

Special Feature

Toegye's Appraisal of Daoism

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Introduction

There have been many studies documenting the relation of Joseon Confucian scholars toward a broad range of texts, institutions, and motives which can be grouped under the general label of Daoism. Of a special interest is a sixteenth century period, often described as a formative stage of the Korean Learning of the Way. Commentary and critiques of Laozi or Zhuangzi, attacks on what remained of Goryeo Daoist institutions or debates on longevity techniques were an integral part of Confucian discourse, and it would be difficult to find a scholar who did not have at least some contact with these alternative intellectual currents. Nonetheless, a precise picture of the everyday interaction of the literati with heterodox topics remains evasive. The greater amount of the cases studied present texts and scholars who were interested in Daoist motives either through positive or negative motivations. But how widespread were those topics on an everyday level? How much were these topics known and discussed by common scholars? There are several indicators that the knowledge of Laozi and Zhuangzi's texts belonged to the common proficiency of sixteenth century Confucian students: this is demonstrated by the entry in *Jeungbo munheon bigo* (*Revised and Enlarged Complete Examination of Documents* 增補文獻備考), stating that "in the thirty third year of the [King Seonjo] (1600) students were prohibited from the use of *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi* textual expressions during state examinations."¹ Does this mean that the knowledge of Daoist Classics was so common among students that it was necessary to explicitly prohibit their use? If *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi* were studied, what about other Daoist Classics or alchemy?

In order to detect the average or customary knowledge of the Daoist topics, it is necessary to shift our perspective to those scholars who were not associated with Daoist discourse in any way; they can reveal data concerning the micro-level of Confucian-Daoist modes of coexistence. The scholar chosen for the presented study has rarely been studied in connection to the Daoist discourse. Toegye Yi Hwang 退溪 李滉 (1501-1570) was known for his struggle

* I would like to thank Kim Daeyool, Diana Yuksel, and Isabelle Sancho with whom I have discussed the topic of this study at the conference of Association for Korean Studies in Europe (AKSE) in Bochum, 2015.

1. *Jeungbo munheon bigo*, 85:10b: "三十三年命禁舉子用老莊文字." I am indebted to Marion Eggert for her comments on this note.

against false learning (Deuchler 1985, 384-92) and he is rather an unusual person to be associated with Daoist topics. Yet it is precisely because of his attitude that he is an ideal person to study his encounters with the Daoist realm and to analyze his knowledge of heterodox thought.

False Learning

No doubt the most visible testimony of Toegye's opinion of Daoist teaching was his *Memorial on Six Points* presented in the year *muo* 1568 (*Mujin yukchoseo* 戊辰六條疏) dedicated to the young king Seonjo (1552-1608). The memorial and the more famous diagrammatic treatise *Seonghak sipdo* were composed as didactical works for the king shortly before Toegye's death. Both texts were widely perceived as the old master's philosophical and political testament, who was, in this way, fulfilling his moral obligation to the young ruler. In the fourth paragraph of the memorandum, Toegye discussed the topics of false learning, including Daoism.

In my humble opinion, among the false teachings spread in the Eastern Country, the teachings of Mister Buddha are the most harmful. These have caused the collapse of the ruling house of Goryeo. Even though our dynasty has prosperous rule, it has not been able to eradicate these roots which continually gain momentum and become resurrected yet again. Although previous kings understood these wrongs and swept them away, yet there are still some remnants which continue to burn in ashes, and so still they exist. The empty nonsense and absurdities of Lao's and Zhuang's teachings are at times also popular, and the habits of insulting sages and disdainful ritual still do arise at times. The methods and works of Guan Zhong and Shang Yang are fortunately not transmitted, yet nonetheless the evils of calculating personal profit and merit persist....If we look at the matter from this perspective, the minds of people are indeed in great disorder.²

Toegye's statement can be taken as a brief overview of the religious and

2. *Toegye jeonseo*, 6:49a-b: “臣伏見東方異端之害. 佛氏爲甚. 而高麗氏以至於亡國. 雖以我朝之盛治. 猶未能絕其根柢. 往往投時而熾漫. 雖賴先王旋覺其非. 而汎掃去之. 餘波遺燼. 尙有存者. 老. 莊之虛誕. 或有耽尙. 而侮聖蔑禮之風間作. 管商之術業. 幸無傳述. 而計功謀利之弊猶錮. ...以此觀之. 今之人心. 不正甚矣.”

