

The Horak Debate from the Reign of King Sukjong to King Sunjo

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Abstract

The Horak debate was a philosophical discussion that originated among Noron scholars who aspired to refine the logic of Neo-Confucianism. The first round of this controversy took place in the early eighteenth century, a time in which the political and philosophical dominance of the Noron faction was widely recognized throughout the Joseon dynasty. Then, Song Si-yeol's students, divided into those who established a presence in the capital city Hanseong and those who did so in Chungcheong-do province, began to express conflicting opinions regarding the conclusions of the controversy. The differences between the two groups mainly stemmed from the issue of correctly interpreting the logic of Neo-Confucianism, and such differences later caused divisions of several academic schools and political parties within the Noron faction. The second round of the Horak debate occurred during King Yeongjo's reign. From the onset of his reign, Yeongjo consistently argued that politics and philosophy were two distinct fields, and such an emphasis contributed to the significant divergence between the Ho-ron and Nak-ron scholars over the relationship between academia and politics. This time around, the Ho-ron group and the Nak-ron group each established its own identity as an academic school and began to criticize each other in a rather harsh manner in connection with political parties within the central government. Through the debate, philosophical differences evidently manifested themselves in the area of political ideology.

Keywords: Horak debate, Ho-ron, Nak-ron, Noron, Sipa, Byeokpa, North Party, South Party, Tangpyeong, righteousness

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Introduction

The Neo-Confucian theory of Yi I, a leading figure in the sixteenth-century's Four-Seven Debate and founder of the Westerners' Noron faction, was accused of being heretical and became a political controversy during King Hyojong's reign.¹ Every one in the mid-seventeenth century was required to reveal his own political and social stances.

The first reason was the existence of numerous academic schools and political factions. There were private academic institutes such as seowon and schools based upon the network of literati called *sadaebu*, and the political factions that stemmed from these institutions. The influence of academic schools and political factions alike had been growing since the sixteenth century, and they came to establish a tight bond among themselves, fostering a strong connection between schools and political parties. In such an atmosphere, intellectuals tended not to differentiate between academic schools and political parties. For example, the term *odang* 吾黨 (“my party”), primarily used to indicate the one's political membership, was also used when referring to the group of fellow colleagues who had learned from the same master. Within this social context, people naturally came to believe that one's philosophy and mind were the basis of politics and that one's philosophical stance should correlate with one's own political position.

The second reason was related to people's ways of recognizing the nature of reality, or traditionally put, the nature of *sedo* 世道. In

1. Contemporaries of Yi I usually blamed him for being responsible for splitting the party into Namin and seoin groups (*Seonjo sujeong sillok* [Revised Annals of King Seonjo's Reign], first day of the third lunar month, 20th year of King Seonjo's reign). His career and his academic achievements were placed under harsh scrutiny when the Westerners requested that Yi I be enshrined at the Confucian Shrine during King Hyojong's reign. The people who opposed the idea argued that Yi I was once a Buddhist and that because he fundamentally misunderstood *qi* 氣 for *li* 理, he was eventually enchanted by Yuk Gu-yeon's ideas and by Buddhism (*Hyojong sillok* [Annals of King Hyojong], 22nd day of the second lunar month, first year of King Hyojong's reign).

the earlier half of the seventeenth century, the literati class, who had witnessed both the fall of the Ming dynasty and the Joseon government's subservience to the Qing monarchs, were keenly aware of the fact traditional Confucian society was approaching an end, and that *sedo* was deteriorating in an unprecedented way. At the same time, they perceived Joseon to be the sole remaining civilized Confucian state and thought it should be at the forefront of reviving the declining Confucian civilization. Thus, reconstructing Joseon society and reinforcing its Confucian ideology was considered not a mere national project, but a catalyst for the future expansion of the entire Confucian civilization. The political party that displayed a stronger sense of obligation to the renovation of Joseon was the Noron faction of the Westerners' party (Seoin). For example, Song Si-yeol emphasized the absolute importance of righteousness above all else. He argued that righteousness was the key to overcoming the dire realities that Joseon faced and that it should be the basis for social reform.² Such a philosophy was firmly rooted in the pursuit of Neo-Confucianism. Those who supported this trend, i.e. individuals who belonged to the Noron faction, were critical of those who diverted from Neo-Confucianism or suggested changes to certain preexisting ideas. The Noron faction also concentrated on perfecting the ideas and internal logic of Neo-Confucianism and identifying its applicability to everyday problem-solving. This pursuit prevented the group from adopting a more liberal approach to academic thought.

The third reason, and perhaps the most significant, was the very nature of Neo-Confucian philosophy. As widely known, Neo-Confucianism was a philosophy that pursued universalism and demanded its followers to engage in action. The link between a universal philosophy and action in real life was deeply integrated in its logical structure, which held that abstract cosmic principles such as *li* 理 and *qi* 氣 would diverge into the real world, a world of matters and realities. Key concepts of Neo-Confucianism—e.g. the Principle of Heaven,

2. Regarding Song Si-yeol's studies, his view of the cause of righteousness, and the consistency of his logic regarding the Way of the World, see Woo (2005).

nature, and goodness—were universal concepts, but in reality they manifest as relative concepts antagonistic to desire, character, and evil, respectively.³ All Confucian learners who achieved a deep understanding of such principles would obtain a strong sense of determination that would aid them in applying them to real-life problems.

In sum, these characteristics of Neo-Confucianism were undergoing a stage of amplification in the seventeenth century as the ideology itself confronted a wide range of political and social problems. The Horak debate was a series of philosophical discussions initiated by political scholars that most passionately defended the logic of Neo-Confucianism and sought to perfect it. As a result, discussions were inherently rooted in the political and social circumstances of the time. Primary issues of the debate had political and social connotations, which were always in question by debate participants. All participants of the debate were involved in the deliberations and actions of the government, and terms such as Ho-ron or Nak-ron, which previously denote only academic groups, began to refer to the political parties to which these scholars belonged as well.

