik schools formed the Easterners' (Dongin) faction, and those of Yi I and Seong Hon schools the Westerners' (Seoin) faction. With the incident of high treason plotted by Jeong Yeo-rip in 1589 (Gichuk Oksa), the Easterners further split into Southerners' (Namin), affiliated with Yi Hwang, and Northerners' (Bugin) factions, affiliated with Seo Gyeong-deok and Jo Sik. Thereafter, schools of thought and political factions were closely related in the period of factional politics, forming an important feature of mid-Joseon society.

Realization of Rule by Rituals (*Lizhi*)

In the seventeenth century, the Neo-Confucian literati affirmed their leadership despite internal and external disturbances. The Japanese invasion of 1592 and 1597 and the Manchu invasion of 1636, however, provided an opportunity to reexamine the role of Neo-Confucianism as the dominant ideology. As a consequence, many other ideas were advanced in that period such as those of Seo Gyeong-deok and Jo Sik, the philosophy of Wang Yangming, the Taoist teachings of Laozi and Zhuangzi, and the harmonious fusion of the three major thoughts of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, along with Zhu Xi-centered Neo-Confucianism. Particularly after the Japanese invasions, the

¹⁰ Seo Gyeong-deok and Jo Sik made little contribution in realizing the theoretical sophistication of Neo-Confucianism, but contributed social reform theories. In fact, the ideas of the Northerners and the capital faction Southerners in the seventeenth century were rooted in those of Seo Gyeong-deok and Jo Sik.

political hegemony attained by the Northerners who followed Seo Gyeong-deok and Jo Sik and the accession of Gwanghaegun provided the impetus for such phenomena.

Because of the immediate need to address the terrible suffering sustained from the Japanese and Manchu invasions, the political leadership concentrated on Neo-Confucian's approach to righteousness, justice, and socioeconomic matters, more than its philosophical aspects. Political factions engaged in heated debates over current issues such as the royal house rituals, northern expeditions against Qing China, the Law of Uniform Land Tax (*daedongbeop*), the levying of cotton cloth tax by household (*hopo beop*), organization of households into units of five (*oga jaktong je*), and the discourse on the arrangement of the evils attending the freeborn's corvée and military service system (*yangyeok*)(양역변통론은 요역이나 부역이 아니라 주로 균역에 대해 논의하는 것임. 이후의 글도 바꾸어 주기를 바랍니다.)

The Northerners' faction, which had gained influence under Gwanghaegun's rule, encouraged the enforcement of socioeconomic policies in order to address the miserable aftermath of the Japanese invasions. They enforced the Law of Uniform Land Tax and the "identification tag" (*hopae*) system, which was designed to prevent peasants from abandoning their land, and carried out land evaluations. To increase state revenues, they developed silver mines, circulated coins, and promoted state control of the salt and iron industries. They attempted to run the country by making commerce and industry the foundation of the economy.

The Northerners also shifted the emphasis on political loyalty over filial piety, and reinforced royal power by executing the king's two half-brothers, princes Imhae and Yeongchang. They also demoted Queen Inmok, the mother of the Prince Yeongchang, to a commoner's status. In external affairs, they employed a neutral diplomacy toward Ming and Later Jin to promote national interests. The Northerners were not constrained by Neo-Confucian values of righteousness and justice. To defend their scholarship, they attempted to downplay the authority of Yi Eon-jeok and Yi Hwang and posthumously honored Seo Gyeong-deok and Jo Sik at Confucian shrines. They were relatively free from the constraints of Neo-Confucianism, and accommodated what they needed from Wang Yangming's thought, Laozi's and Zhuangzi's philosophy, and Buddhism. While the Northerners' ideas were not metaphysically sophisticated, their focus on commerce

and industry, harmony of the three major thoughts, and erudite qualities of their school of thought offered a way of statecraft. They exercised considerable influence on the ideas advocating the relativization of Zhu Xi, which emerged afterwards.

However, the deviations from Neo-Confucian righteousness and justice, such as the degradation of the queen, the execution of the king's brothers, and a neutral diplomacy, coupled with the impoverishment of the population caused by massive mobilization for expansive palace construction, invited resistance from the Westerners and Southerners and resulted in a loss of public support. In consequence, King Injo dethroned Gwanghaegun, and assumed power with the Westerners, affiliated with the Yi I school. The Northerners were expelled and the philosophies of Seo Gyeong-deok and Jo Sik, Laozi, Zhuangzi, and Wang Yangming were summarily rejected. Thus, the teachings of Yi Hwang and Yi I of Zhu Xi-centered Neo-Confucianism finally gained the upper hand in Joseon society.