intellectual landscape in Korea of his times; it combines both statistic and strategic evaluation. The wide range of established false teachings are enumerated according to the potential dangers they present to Confucian teaching. These dangers began with Buddhism, still powerful, and continued in the less widely prevalent Daoist teachings, usually practiced only on a personal level; they ended with the ancient Chinese schools represented by Guang Zhong and Shang Yang, considered as mere objects of scholarly curiosity. Toegye's stance on false learning was complex and evolved over the time but we can state that the topic that most concerned him was not the definition of false learning, since this had been relatively well defined, but how to combat these various doctrines. The most effective method which Toegye recommended to his students was to ignore them entirely. Toegye's disciples described the attitude of their master in the following way:

The Master's [attitude] toward false learning was as [his attitude] toward licentious songs and beautiful women,³ and yet he still worried that he was not strict enough in getting rid of them. He once said: "I wanted to read Buddhist scriptures in order to properly investigate what they heretically hide, but I was as fearful as someone crossing a river. First, he wants to try its depth, but then he is afraid of drowning. Those who study should read only the writings of sages and worthies. If they can understand them, they may trust them completely, and when it comes to the texts of false learning, there will be surely no harm if they do not know them at all."⁴

This statement, of course, was also applicable to Daoist texts. We find a similar image in Toegye's letter to Nam Eongyeong 南彦經 (1528-1594), where he passionately dissuaded the younger scholar from engaging with the text of *Zhuangzi*, claiming that:

Generally our [Confucian] Way is self-sufficient, so why must you crawl through these false learnings, quoting them and searching for any

3. Compare with *Jinsilu*, 13:5: "A student should forthwith get as far away from Buddhist doctrines as from licentious songs and beautiful women" (Wing-tsit Chan's translation) 學者于釋氏之說, 直須如淫聲美色以遠之。

4. *Toegye seonsaeng eonhaengnok*, 5:12a: "先生於異端如淫聲美色, 猶恐絕之不嚴, 嘗曰我欲看佛經以覈其邪遁, 而恐如涉水者, 初慾試其淺深, 而竟有沒溺之虞耳, 學者但當讀聖賢書, 知得盡信得, 及如異端文字, 全然不知亦不妨也。"

consistency within them? Before, you wanted to read *Zhuangzi*, but I believed that you just wanted only to cursorily read it in order to broaden your perspectives. Now I have realized that you are in the very midst of its poison. False learning moves people easily, and so we should be deeply afraid of it, resolutely warning against it thousand ten thousand times.⁵

This personal warning, along with the royal edict to state examination candidates mentioned above, signify that Daoist texts were both known and studied on a fairly regular basis.⁶ What makes this picture even more interesting is the fact that Toegye himself often displayed a prefect command of such texts. During a royal lecture on the Western Inscription, Toegye briskly identified *Zhuangzi* as the source of the quotation “[there is] no place he can escape between heaven and earth,”⁷ explaining the full context of the story connected to the tragic destiny of Jin prince Shensheng 申生 (?-655 BC). In the above mentioned memorial, Toegye used an allusion to the story of Cook Ding, and in another memorial from 1558 (*Muo sajikso* 戊午辭職疏) he employed a metaphor from the *Liezi*.⁸ All these texts and social events demonstrate that Toegye freely used his knowledge of Daoist Classics—the very same sources which he discouraged his students from studying. This seeming paradox, however, is easy to explain with a brief recourse to the origins of the relation between the Learning of the Way and Daoism during the Song era.