Accordingly, the Horak debate requires examination not only in the philosophical sense, but also with respect to its social, cultural, and political aspects. This latter approach, adopted by this article, pays attention to the ways in which philosophical differences were manifested in ideology, politics, and culture.⁴

The Birth of Ho-ron and Nak-ron Groups in the Latter Half of King Sukjong's Reign

The ground-breaking event that led to the formation of the Ho-ron group's worldview was the Hansansa Conference, an academic seminar arranged by the students of Kwon Sang-ha in 1709 (35th year of

3. Zhu Xi, *Zhuzi daquan* (The Complete Works of Zhu Xi), vols. 42-43.

4. Earlier studies of the philosophical history or general philosophy of Korea have long examined the political and social meanings of the major issues discussed in the Horak debate. See references.

King Sukjong's reign). The position of the Nak-ron group was established by the continuing discussions among students of Kim Chang-heup from 1713 through 1715, consisting of themes similar to those of the Hansansa Conference. While no record specifically documents the pre-existing political motivation of either group, the fact that the two groups, both prominent within the Noron political faction, were engaged in tense discussions over similar issues suggests that their formations were tied to the general situation of the entire Noron academic community.

Since 1703, before the Horak debate intensified, an earlier generation of Noron scholars had already been engaged in a criticism of the ideological incompleteness of the discussions within the Soron faction, also known as the Young Doctrine faction, the opposing faction of Noron or Old Doctrine faction.⁵ The debates started as purely academic debates; yet, as the Noron faction's objectives in the debates were to point out the incomplete nature of the Soron faction's philosophical stance and to restore Neo-Confucianism, the debates inevitably lent themselves to political conflict.

The debate came to an end with King Sukjong's intervention in 1718, an event now called the Order of the Byeongsin Year. King Sukjong decided to intervene directly in the *samun sibi* 斯文是非, which was then officially progressing as an academic debate devoted to the determination of right and wrong in the interpretation of Confucian classics. The king himself sided with one of the two groups and allowed a single party to take control of the government. The Noron faction welcomed the king's decision, which they interpreted as an opportunity to re-erect Neo-Confucianism as a political ideology. The Noron faction enjoyed its dominance in both philosophical

5. The criticism against Bak Se-dang's *Sabyeonnok* (Thoughtful Elucidations) and the epitaph for Yi Gyeong-seok that broke out in 1703 under Kim Chang-heup's leadership, and criticism launched against Choe Seok-jeong's *Yegi yupyeon* (Commentaries on the Book of Rites) by Kim Chang-heup and the Noron Confucian students in 1709, could both be cited as prime examples. In 1715, Noron and Soron scholars fiercely clashed once again over the text *Garye wollyu* (Source Stream of the Family Rites).

and political arenas, supported more or less officially by the government and the king, leading an active, fruitful discussion.⁶

Early participants of the Horak debate continued to engage in lively discussions, and refined their positions through such debate. These initial participants included Kwon Sang-ha, Kim Chang-hyeop, Kim Chang-heup, and their students. The activities of these individuals clearly demonstrate the political aspiration underlying the Hansansa Conference, which served as the catalyst for the Horak debate. The last part of Yi Gan's *Hansan gihaeng* (Journey to the Hansansa Temple), a comprehensive review of the Hansansa Conference, is particularly informative. Returning from the conference, Yi Gan visited a village called Maechon and reported to an unidentified scholar named Kim Yeo-sam on everything that had happened. In the process he also spoke about the righteousness that would rebuild Neo-Confucianism and deflect heresies, a concept by which his colleague Hang Hong-jo was deeply inspired. Yi Gan's description of the closing scene of the conference vividly illustrates the academic aspiration of the young scholars of the Noron faction.

The academic achievements of key scholars in the Westerners' Noron faction can be examined in more detail apart from their political background. Since the days of Song Si-yeol, scholars aimed to attain a comprehensive understanding of the work of Zhu Xi 朱熹 and to explain away any discrepancies that lay within Zhu Xi's texts and to resolve the logical fallacies within them. Song's most noteworthy students, Kwon Sang-ha and Kim Chang-hyeop, were at the forefront of such efforts. They continued to exchange thoughts with their colleagues and thus furthered their understanding of Neo-Confucianism. Kwon Sang-ha, who later became the leading figure of the Ho-ron

6. Yi Gan, one of the leading figures of the Ho-ron line in its early days, made an enthused remark regarding Sukjong's Order in the Year Byeongsin: "The culture of Joseon is shining and the core of Neo-Confucianism has cast the heresy away" (*Oeam yugo*, vol. 1). In the following periods, during the reigns of both Yeongjo and Jeongjo, the Order in the Year Byeongsin was continuously quoted and honored by the Noron faction (especially by the South Party and the Byeokpa) as the ideal political standard.

position, continued to debate with Kwon Sang-yu and Bak Se-chae, finally establishing his own theory of the Great Ultimate (*taegeuk* 太極) around the year 1679. Around the same time, Kim Chang-hyeop, who was later considered the leader of the Nak-ron position, also exchanged ideas with his younger brother Kim Chang-heup as well as two Seoul-based scholars Jo Seong-gi and Im Yeong, engaging them in a discussion about various concepts such as the theory of the Great Ultimate and the notions of *li* and *qi*. Then, in the 1690s, Kwon Sang-ha and Kim Chang-hyeop began to communicate with each other directly. In exchanging their opinions over concepts like perception (*jigak* 知覺) and the unaroused mind (*mibal* 未發), they determined the differences between their opinions.⁷

In the 1700s, the students of Kwon and Kim gained prominence, and they continued to arrange important occasions that would pave the way for the Horak debate. In 1705, one of Kwon's leading students, Han Won-jin, started to deliberate concepts such as "great morale" (*hoyeonji gi* 浩然之氣) with his colleagues, including Choe Jing-hu and Hang Hong-jo, until finalizing his own "theory of three levels of nature" (*seong samcheung seol* 性三層說) in 1708. Then in 1709, Yi Gan, another leading student of Kwon, meticulously analyzed Han's theory, engaging him in a fierce debate at the Hansansa Conference. Han and Yi continued to exchange ideas through 1713, and their teacher Kwon ultimately judged Han's theory, which understood the nature of humans and animals to be different, to be correct.