By emphasizing righteousness and justice, the Westerners excluded officials responsible for the degradation of the queen, maintained allegiance to Ming China, and stressed the study of ritual (*yehak*) and familial relationships. In an effort to address the socioeconomic problems caused by the Japanese invasion and the excessive levying of corvée services for palace construction during Gwanghaegun's reign, the Westerners suggested a number of socioeconomic policies involving the Law of Uniform Land Tax, the identification tag system, and state control of the salt and iron industries.

Nevertheless, the philosophy of Seo Gyeong-deok and Jo Sik, the philosophy of Wang Yangming, and Laozi and Zhuangzi teachings did not lose their influence entirely. In fact, meritorious officials affiliated with Wang Yangming like Choi Myeong-gil and Jang Yu controlled the political scene during Injo's reign, and the Northerners who did not participate in the queen's degradation retained their status as working-level officials in charge of socioeconomic affairs.

The Neo-Confucian call for allegiance to Ming invited the Manchu invasion of 1636, which resulted in Joseon's surrender to Qing. But when the Westerners led by Song Si-yeol and Song Jun-gil seized the reins of political leadership in Injo's last years following a heated debate on peace with Qing, arguments opposing peace with Qing and advocating allegiance with Ming gained ground.

At that time the Joseon dynasty was faced with two possible choices. The first

was to deny the fact that Ming China had been destroyed and maintain its current status, and the other to acknowledge Ming's fall, abandon the moral relationship with China, and establish a new order in Korea after the pattern of Qing. The accession of Injo and the Manchu's invasion of Korea in 1636, along with the political hegemony held by the Westerners, both shifted attention away from socioeconomic concerns to those having to do with righteousness and justice. In consequence, Korea chose the former course of action, which subsequently guided Joseon society.

Socioeconomic discourses during the reign of Injo can be classified roughly into active and passive reforms. Subjects and bureaucrats from the Western faction and officials from the Northern faction generally advocated active reforms, such as improving state financing by enforcing the Law of Uniform Land Tax, revamping the military service system so as to enable able-bodied peasants to perform both farming and military duties, and encouraging commerce and industry. On the other hand, the rural Neo-Confucian literati affiliated with the Western and Southern factions based in Gyeongsang-do province asserted passive reforms, opposing coin circulation and state control of the salt and iron industries, as well as the Law of Uniform Land Tax and the identification tag system. Eventually this group gained the upper hand, as shown by the repeal of the Law of Uniform Land Tax in Chungcheong-do and Jeolla-do provinces, succeeded in stalling enforcement of the identification tag system, suspended coin minting and circulation, and discontinued state control of the salt and iron industries. As a result, little change took place in the livelihood of the populace at large, whether in securing state revenues or in national defense.

This situation improved slightly in the last years of Injo's reign, and some Western faction rural literati even recommended the enforcement of the Law of Uniform Land Tax. However, until the first half of Hyojong's reign, as the confrontation between Kim Yuk and **Kim Jip** proved, Western faction bureaucratic officials mainly advocated the enforcement of the Law of Uniform Land Tax and coin circulation. By contrast, whereas Western faction rural literati advocated withholding the enforcement of the Law of Uniform Land Tax and reforming the list of tribute items (*gongan*) in advance. Song Si-yeol, the central figure of the Western faction Neo-Confucian literati, supported the enforcement of the Law of Uniform Land Tax, and Yi Yu-tae proposed that privileged class and the wellborn common be levied cotton tax. The Western

faction literati embraced positive reforms advocated by the Western and Northern faction bureaucrats in an attempt to address the socioeconomic problems of the time.

Controversies over socioeconomic policies increased when the Southerners of the capital and Gyeonggi-do province(Geunginamin)(근기남인은 서울과 경기지역에 살면서 활동했던 남인을 의미) took political hegemony in the wake of the second factional dispute on the propriety(예송에 factional이라는 용어가 들어가는 것은 부적절함. 그냥 ritual controversy가 좋을 것 같은데 어떤지) in 1674. Yun Hyu, their uppermost reform advocate, asserted that households be organized into units of five for the purpose of discouraging land abandonment by the peasantry, that a law providing for an identification tag system be enacted, and that cloth tax be levied by household and not by individual. Yun Hyu proposed the levying of cotton cloth tax by household as a means of the arrangement of the evils attending the freeborn's corvée and military service system(?), and his approach raised serious arguments because it was predicated on repudiating the class system.