Many Song masters had close relations to Daoist circles and many of their theories were developed in the course of polemics with their opponents; from Zhou Dunyi to Zhu Xi we find many direct comments or usage of various Daoist sources which were deeply embedded within their philosophical

5. *TGJS*, 14:15b-16a: “大抵吾道自足。何必匍匐於異學。而援引求合乎。向者。公欲看莊子。吾意謂汎觀以資博耳。今覺已中其毒如此。異學移人之易。深可畏。千萬切戒之。”

6. The sixteenth century rise of the literati community influenced also publications of Daoist works, and we have at our disposal the first records of their xylographic editions. Encyclopedia *Gosa chwallyo* (*Extracted Essentials of Examination of Things* 攷事撮要), first compiled in 1554, lists in its first extant version from 1585 the printing blocks for *Daodejing* and *Liezi* stored in Wonju and the matrices for *Zhuangzi* stored in Gyeongju, Neungseong, and Hamheung. The 1585 edition of the encyclopedia lists as well the matrices of *Yinfu jing* (*Scripture of the Hidden Response* 陰附經) kept in Gwangju. See Choe 2012, 14–15. At least some of Toegye's contemporaries had, therefore, at their disposal clean edited copies of Daoist writings and not clumsy manuscripts handed over under a desk.

7. *TGJS*, 7:58b: “無所逃於天地之間。”

8. *TGJS*, 6:19a: “莖芹萍子不足以充獻芹之誠。”

discourse.⁹ Even as Zhu Xi and his predecessors harshly criticized Daoist concepts, their environment and own thought processes were deeply connected to them; a knowledge of Daoist concepts and theories was very common among Song thinkers. To study a Song master required the basic knowledge of those concepts which were the target of their polemics and we can be certain that many Daoist theories were known to Korean literati simply because they were contained in the polemical texts of the Song canon.

A case study of this problem is presented in Toegye's letter to Heo Bong 許筭 (1551-1588), written in 1570. The young scholar sent dozens of questions for which he sought answers to Toegye, ranging from problems of Confucian Classics to the master's opinion on Gim Siseup 金時習 (1435-1493). Only handful of questions were related to Daoist topics. What makes Heo Bong's queries interesting is the fact that they were all related to Zhu Xi's treatment of Laozi or Zhuangzi. The young student was obviously puzzled by the several positive mentions concerning both Daoist thinkers which can be found in the Classics of Song Confucianism.

Zhuang Zhou indulged in his strange and mystical theories, lashed out slanderously against sage men and took a buffoonish stance toward goodness and right, so he is indeed an exemplary proponent of false learning. But Master Cheng and Master Zhu considered him as a "great outstanding talent." Why?

[Reply:] Saying that he [Zhuang Zhou] was great outstanding talent is expression treating him contemptuously and as an outsider.¹⁰

Toegye's answer deliberately avoided the fact that Zhu Xi indeed praised Zhuang Zhou several times for many of his insights (Chan 1989, 486-508): the incriminating citation had arisen in the context of his praise of Zhuang for his understanding which surely had been inspired by the teaching of Confucian disciples.¹¹ Toegye further politely explained to Heo Bong the reasons why

9. A prime example is a debate on Daoist origins of Zhou Dunyi's diagram, see Adler 2014, 71-72; 117 and Louis 2003, 145-96.

10. *TGJS*, 33:33a-b: "莊周肆其荒唐之說. 排詆聖賢. 違徇仁義. 此固異端之尤者. 而程朱皆以爲大秀才. 何也. 云大秀才. 已是賤之外之之辭."

11. *Zhuzi yulei*, 125: "莊周是箇大秀才他都理會得. 只是不把做事. 觀其第四篇人間世及漁父篇以後. 多是說孔子與諸人語."

Zhu Xi had stated that “Boyi was slightly similar to Laozi” and that “[Zhou Dunyi’s] *Rhapsody on Dullness* resembles the teachings of the Yellow Emperor and Laozi.”¹² Immediately after these replies, however, there followed a long admonition on how to read books properly so as not to “plunge into false teaching.”

Large sections of the conversation on Daoist topics, especially on Laozi,¹³ contained in Zhu Xi’s recorded conversations and his own texts could not be ignored. Toegye accepted this, just as he accepted that large parts of Song discourse were more or less contaminated by various heterodox influences; in his letter to Nam Sibō, he mentioned it as a natural part of the exegesis of the latter eras.