As the debate between Han and Yi began to wind down, another debate over a similar theme was initiated inside the Noron society in Seoul. Students of Kim Chang-hyeop and Kim Chang-heup, including Yi Hyeon-ik, Eo Yu-bong, and Bak Pil-ju, also discussed the concept of the unaroused mind and the equivalence of human and animal nature. These discussions continued until 1715, when Kim Chang-heup intervened to declare the position of Bak Pil-ju and others, who considered the nature of human and animal to be the same, to be correct.

We can see that the two branches of Song Si-yeol's students,

7. See Moon (2006, ch. 2).

divided into those in the capital and those in Chungcheong-do province, debated a similar theme around the same time, but interestingly, reached completely different conclusions. After 1716, the two branches started to exchange their conclusions with each other, either respecting the other's conclusion or rebutting the other's position in a fairly critical manner.⁸

In the early days, the debate was confined to the discipline of philosophy. In light of the political situation of the time, when the Noron faction maintained dominance in Joseon philosophy, the discussion can be defined as a process in which the younger generation of Noron scholars embraced their faction's major theories (which had been passed down from Zhu Xi to Yi I) and pursued a better understanding of them. Upon further study, they reached conflicting results, eventually creating a split inside the entire Noron academic community, not to mention the political party itself.

It seems that the most influential factor of such ironic results was the discursive mechanism of the scholars: the more they viewed academic and political theories and political to be the same, the less the possibility of conversation existed. In such a climate, a liberal approach that allowed scholars to question or re-interpret texts was understood as a deliberate effort to compromise the school's academic efforts or to destroy the integrity of their elders' teaching. Scholars seeking to perfect Zhu Xi's arguments, mostly members of the Ho-ron group, were particularly critical of such attempts. For example, we can examine the case of one Ho-ron scholar, Yi Gan. Like Song Si-yeol, Kwon Sang-ha, and Han Won-jin, he considered his own historical period a time of crisis and thus strived to remain faithful to the cause of "repelling the barbarians" (*yangyi* 攘夷), which Zhu Xi had

8. For instance, Yi Gan once criticized Kim Chang-heup's comments prior to 1715. Yet, after 1716, when one of his colleagues Hyeon Sang-byeok attacked Yi Gan's own theory by quoting Kim Chang-heup's theories, Yi Gan rebutted by saying that Kim Chang-heup's understanding of Heaven was the correct one (*Oeam yugo*, vol. 8). This short discussion demonstrates that the issues discussed in the Horak debate affected various groups of people, regardless of their location of residence or the schools to which they belonged.

prioritized above all else (*Oeam yugo*, vol. 6). In such a spirit, the scholars above considered not only Yi I's theory, but also his uncompromising character, as a torchlight that would guide people from a dark age into civilization and enlightenment (*Oeam yugo*, vol. 6). While Han Won-jin and Yi Gan differed in their philosophies, they agreed that Yi I's philosophy and actions should be thoroughly evaluated and explained.

Many Nak-ron scholars also shared the political views of the Ho-ron group. During the latter half of King Sukjong's reign, the Kim Chang-hyeop and Kim Chang-heup brothers harshly criticized the Soron faction, to a greater extent than the Ho-ron group. Yet the ultimate objective of Nak-ron's academic research differed from that of the Ho-ron camp. The academic position of the Nak-ron group originated in part from the tradition of Sangsuhak 象數學 ("image-number study") prevalent in the Seoul region, and from an academic trend that attempted to synthesize the work of Yi Hwang and Yi I. As a result, members of the Nak-ron group, and most notably Kim Chang-heup, showed a tendency to skew Yi I's teachings.⁹ The attempt to bridge the two theories gave birth to a stance that attached importance to present-day phenomena. This meant that neither Zhu Xi's nor Yi I's theories were to be considered absolute and that they could and should be reviewed in light of current situations. To them, perfecting their elders' teachings meant acknowledging their flaws and repairing or supplementing them correspondingly. Such efforts on their part demonstrate the group's process of dynamic perfection.

Ho-ron scholars were taken aback by the fact that Nak-ron leaders, such as Kim Chang-hyeop and Kim Chang-heup, continued to discuss things and respected the position of scholars such as Jo Seong-gi and Im Yeong of the Soron faction. The Ho-ron scholars started to criticize such endeavors, and while criticism was initially gentle, fierce dispute soon became unavoidable. Ho-ron scholars disapproved of Kim Chang-heup's quoting of Yi Hwang and Yi I in a

9. For more information on the academic background of Nak-ron scholars and their achievements, see Cho (2007).

metaphorical context, as they considered Yi I's teachings absolute (*Oeam yugo*, vol. 4). Consequently, criticism against Kim Chang-heup took on a similar discourse to his own earlier criticism against Soron members. Such controversies over academic authenticity would last for many years to come.

King Yeongjo's *Samun Yangbiron* and the Reinforcement of Ho-ron and Nak-ron Group Identities

Other than the exchange of letters between Yun Bong-gu, Yi Jae, and Bak Pil-ju, there was no notable continuation of the Horak debate from 1716 (42nd year of King Sukjong's reign) through 1745 (21st year of King Yeongjo's reign). The period was marked by a diminishing intensity of the overall debate, which can be attributed to the political circumstances of the time. The Soron faction had taken control of the government with the Literati Purge of 1721 (1st year of King Gyeongjong's reign), which had defeated the Noron. The following year, dozens of high-ranking Noron officials and their sons were killed in a criminal investigation of treasonous conduct. In 1724, King Yeongjo was crowned, yet political conflict and bloody power shifts continued until 1729, when Yeongjo announced the Tangpyeong-chaek 蕩平策 or "policy of impartiality." Subsequently, an alliance of moderate members of the Noron and Soron parties gained control of the government.