In the course of the debate, some Westerners like Kim Seok-ju also called for levying cotton cloth tax by household. But their assertion was far removed from Yun Hyu's suggestion, because it was made on the premise of preserving the class system. Since the proposed cotton cloth tax was to be levied by household, they argued, it did not call for renouncing the class system.

Faced with objections even from some Southerners affiliated with the capital and Gyeonggi-do province(affiliated with를 사용하는 것이 적절하지 않은 것 같음. 앞의 경우처럼 Southerners of 로 처리하는 것이 나올 것 같음) faction, as well as some Westerners, along with strong resistance from the privileged class, the call for levying cotton cloth tax by household was aborted. As the meritorious elite(외척을 뜻하는 영어로 바꾸었으면 합니다.) regained influence following the Western faction's resumption of power in 1680 in the wake of an abortive assassination plot, with Song Si-yeol having collaborated with the meritorious elite in the course of the Western faction's division into the Old Doctrine (Noron) and the Young Doctrine (Sorun), the active reform group that functioned in the latter half of the seventeenth century again gave way to its opponent.

When the Young Doctrine faction took power following the purge of

Southerners in 1694, calls for extensive reform in corvéé and military service system(?) and tax laws that gained force during the first half of Sukjong's reign were replaced during the same reign by those advocating partial reform in the corvéé and military service system. Though it was rekindled in the latter half of Sukjong's reign, the call for extensive reform disappeared completely in the course of heated confrontation between the Old and Young Doctrine factions. Given this situation, it was due to Yeongjo's strong will that only the Equalized Tax Law (*gyunyeokbeop*) was barely put into effect.

The study of ritual developed so much in the seventeenth century as a scholarly discipline that it was named the “century of ritual studies,” and many controversies took place including two major factional disputes on the propriety. The development of the study of ritual, however, did not come abruptly in the seventeenth century. Late in the fifteenth century the Neo-Confucian literati already began emphasizing education under the rituals purportedly practiced in the so-called golden age of the three ancient Chinese dynasties of Xia, Shang and Zhou. In Jungjong's reign, the Neo-Confucian literati faction led by Jo Gwang-jo placed more weight on the *Zhuzi jiali* (Zhu Xi's Family Rituals) and the *I-li* (Book of Rites)(의례를 Book of Rites로 표시하는지 아니면 예기를 Book of Rites로 표시하는지 확인 필요) than on the *Gukjo oryuei* (The Five National Rites),(The를 제외해야 하는지, 붙여야 하는지 확인. 뒤에서는 제외했음) which discussed the five national rituals from early Joseon and the rituals of Han and Tang.

The emergence in the mid-sixteenth century of ritual books based on *Zhu Xi's Family Rituals* prompted a scholastic study of this Chinese classic. Almost all Neo-Confucian scholars, with the exception of those few masters of writing, were interested in rituals and wrote articles and books on rituals or propriety. Such development of the study of ritual, although differing in quality, paralleled that of the sophisticated discourses of “principle and material force” and “mind-and-heart and human nature.”

Even in the seventeenth century, more emphasis was placed on rituals in response to demands for restoring the order of rituals, slackened by the Japanese and Manchu invasions. Furthermore, it was widely believed that the country could be ruled through rituals, that rituals were crucial in education, and that the study of ritual was the

most relevant of all scholarly disciplines.¹¹ Rituals emerged as a means of social guidance--the manifestation of rule by rituals.¹²

With ritual and propriety emerging as a means of governance, deeper study of ritual was conducted and exposed differences in stance on rituals between different schools of thought, as expressed in ritual controversies. Disputes over propriety intensified in the course of disputes over mourning rituals in the royal house during Jungjong's reign, over whether or not to wear black or white conical hats in Seonjo's reign, whether to posthumously honor Gwanghaegun's mother during Gwanghaegun's reign, as well as over whether to posthumously honor Injo's father during Injo's reign. The disputes on the propriety reached its zenith with the two factional disputes on the propriety in 1659 and 1674.(이것 역시 two ritual controversies 로 하는 것이 어떤지)

The Westerners affiliated with the Yi I school favored the ruled in the factional disputes on the propriety(이것도 마찬가지로), and asserted that the royal house and literati should observe identical rites, heavily relying on the *Zhu Xi's Family Rituals* and *Yili* (Book of Ceremonial). By contrast, the Southerners affiliated with the capital and Gyeonggi-do province faction, who inherited the teachings of Seo Gyeong-deok and Jo Sik, took a stance favoring the royal house, and professed that rituals applying to the royal house should differ from those of the literati. Their main references were the *Zhouli* (Rites of Zhou) and the Liji(Book of Rites 예기의 영문 표현 확인 필요).