Therefore, among people of the ancient times in their honoring of the teacher, there was nothing that was not done to the utmost. When there arose contradictory passages in Hu Wufeng’s *Zhiyan*, Nanxuan¹⁴ did not conceal it, and when Yang Guishan’s statements slipped into the teachings of Buddha and Lao, Hui’an did not conceal it...Even if there was some slight error in the statements of Yanping, Hui’an would not protect him and his principle was impartial to the utmost.¹⁵

It is no coincidence that the above-mentioned scholar, Yang Shi, was criticized by Toegye for his remarks on the achieving of the Way as “belittling humanity and righteousness, similar to Zhuang Zhou and Liezi.”¹⁶ The vivid intellectual exchange between the Song Confucians and Daoism was frequently discussed by Toegye and as shown in the above-mentioned quotation, he concealed neither these contacts nor the ensuing dialogue. On the other hand, he did not mention it frequently and if so, only as a negative example. Such was the case of his second letter of the Four Seven debate in which he stressed to Gobong that through an exegesis of the crucial terms related to the realm of “above forms” (*hyeongisang* 形而上) one should not misunderstand them as “Lao and Zhuang’s

12. *TGJS*, 33:36b.

13. See Chan 1975, 131-44. For similar Korean cases see Kim 2007, 17-22; Glomb 2016, 15-47.

14. Zhang Shi 張栻 (1133-1181).

15. *TGJS*, 14:14b: “故古人尊敬師門，非不至也。五峯知言駁處，南軒不諱。龜山之言，苟涉佛老處，晦菴不隱。南軒，五峯之門人，晦菴，龜山之源流也。非徒龜山，雖延平之言，有少差，晦菴亦不回護者。此理至公。”

16. *TGJS*, 41:20a: “此卽莊，列小仁義。”

empty Non-Being.”¹⁷ Toegye’s mentions of Daoist texts were always rather sketchy and brief. We find no systematic polemic with the notorious *Daodejing* statement “Being is generated from Non-Being,” which was discussed by other great sixteenth century Korean scholars such as Hwadam and Yulgok,¹⁸ and other crucial ideas of the Daoist Classics are almost never mentioned. Toegye indeed tried to avoid discussing Daoist heresies as much as possible, despite his good knowledge of the Daoist texts; he rarely discussed them if not strictly necessary. But there was one area where Toegye mentioned Laozi and Zhuangzi very often: in his critique of other scholars.

Personal Attacks

Almost every biography of a famous Learning of the Way figure contains a story of early failures, trials or temptations, and the subsequent return to the right path of the learning.¹⁹ This phenomenon can be observed both in Song and later Chinese thinkers as well as in their Korean counterparts. Apart from an interest in military affairs, the most frequently mentioned youthful mistake is an interest in Daoist teaching. Among Toegye’s contemporaries we can find several such cases which he found worthy of commentary. One example of such an early and naive engagement with the teachings of Lao and Zhuang is described in Toegye’s letter to Hong Inu 洪仁祐 (1515-1554), where he mentions one of the *sarim* heroes Chungam Gim Jeong 冲菴 金淨 (1486-1521), whose scholarship “had, at the beginning, fallen into the teachings of Lao and Zhuang, but later on, his views were truly a degree higher than that of other men.”²⁰ The youthful experience with Daoist temptations by no means disqualified a scholar from a later illustrious career and recognition, as we can see in Toegye’s memories of his friend²¹ Haseo Gim Inhu 河西 金麟厚 (1510-1560).

17. *TGJS*, 14:40b.

18. *Hwadam jip*, 2:14b; *Yulgok jeonse*, 10:39a.

19. Even in Toegye’s case, we find the story how he repeatedly failed his state examinations but finally decided to prove his abilities. For this see Jeong 2001, 1:79.

20. *TGJS*, 13:8b: “初雖陷於老莊。後來所見。實高人一等。”

21. Haseo and Toegye met for the first time during their studies in Seonggyungwan in 1523 and remained good friends from that moment on; see *Toegye seonsaeng nyeonbo*, 1:3a.