Under the hostile climate of King Gyeongjong's reign and in the early days under Yeongjo, all Noron scholars, both Ho-ron and Nak-ron, maintained a particularly close knit relationship among themselves, unilaterally guiding the opinion of the Noron Confucian students.¹⁰ Noron members continued to argue that their own activity during King Gyeongjong's reign had paved the way to Yeongjo's coro-

10. After the declaration of the Tangpyeong policy, however, Ho-ron and Nak-ron leaders started to voice different opinions regarding King Yeongjo's governance and principles.

nation and that they contributed to the cause of righteousness throughout the country. To that, King Yeongjo responded by stating that the Noron and Soron parties had both displayed not only good deeds but also shameful acts, and arranged for a joint government of Noron and Soron members. Yeongjo also declared that, unlike his father Sukjong, he would not be interfering with any debate within Confucianism or drawing such discussions into the official affairs of the government. He labeled these scholarly debates as “affairs of children,” and claimed that as a king, who assumed a paternal position, he could not side with any one of his own offspring.

Yeongjo’s decision essentially created a theoretical rift between the discipline of philosophy and the realm of politics. It therefore altered the existing notion of righteousness and consequently met with strong responses. During the latter half of Sukjong’s reign, people believed that misguided actions of academia would lead to misguided politics, and that they should eventually be repaired by the intervention of an official authority in order to facilitate the reestablishment of righteousness. Yeongjo claimed that he would break this pattern, clearly stating that academics and politics were to be separated, and that no king should interfere in the former. In addition, the king and his subjects were no longer partners who shared equal obligations to righteousness. The role of subjects was to be modified, and the relationship between the king and his subjects was to be reconstructed to one analogous to a father-son relationship. Asking Yeongjo to acknowledge that subjects and kings had the same stake in upholding righteousness became a lost cause. Yeongjo kept to his words and refused to reveal his views on the Horak debate. He even fired a member of the Royal Lectures for commenting on the debate in the presence of the king.¹¹

King Yeongjo’s new interpretation of the cause of righteousness would be problematic for the Noron scholars. Right after his coronation and the arrangement of a Noron government, he invited to the

11. For further description of Yeongjo’s handling of political issues during his reign, see K. Lee (2004).

government some Ho-ron *sallim* 山林 scholars, many of them Kwon Sang-ha's students. In accepting the invitation, the scholars hoped that Yeongjo would disclose his position on the *samun sibi* that had occurred in the final days of Sukjong's reign, and that he would arrange a government controlled solely by the Noron faction. The group was led by Han Won-jin, who believed that there were political parties of gentlemen (*gunja* 君子) and those of petty men (*soin* 小人), and therefore considered Noron attacks upon the Namin and Soron factions as acts of resistance against heresy. Such a perspective was rather longstanding and somewhat outdated, and had always been employed to evaluate a wide array of issues including but not limited to international crises, natural disasters, widespread poverty, criminal activity, and disunity within the ruling class.¹² Han Won-jin and his colleagues believed that the early days of Yeongjo's reign had been a time of social upheaval, and that it would be an opportune time for them to enter the government. But Han Won-jin was deeply disappointed with Yeongjo's stance regarding conflict resolution among parties, and in 1727, retired to his hometown. As a result, no visible recruitment of Ho-ron supporters occurred until the latter half of Yeongjo's reign.

After declaring the Tangpyeong policy, or the policy of impartiality, Yeongjo invited *sallim* figures of both the Noron and Soron factions to the government. With time, his recruitment of Noron *sallim* figures, comprised of supporters of the Ho-ron group, became somewhat of a mandatory quota. On the other hand, his fondness of Soron *sallim* members such as Yang Deuk-jung and of Noron Nak-ron supporters like Bak Pil-ju, became quite apparent. Because Bak Pil-ju was a student of Kim Chang-heup, his enlistment stirred up considerable controversy among Noron *sallim* figures. Despite criticism from the Ho-ron supporters among the Noron *sallim* figures and concerns expressed by Yi Jae, a Nak-ron supporter, Bak responded to the king's summon in 1743. Later in 1746, Bak met with the king and elicited a

12. Han Won-jin's studies and political views are thoroughly outlined in T. Kim (2006).

shift in the king's position toward the Righteousness Cause of the Sin and Im Years (*sinim uiri* 辛壬義理). The result was quite favorable to the Noron faction in general, and the political tie between the king and Nak-ron supporters among the *sallim* community was strengthened. This process was facilitated by a firm establishment of the Nak-ron group identity and a stronger sense of its partnership with prominent politicians residing in the capital. Key supporters of the Tangpyeong policy involved in the government at the time were senior members in the Soron and Noron factions, but they also had deep personal ties with Nak-ron supporters among the *sallim* community. In turn, some of the Nak-ron supporters looked forward to the favorable outcomes of Yeongjo's Tangpyeong policy.¹³ The political views of Nak-ron and Ho-ron supporters, which had remained unified in an effort to urge Yeongjo to recognize the Loyalty Cause of the Sin and Im Years, were to diverge thereafter.