The main issue in the first factional dispute over propriety(이것도 마찬가지로) concerned the mourning rites observed for King Hyojong, whether mourning clothes should be worn for one or two years. The second dispute regarding mourning rites for Queen Hyojong centered on whether mourning clothes should be worn for one year or nine months. Essentially, however, they were political disputes disguised in rituals, in which different philosophical systems and political factions defended the propriety of their respective policy lines based on their scholastic foundations.

Ostensibly, disputes over propriety appeared to discuss mourning rites at the

¹¹ 「跋」 (Epilogue), in 『五先生禮說分類』 (Five Eminent Confucians' Propriety Theories Classified).

¹² “Rule by rituals” implies rule based on propriety toward individuals, society, and state. It was realized

royal house. In fact, however, not only political and ideological factors but also all social factors of the time were converged and brought to the fore by the two disputes. Factors included the sophistication of Neo-Confucianism and the study of ritual, the shift to a family system dominated by the legitimate and eldest son, close links between schools in philosophical systems of thought and political factions, an increase in people's(신권은 일반백성의 권리가 아니라 신하, 관료의 권리를 의미함. 적절한 것으로 바꿀 필요가 있음) rights, and measures to cope with the problems of the nation's reconstruction following the Japanese and Manchu invasions.

Furthermore, differences in the factional disputes over propriety reflected conflicting views of medieval Korea's social systems. Accordingly, the factional disputes over propriety were to be undertaken as part of an inevitable process amid changing social systems in the late Joseon period. By undergoing such a process, rituals (propriety가 좋을 것 같음) formed a discourse that affected all of society, framing the very ideas and structure of rule by rituals.¹³

The Westerners, who had led the political scene following King Injo's Restoration of the Rectitude, or the deposition of Gwanghaegun from the throne by the Westerners' faction and succession by King Injo in 1632, managed to honor Yi I and Seong Hon at Confucian shrines and rendered Zhu Xi doctrine as orthodox. They thought Joseon society to be full of hypocrisy and that problems could be addressed by being faithful to the original intentions of Zhu Xi. On the other hand, some scholars made an attempt to relativize Zhu Xi by offering their own dissenting views to his doctrine, trying to find an ideological foundation for resolving the problems of the time in the six Chinese classics and the "Hundred Schools of Thought" of the Chinese ancient dynasties. Eminent among these were Yun Hyu and Bak Se-dang. Yun Hyu, influenced by Seo Gyeong-deok, interpreted (‘독자적으로’ 또는 ‘창조적으로’ 라는 단어가 들어가야 함) Confucian classics like the *Daxue* (Great Learning), *Zhongyong* (Doctrine of the Mean), *Xiaojing* (Book of Filial Piety), and the *Zhouli* (Rites of Zhou). Under the influence of Wang Yangming's thought and Laozi's and

in Joseon society through education and study of ritual.

¹³ Ko Yeong-jin, "Joseon sidae yechi-ui hyeongseong-gwa gujo" (Establishment of Rule by Rituals and Its Structure in Joseon), in *Jeontong yegyo-wa simin yulli* (Traditional Education of Rituals and Civic Ethics) (Seoul: Cheongkye Publishing Co., 2001).

Zhuangzi's philosophy, Bak Se-dang also criticized Zhu Xi's doctrine. By placing the "human nature Heaven" over principle, the two scholars dissented from the scholarship of Zhu Xi, who identified the divine "principle Heaven" with the Great Ultimate. Charged as heretics by the Westerners, who held political hegemony at the time, they were banished and died in exile.

As discussed above, Neo-Confucianism played the role of a dominant ideology in developing Joseon society until the late seventeenth century. When Joseon society began to change its focus from agriculture to commerce industry, however, Neo-Confucianism failed to successfully cope with the concomitant changes, resulting in deepened socioeconomic contradictions. As a response, a new school of Practical Learning (Silhak) arose in an attempt to resolve these contradictions.

In addition, political, social, and economic policies, which was faithful to the Neo-Confucian thought,

Confucianism which was introduced to Goryeo was one that Han Chinese scholars in northern China adopted Neo-Confucianism of Southern Song and made it the official state learning.