In his early years he entered and dwelled in the texts of Lao and Zhuang and therefore became very much engaged in songs and wine, which ruined him. What pity it became like that. But I have heard that in his later years he directed his attention to proper study. Recently, I have seen his debates and written texts, and his views are clear and perfect to the utmost.²²

An interesting point in this evaluation is the view that indulgence in false learning inevitably leads to other vices, but as the above-mentioned example shows, early experience with Daoism did not necessarily hinder the later career of a scholar. It also did not prevent the granting of the highest honor possible for a Korean Confucian scholar, enshrinement in the Confucius Temple (Munmyo), bestowed upon Haseo in 1796. This, however, was valid only when an interest in Daoism was a firmly matter of the past and when the young student had become a full-fledged member of the Learning of the Way fellowship, distancing himself from such past waywardness.

There are other instances of Toegye's mentioning of Daoist studies in a different context: Daoist tendencies, supposed or real, were weaponized as accusations against other scholars. Such was the case with Toegye when he attacked his contemporary Nammyeong Jo Sik 南冥 曹植 (1501-1572), whom he privately accused as being "of the same string as Zhuang Zhou."²³ This was not the only insult of this kind against Nammyeong; in the record of Toegye's sayings we find other attacks stating that "Nammyeong's teaching praising Nanhua (Zhuangzi) should be deeply worrying"²⁴ and another statement, recorded by Toegye's disciple Ganjae Yi Deoghong 艮齋李德弘 (1541-1596), which argued that Nammyeong "in fact adds another level to Zhuang Zhou."²⁵ But what was the intent of these comments? Nammyeong, who, despite Toegye's animosity, was deeply venerated by many of his contemporaries was hardly a full-fledged follower of Daoist teaching and Toegye's comments appear to be mere personal attacks. Many of these accusations were conveyed (or written) privately in letters and remarks to disciples, but sooner or later became known to the broad public, causing considerable and long lasting uproar.

22. *TGJS*, 16:18a: "其初入處多在老莊. 故中年頗為詩酒所壞. 為可惜. 而聞其晚年留意此學. 近方得見其論學文字. 其見識儘精密."

23. *Toegye seonsaeng eonhaengnok*, 5:13a: "實與莊周一串."

24. *Toegye seonsaeng eonhaengnok*, 5:12b: "南冥唱南華之學甚可懼也."

25. *Ganjae jip*, 6:12b: "南冥實加莊周一層."

The first who objected to such accusations was Nammyeong himself, who passionately reacted to defend his Confucian face:

Does Gyeongho [Toegye] think that I am follower of Lao and Zhuang? Surely it is because one can see that when I was young I did not study; I treated the world lightly, looking down on practical affairs. Master Zhu said: “Get the idea of following one’s nature. I know that in what I have received from Heaven, not a single thing is wholly sufficient, but I do know that the so called Non-being of Mister Lao is not the Way.”²⁶

The offence was even more serious as Toegye was studiously polite in his public letters to Nammyeong, giving no hint of his private thoughts. To slander a fellow Confucian scholar with the accusation of Daoist tendencies was considered by many to be a serious insult; Nammyeong’s disciple Naeam Jeong Inhong 來庵 鄭仁弘 (1535-1623) later vehemently condemned it in his address to the throne in which he opposed the Munmyo enshrinement of both Yi Eonjeok and Toegye,²⁷ and even long after the death of both protagonists, Seongho Yi Ik 星湖 李穰 (1681-1764) devoted the entire entry of his *Seongho saseol* (*Trifling Talks of Seongho* 星湖僊說) to the affair. This obviously unfounded personal attack was not based on Nammyeong’s knowledge of the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi*, but on the fact that his teachings were, according to Toegye, close to them in spirit. Nammyeong was deeply convinced of the orthodoxy of his thought and it is not surprising that he himself found many mistakes on Toegye’s side, accusing him of lacking requisite focus on the fundamental values of Confucian cultivation. But to what extent were Toegye accusations concerning his Daoist inclination relevant?