Social changes also caused Ho-ron and Nak-ron groups to respond in different ways to the king's Tangpyeong policy. Entering the eighteenth century, both the academic community and society in general began to display new differences between the capital and provincial regions. One result of these new discrepancies was the divergent growth of Ho-ron and Nak-ron positions in the Chungcheong region and Seoul, respectively. The academic arguments of the Ho-ron position did not undergo changes, but Nak-ron scholars openly pursued new approaches after encountering the intellectual works of Qing society and the Western world. In addition, since this pursuit was shared by Soron and Namin scholars in the capital, it became an academic trend in the capital as well as in Gyeonggi-do province, notwithstanding the individual differences in political membership.¹⁴ Furthermore, such academic tendencies of the Nak-ron faction did not

13. With reference to Bak Pil-ju's entrance to the government and the activities of the Nak-ron group's *sallim* figures, see K. Lee (1998).

14. A study of the academic community's divergence into multiple groups in both the capital and provincial regions can be found in You (1995). In regard to the exchanges that continued between scholars in Seoul and Gyeonggi-do province, as well as their academic traits, see M. Kim (1997).

remain isolated in the center of the peninsula. Its influence expanded to other regions through local private academies called seowon, which served as conference sites for Nak-ron supporters, aided by the seowon's expansion of personnel and material resources. Kim Chang-hyeop's grandson, Kim Won-haeng, was instrumental in enlisting support in the Gaeseong region, and also from parts of the Pyeongan-do, Hamgyeong-do, Jeolla-do, and Gyeongsang-do provinces.¹⁵

The growth of Nak-ron supporters throughout the country as well as the establishment of their worldviews and identities began to affect the nature of the Horak debate. A particular turning point for the controversy occurred at the time of Bak Pil-ju's recruitment. In 1745 (21st year of King Yeongjo's reign), Yi Jae's student Choe Seok visited Han Won-jin for a discussion, and during this meeting, Han criticized the position of Yi Jae. In return, although Yi was directly involved in the debate, he criticized Han's theory indirectly, and the next year, after the death of Yi, Han harshly critiqued Yi again.¹⁶ This exchange of criticism, spanning over two years, initiated the second phase of the Horak debate.

During this renewed debate, Han presented his well-known "Argument of the Three Types of Indiscrimination," positing that Nak-ron ideas would eventually obliterate the differences not only between humans and animals, but also those between Confucianism and Buddhism, and ultimately, between the civilized and the barbaric. As a rebuttal to such arguments, Nak-ron supporters argued that Han Won-jin's theory would prevent people from reinventing themselves for improvement. Essentially, both arguments cast the other as the enemy of Confucianism. The debate had mainly been philosophical and academic thus far, but it was rapidly politicized. Ideological warfare became inevitable.

From the 30th year of King Yeongjo's reign, the political topogra-

15. Regarding the expansion of the Nak-ron group's influence and also the activities of Kim Won-haeng, see K. Lee (1998).

16. For more information on the debate between Han Won-jin and Yi Jae, see Kwon (2003).

phies of the two groups became even more complex. Following Queen Jeongsun's appointment in 1759, the South Party was formed under the leadership of Kim Han-gu and Kim Gwi-ju, the queen's father and brother, respectively. Furthermore, Kim Han-rok, Kim Gwi-ju's uncle, who was the leading student of Han Won-jin, inherited his master's academic perspective on the *sedo* as well as his master's political values, rejecting the somewhat compromisory attitude of the Tangpyeong policy. Scholars of the South Party presented themselves as sponsors of young, disadvantaged Confucian students and continued to fight against the North Party, which substituted the previous dominant Tangpyeong faction and exercised political control during the latter half of Yeongjo's reign. They tried to establish a strong Noron-based cause of righteousness during Yeongjo's reign and in the early days of King Sunjo's rule, whether operating at the center or the margins of government.¹⁷

The principal figure of the North Party was Hong Bong-han, father-in-law of the crown prince. In this regard, the composition of the party was similar to that of the South Party, which included a large number of scholars who became high-ranking officials due to their kinship with the queen, known as *cheoksin* 戚臣. In contrast, however, the North Party comprised of many officials based in Seoul. Since the South Party continued to enlist poor Confucian scholars with the support of the Ho-ron group, the North Party responded strategically by contacting *sallim* figures who supported the Nak-ron group. The Nak-ron *sallim* group led by Kim Won-haeng attempted to prevent the Horak debate from turning into a political vendetta between the opposing groups and to maintain a certain distance from the leadership of both parties, but they were inevitably charged with aiding the North Party.

The escalation of such conflicts resulted in various political social events. One such event was the Incident of the Hwayang Seowon

17. Regarding the philosophical views and political actions of members of the Gyeongju Kim clan, including Kim Han-rok and Kim Gwi-ju, see Choe (2009).

Tablet in 1769. Yun Bong-gu and Kim Won-haeng had different opinions on whether Song Si-yeol's academic achievements should be considered equal to his cause of righteousness. Scholars were divided between Ho-ron and Nak-ron and started to take sides over this matter, soliciting additional support through letters and engaging in verbal argument. Those who previously did not have a fixed position were compelled to take sides, and some of them were rumored to have allied themselves with the opposition. Such rumors, intended to embarrass one's opponents, were widespread.¹⁸ Academic debates were transmuted into political conflicts.

King Jeongjo's Initiative in Leading the "Righteousness Debate" and Changes within Ho-ron and Nak-ron Positions

Immediately following his coronation, Jeongjo emphasized that the king had authority over issuing an official interpretation of the notion of righteousness and purged the government of corrupt officials by recruiting newcomers. Although Jeongjo enlisted certain morally upright scholars from both the Ho-ron and Nak-ron groups, he also purged those who became officials based on their kinship with the queen; therefore, key members of the South and North parties suffered loss of leadership. The damage, however, was greater for the Ho-ron group.