In addition to the verbal attacks, we find in Toegye’s writings very few, or rather none, explanations as to why Nammyeong deserved to be designated as being of “the same string as Zhuang Zhou.” It is true that Toegye was irritated by his steadfast boycott of an official career and his rather offensive behavior with his proud (or arrogant) refusal of contemporary politics, with which Toegye had tried to engage him. It is also true that Toegye viewed Nammyeong as a

26. *Zhongyong huowen*, 1; *Nuram jip*, 3:3a: “景浩以我爲老莊耶。必見吾年少不學時輕世事也。朱子曰得乎。性之說。則知我之得乎天者。無一物之不該。而老氏之所謂無者。非道矣。”

27. *Gwanghaegun ilgi*, 3/3/26#5.

rather extravagant scholar who “in his discussions and opinions always valued the new and the strange.”²⁸ But in addition to these vague remarks criticizing Nammyeong’s bigoted behavior and preposterous deeds (as when Nammyeong ordered his disciples to destroy the house of a depraved widow),²⁹ Toegye gave no evidence as to why Nammyeong should be called a Daoist. A closer look at Nammyeong’s works reveal that they do not contain any more allusions to Daoist writings than the other orthodox *munjip* among his contemporaries. Certain features of his personality, such as his ostensive reclusiveness, could create the appearance of being suspiciously close to the Daoist sphere, but according to common standards, Nammyeong was no more a Daoist than Toegye himself.

Toegye employed a Daoist label to discredit Nammyeong and his teaching, but he addressed this opinion only to his own disciples. His views never gained broader influence, and in the long-term could not prevent an increase in Nammyeong’s followers, who were, for a short time, the dominant political faction in the court, maintaining their local base in Gyeongsang Province for centuries. The above-mentioned cases demonstrate that an interest in Daoism could be excused in young students; it was not, however, acceptable in older scholars. Nammyeong’s case further demonstrates that an accusation of Daoism was frequently used as a weapon in doctrinal disputes.

Longevity and Alchemy

Confucian discourse in many cases touched upon areas which were never fully under the control or fully incorporated into the realm of orthodoxy. Such topics as medicine, divination, or alchemistic studies were genetically connected to the wider context of Daoist thought, and yet at the same time they played an important role for ordinary literati who made use of many of their practical contributions. Toegye was also engaged in delineating the subtle line between medicine and alchemy or preserving one’s vital energy (which was fully in accord with Confucian morality) in contrast to striving for immortality (which was immoral false learning). The traditional picture of Toegye as a relentless fighter

28. *Munbong jip*, 5:22a: “其議論識見. 每以新奇爲高.”

29. *Toegye seonsaeng eonhaengnok*, 5:13b.

against false heresies should be corrected in view of his studies of alchemistic manuals and medical techniques, which played an important role in his life. Toegye's basic stance toward Daoist longevity techniques was fully in accord with the traditional distinction between the orthodox preservation of one's own body and heterodox techniques of longevity. In his letter to Pak Chihwa 朴枝華 (1513-1592), Toegye commented on various concrete physical exercises; the related sources gave the basic distinction between proper and improper studies of this field.

In the body of man, the principle *li* and *qi* are simultaneously contained. Principle *li* is noble and *qi* is base but principle *li* is without activity and *qi* has desires and needs. Therefore, those who put the stress on practical conduct cultivate *qi* within their activities. Such are sages and worthy men. If somebody is only inclined toward the cultivation of *qi* he will surely reach the point where he will steal, harming his own nature. Laozi and Zhuang Zhou were like that. If you wish to fulfil the way of preserving life to the utmost, then it is an occupation such as taking care of one's parents day and night. You must leave aside all other activities and then it may be possible. It destroys principle and harms what is correct and in the basic sense it cannot be considered as proper education and instruction. If you believe that cultivation of *qi* is also not absolutely useless and that some things in these books are permissible, then you must know that there are also many strange and unfounded things and you must also get rid of them.³⁰

Toegye's relatively tolerant view admitting the uses of Daoist techniques was motivated by his own chronic health problems. Health issues and medical problems were a frequent topic of literati dialogues, forming a large part of social lore. We find very few Korean literati who would state that they were in good health and excuses for poor health and physical weakness were among the standard rhetorical figures of apologies for leaving an official post or