On the Ho-ron side, students of Han Won-jin had already displayed signs of internal division during the latter half of Yeongjo's reign. The first group included scholars like Yun Bong-gu, Kim Han-rok, and Kim Gwi-ju. They firmly maintained Han Won-jin's strict distinction between right and wrong, and they were critical not only of the Nak-ron's position, but also of other moderate opinions inside the Ho-ron group. Moreover, they also criticized Yeongjo and Jeongjo's Tangpyeong policies. Many in this group were killed or exiled in the political purge that eliminated Kim Gwi-ju in the early days of

18. Refer to See Kwon (2003). For the implications of this incident, see K. Lee (2006).

Jeongjo's reign.¹⁹

The second group comprised of Hwang In-geom, Kim Geun-haeng, Han Hu-su (a son of Han Won-jin), and others. They disagreed with the first group over the issue of publishing the personal anthology of Han Won-jin around 1764. They remained unaffected by the political purge that struck the others during the early days of Jeongjo and thus continued to lead the Ho-ron group.

The third group included Song Neung-sang (a descendant of Song Si-yeol), Kwon Jin-eung (the great grandson of Kwon Sang-ha), Song Myeong-heum, Song Mun-heum (descendants of Song Jun-gil), and Kim Ji-haeng, who were all descendants of distinguished families of the Ho-ron camp. All were students of Han Won-jin, but also had personal and academic ties with members of the Nak-ron group, which led them to be regarded as Nak-ron supporters within the Ho-ron group.²⁰

Simultaneously, the Nak-ron group was also experiencing change. The Yi Jae school, which represented the Nak-ron group during Yeongjo's reign, was weakened when Hong Gye-hui, who considered himself Yi Jae's leading disciple, was deserted by his own school. Hong's descendants were also accused of treason in the early days of Jeongjo's reign, and with the collapse of his clan, Hong was in no position to lead others. Another leading disciple of Yi Jae, Bak Seong-won, also died during Yeongjo's reign. During the latter half of Yeongjo's reign, the Nak-ron group was left with two representative branches, divided into followers of Kim Won-haeng and Min U-su. Kim Won-haeng had become Yi Jae's student much later than other Nak-ron scholars, but by committing himself to the education of the next generation, managed to cultivate key members of the Sipa or the Party of Expediency and expand the influence of the entire Nak-ron group. During the latter half of the eighteenth century, it was

19. For further description of the activities of the South Party's branch under Kim Gwi-ju in the early days of Jeongjo's reign and of the nature of the treason case, see Choe (2009, 127-132).

20. See K. Lee (1998, 117-123).

acknowledged that the group's lineage extended from Kim Chang-hyeop to Yi Jae and onto Kim Won-haeng.

The situation of the branch led by Min U-su was slightly different, as Min U-su himself was generally agreed with the overall stance of the Noron faction toward the loyalty cause. All of his students, including the Kim Jong-hu and Kim Jong-su brothers as well as Yu Eon-ho, sided with the South Party or constituted a significant portion of the Byeokpa or the Party of Principle during King Jeongjo's reign; in other words, they shared the Ho-ron group's perspective regarding Confucianism. As a result, Kim Jong-hu and others were considered Ho-ron supporters within the Nak-ron group.²¹

While having set his own view of righteousness as the national standard, Jeongjo still tried to embrace the views of various political factions. His Tangpyeong policy is often referred to by modern scholars as a "Tangpyeong order based upon righteousness" and considered to have been somewhat different from Yeongjo's Tangpyeong policy. Yet again, both kings' Tangpyeong policies shared the same premise that the Tangpyeong cause should be led solely by the king. Yeongjo became increasingly controlling of political parties toward the end of his reign as he solidified the *sinim uiri* and reinforced his right to interpret the cause of righteousness while curbing partisan dispute. Moreover, Jeongjo emphasized that only the king had the right to present a final interpretation or decision regarding the issue of righteousness and by such means limited the discretionary influence of subjects in the matter.

The same situation surrounded the *samun sibi*. Jeongjo had expressed preference toward Song Si-yeol's academic stances in the past but did not believe in the need for political conflict over such an issue. He maintained the same position with regard to the Horak debate; he himself leaned toward the Nak-ron theory that considered the nature of humans and animals to be the same, but such an opinion was expressed exclusively on a personal basis. In line with his grandfather's stance, he maintained that the government should not

21. See K. Lee (1998) and Cho (2007).

interfere in the *samun sibi*. Therefore, aside from the political purge that occurred in the early days of his reign, Jeongjo commanded no such intervention thereafter. The Byeokpa, linked to the Ho-ron line, remained deeply involved in central politics.

Jeongjo's policy aimed to undermine the group led by Kim Han-rok and Kim Gwi-ju, which comprised the core of the South Party's Ho-ron camp, but he did not seek to eliminate the newcomers, who, in his eyes, possessed integrity and principle. Indeed, the group led by Min U-su in the capital included a wide variety of members, including officials who shared good relationships with both Ho-ron and Nak-ron supporters. They still considered themselves to be the center of the Noron righteousness cause and participated in government affairs through the Byeokpa. However, beginning in the latter half of Jeongjo's reign, the nature of this group also began to change. Its members regarded themselves as the majority of the integral officials of the Noron faction, but also entered the government through their relationships with powerful elders. In short, although their seventeenth century cause was maintained, their mode of existence gradually became corrupt. Consequently, the *sallim* figures who were to carry the torch of the righteousness cause came to be manipulated by those in power. Sometimes this included the king himself, as we can see from the secret letters written by Jeongjo about regulating officials from the Byeokpa and maintaining them as part of his Tang-pyeong politics.²²

22. The secret letter that Jeongjo sent to Sim Hwan-ji, the head of the Byeokpa party, was disclosed in 2009 to the astonishment of the academic community of Korea. Sim Hwan-ji had long been believed to have been a political enemy of King Jeongjo, so it was hardly imagined that Jeongjo would have discussed the situation of the government with him, let alone give him particular instructions. This letter shows us that Jeongjo was using not only the Sipa party but also the conservative Byeokpa party in his efforts to govern the country and maintain control of the government. To many, his manner was not very commendable, as it breached the laws and expectations concerning the king's consultation of his subordinates. In that regard, one might conclude that Jeongjo himself was creating the very "in-law government" (*sedo jeongchi* 勢道政治) system ruled by powerful families who abused their power. The interpretation of the meaning of this secret letter by Jeongjo is certainly to become a much-discussed issue among Korean scholars for years to come.

Overall, the Nak-ron group was in control of the academic society in the capital and established a vast network of personnel. They had maintained some distance from the North Party during the latter half of Yeongjo's reign, and during the reign of Jeongjo, some of them maintained indirect links with the Sipa party of the Noron faction while others acted as members of the Party of Principle. But the Andong Kim clan, the key clan within the Nak-ron group, believed, "When right and wrong are determined, attempting alliance and coexistence with other parties would be an act no less true to the spirit of Tangpyeong politics" (*Ijae nango*, vol. 26). In essence, they generally agreed with the King Yeongjo's early decisions, a reflection of the overall atmosphere within the Nak-ron group during the latter half of the eighteenth century. They more or less agreed that the Noron cause of righteousness had been fulfilled and so responded positively to Yeongjo's Tangpyeong policy and its effects.

The problem that Nak-ron supporters faced from mid- to late-eighteenth century was entirely separate from the righteousness cause, which had been the most central issue. The new problem for the Nak-ron group was the social climate itself, marked by the expansion of the capital area, economic growth, social prosperity, and new academic trends. There was, moreover, an emergence of lavish lifestyles, accompanied by the liberated atmosphere of the society. Some of the younger Nak-ron scholars, influenced by academic works of Qing society and the Western world, started to transcend existing debates argued the necessity of engaging in Bukhak 北學 or Northern Learning. Yet, as we can see from the remarks of the Nak-ron leader Kim Won-haeng—"following wrongful trends would be even more dangerous than succumbing to heresy"—most Nak-ron scholars expressed concern about the negative effects of such a worldly social atmosphere, believing that the increase of material abundance accompanied by the pursuit of economic interest would threaten basic Confucian values. In their eyes, the biggest problem was the fact that even the most devout Confucian scholars were being engulfed into the trend. Interestingly, Kim Won-haeng mentioned the Horak debate as a prime example, arguing that its partici-

pants were now only interested in achieving personal honor, obtaining a result favorable to a specific party and advancing politically. He posited that the original spirit behind the debate had been lost and that action in real life should be valued over excessive philosophical debate.

Changes in the Horak Debate and Its Resolution during the Early Years of Sunjo

King Sunjo was crowned after Jeongjo's untimely death, but Queen Jeongsun was responsible for overseeing the affairs of the government from 1800 to 1803. Queen Jeongsun established a government consisting of Byeokpa politicians and Ho-ron scholars. This would be the last historical period in which the government was ruled by a political party guided by and committed to the cause of righteousness. Using the Noron faction's methods from the final years of Sukjong's reign, they launched a full-scale attack upon Christianity in the form of a heresy claim. Leaders of the Ho-ron line, such as Han Won-jin and Yun Bong-gu, were honored with posthumous titles; the late leader of the South Party, Kim Gwi-ju, had his honor restored; and family members of Queen Jeongsun, such as Kim Gwan-ju and Kim Il-ju of the *sallim* community, were summoned to serve the government. However, those belonging to other political parties and schools suffered threat or severe persecution, because the controversy over the heresy of Western Learning (i.e. Catholicism) could extend to the crackdown on suspicious factions within the Neo-Confucian community. Even Kim Jo-sun, who was the leading figure in both Nak-ron and Sipa groups and whose daughter was selected as Jeongjo's daughter-in-law, was suspected of heresy.

The powerful clans' command of power only accelerated the subordination of Ho-ron members to the central government. Political appointments based on personal ties increasingly replaced those based on meritocratic evaluation. Since such behavior was previously condemned by academic groups, the involvement of scholars such

inappropriate practices was costing them their identity. Such involvement displayed the same logical inconsistency as that of Jeongjo when he emphasized the importance of righteousness but nonetheless defended the unique nature of the royal family.

Following the collapse of the powerful clans with the death of Queen Jeongsun, the Sipa members began to pursue a counter-attack against the Byeokpa members. After Kim Han-rok's "eight-lettered remarks," which contained an unverified accusation against the legitimacy of King Jeongjo, most of the government officials from the Gyeongju Kim clan were expelled until 1807. Most of the leading Ho-ron scholars and Byeokpa politicians were implicated in this incident and were found guilty, leading to the rapid decline in their influence upon both the political arena and academic community.²³

The powerful clans of the Nak-ron and Sipa side, which emerged after the collapse of the Byeokpa administration, launched a fierce attack against the Ho-ron and Byeokpa side. Kim Han-rok was found guilty of trying to prevent Jeongjo from being crowned. As a consequence, his teacher Han Won-jin was also to be held accountable: memos submitted to the king at the time uniformly accused Han Won-jin of having an evil heart, of spreading wrong teachings, and eventually, of enabling Kim Han-rok to engage in such a shameful act of treason. Such criticism not only appeared in political memos, but also in personal publications.

Publications documenting the Horak debate constructed an image of the debate to be perceived by generations to come. The earliest example was Hwang Yun-seok's "Gi horak ihak simal" (A Record of How the Two Schools Ho-Ron and Nak-Ron Began and Ended), authored during the latter half of the eighteenth century. This article

23. Although their influence over the central government was weakened, students of Han Won-jin in provincial regions upheld their strong sense of righteousness and managed to continue their work for decades. In addition, they were engaged in the national liberation movement during the Japanese occupation period (S. Kim 1999). This example shows us exactly where the liveliness of Confucianism actually originated, as it shows us the contrast between the decline of a group that only used the cause and the survival of a group that understood the cause.

presents both Ho-ron and Nak-ron groups in an unbiased manner in documenting the conflicts between academic arguments and depicting the lives of controversial people in political terms, though maintaining that the theories of Nak-ron were correct. Presumed to have been published at a similar time, *Cheonmun sabaengnok* and *Sibibyeon* also contained critical analyses of Ho-ron and Nak-ron theories.

Such trends began to change as a large group of Ho-ron-based Confucian students requested in 1799 by memo that Han Won-jin should be honored with posthumous titles. Following the political atmosphere of the early days of King Sunjo's reign discussed above, publications containing strong criticism of Ho-ron arguments were openly published. Some attempted to revise already published material such as *Cheonmun sabaengnok* by modifying some parts of it or by adding supplementary documentations of discussions that occurred in later periods. *Horak sasil*, *Bulyeogeon*, and *Horak wonwi* were all examples of such works, and although they managed to review a wide variety of sources and remarks, they also contained judgments regarding the heretical potential of Han Won-jin's ideas and disclosures of the alleged deceitful and fraudulent behavior of the Horon group.

Other works attempted to redefine the nature of the once-academic debate in a political light. Party position manuals can be cited as prime examples. Some portions of *Eunpa sango* consistently portrayed the Sipa party under Jeongjo's reign as the loyal party and the Byeokpa as the treasonous one. Conversely, there were also other manuals like *Gonggeo jinam* that determined loyal and treasonous parties based on the perspective of the Ho-ron group within the South Party.²⁴ Regardless of their political positions, the conclusions of these manuals were based on the shared logic that treacherous forces originated from wrongful academic beliefs and that such wrongful academic beliefs originated from wrongful hearts. Academic

24. For more on the political party manuals that contained discussions on the issue of "good" and "treacherous" under rule of Yeongjo and Jeongjo, see Choe (2009, 55-58).

schools were reduced to groups of individuals with the same political views, and the scholar to a mere possessor of political motivation. Correspondingly, the position of a school was evaluated only in light of the affiliated political party, and the positions of scholars were equated to the party's slogans. In such an atmosphere, creative interpretation and productive academic conversation became practically impossible.

After 1803, the Nak-ron group still maintained dominance within the government but had lost their academic identity long before. Just like the *cheoksin* officials, who had seized control over the entire Ho-ron group, the new Nak-ron *cheoksin* officials also considered the Nak-ron group as its own belonging, causing scholars and ordinary *sallim* figures within the Nak-ron group to become subordinate to the *cheoksin* clans. The documentation of the Horak debate itself became a sad reflection of what the two parties had been: two groups of scholars devoid of intellectual spirit.

Nonetheless, modern scholars of Korean history have widely recognized that the influences of the Horak debate are worth examining from various perspectives, in spite of the waning of both Ho-ron and Nak-ron groups in the nineteenth century. For instance, beginning in the late eighteenth century, some scholars regretfully pointed out that the debate had become overheated, resulting in the development of petty arguments over small, unimportant issues. This evolved into the development of new academic agenda such as certain Joseon scholars' search for the values of everyday life and the Bukhak group's pursuit of new methods of thinking. Yet other scholars took issue with the fact that even when parties were losing their identities, major issues—such as whether human nature and animal nature are identical, or whether the unaroused mind is good or evil—were still at the core of the debate. These two seemingly conflicting perspectives should be evaluated in relation to the bigger picture, particularly in terms of changing nature of the entire Confucian society.

Conclusion

As stated in the foreword, this article aims to examine how philosophical differences manifested themselves in the area of political ideology, rather than analyzing the individuals who were involved in the debate or the philosophical issues of the debate. Such an attempt presents numerous difficulties because theories and actions are inherently intertwined within the logic of Confucianism, while the time period that witnessed the Horak debate had its own characteristics. My academic interests lay in the schools, rather than the individuals, in analyzing this 200-year-old academic event that involved hundreds of scholars and their theories and opinions. The schools themselves were critical in shaping, modifying, and presenting the scholars' positions.

I would like to conclude this paper by reflecting upon the philosophical views of Ho-ron and Nak-ron members and the relationship between the scholars' philosophies and their ideological inclinations. By adopting the approach of deducing their philosophy from their aspirations, which reverses the general approach that tries to deduce their aspirations from their philosophy, I was able to reach the following findings. The Ho-ron group maintained its position, shared by many of the seventeenth-century Joseon intellectuals, that academics and politics are the same. To Ho-ron scholars, the prosperity of the Confucian civilization was an objective to be pursued above all else, and out of this belief, they tried to define and determine the nature of things and the differences between them rigidly and conservatively, in existential terms. In comparison, the Nak-ron group exercised more flexibility. They also inherited the cause of the seventeenth century in the spirit of upholding the cause of righteousness, but acknowledged that politics and academics were two separate areas, governed by autonomous principles inherent to each. So, instead of firmly distinguishing between the nature of things, they tried to explain and find ways to resolve such differences.

From this discussion, we can see why the Ho-ron group was so eager to differentiate between humans and animals and to define the status of the unaroused mind (i.e. the uniqueness of mind of sages),

whereas the Nak-ron group emphasized the possibilities of philosophical renovation. The two groups ultimately differed in their stances toward the Other. The judgment on whether to separate Others (such as animals, barbarians, and heresy) from human beings to confine them into the unchangeable realm of beings or to break down the boundaries between the beings of this world was at the root of the differences in their respective positions. As a result, the terms and concepts of the Horak debate were never merely abstract. The debate over whether human nature and animal nature are identical was not about human society and the animal habitat, but rather the Joseon people's definition of "human" and "non-human." They referred to humans, heresy, and barbarians in relation to their vision of the Confucian civilization.

As many scholars of the Joseon era worried, when philosophy engages in real-life demands too heavily, it becomes nothing more than mere rhetoric, losing its function of valuable social critique and being reduced to a mere political tool. The Horak debate was an event that motivated people to question how philosophy and reality should interact and at which points they should remain disparate. This question originates in the past, but still stands today.

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