30. *TGJS*, 12:24a-b: “人之一身，理氣兼備，理貴氣賤。然理無爲而氣有欲，故主於踐履者，養氣在其中，聖賢是也。偏於養氣者，必至於賊性，老莊是也。衛生之道，苟欲充其極致，則匪懈匪躬之職，皆當頓廢而後，可庶幾其敦理害正如此。本不可以爲訓者也。若以爲養氣亦不可全無，而姑存其書爲可，則其中尤近怪無稽者，亦當去之。” Dasan Jeong Yagyong devoted a long commentary to this citation in which he explains that the Song masters took from the Daoist school (Doga 道家) several useful techniques concerning how to make one's own mind clear, reduce selfish desires, and cultivate *qi* properly, but they also warned against vulgar immortality techniques. See *Yeoyudang jeonseo*, Dosan sasuk rok, 8b-9a.

refusing a bureaucratic appointment. It is true that professional doctors were, in the Joseon era, considered as being of a much lower status than the literati class but the degrading attitude toward them was based on the fact that they worked for profit and was not related to medicine as such. Confucian literati very often had a substantial command of medical knowledge, studying it from both curiosity as well as practical reasons. As the heads of households they were responsible for their family members and slaves, and a brief look into household management manuals such as a *Sallim gyeongje* 山林經濟 reveals that basic knowledge of medical essentials was very common among countryside literati. Toegye's personal interest in medical techniques was fueled by his chronic health problems for which he sought to find a remedy. The unusual high number of various medical prescriptions and health topics mentioned in his letters³¹ reveal Toegye as a well-educated amateur who frequently studied medical books.

In 1963, the discovery of Toegye's copy of the Daoist-medical manual *Hwarin simbang* (*Methods to Rejuvenate the Human Mind* 活人心方), originally written as *Huorenxin* 活人心 by the Ming prince and scholar Zhu Quan 朱權 (1378-1448)³² created a huge sensation as it appeared to correct the general picture of Toegye's stance on Daoist techniques (Yi 1974, 184-92). The text itself had been couple of times mentioned in the works of both earlier³³ and later authors as a medical manual but it is also very clear that compared to other medical books *Hwarin simbang* was very close to Daoist understanding of longevity, as well as other techniques; if it had not been discovered we never would have known about its use by Toegye as this text was never mentioned by him in his writings. Given the absence of context concerning Toegye's perception of *Hwarin simbang*, it is difficult to determine whether he considered it to be a medical manual or a Daoist treatise, but fortunately, we have at our disposal other examples of texts on the border of orthodoxy encountered by him.

The fuzzy border between the Confucian and Daoist realms, or rather between the permissible and forbidden in terms of false learning and Daoist

31. For an overview of Toegye's health problems, see Yi 1992, 85-92.

32. The manuscript was kept in a private collection in Dosan, and its existence was registered in 1944 by Abe Yoshio 阿部吉雄 (1905-1978) in his study on Toegye.

33. The text was first quoted in the Korean medical encyclopedia *Uibang yuchwi* (*Classified Collection of Medical Remedies* 醫方類聚) in 1443.

teachings is well demonstrated by the role of the semi-classical work *Cantongqi* (*The Seal of the Unity of the Three* 參同契), “the forefather of the scriptures on the Elixir of all times” (Pregadio 2011, 1). This text, attributed to Wei Boyang 魏伯陽 (c. 151–c. 221), consists of the essentials of alchemy, the Daoist theory of action, and cosmological speculations related to *Yijing*. Although the text itself traditionally belonged to the sphere of Daoism, it had attracted attention of many scholars who would otherwise claim to be orthodox Confucians. The most important instance of the contact of this text and a Confucian scholar was Zhu Xi’s *Zhouyi Cantong qi kaoyi* (*Investigation of Discrepancies in the Zhouyi Cantong qi* 周易參同契考異). *Cantong qi* was, during the second half of the 16th century, a well-known text among Korean literati and attracted much attention; the discussion concerning the nature of the text or its orthodox interpretation strived to determine whether it was proper to study this manifest Daoist source. A good example of this debate are the dialogues of King Seonjo and his court scholars who tried to convince the sovereign that “*Cantong qi* speaks only of the methods of the cultivation and refinement of *qi*” and “is nothing that should be discussed by the ruler of people.”³⁴ *Cantong qi* was considered by the majority of Korean literati as at best a very dubious text of Daoist provenience and despite Zhu Xi’s favorable opinion of the text, it remained classified as a suspicious book. There were, however, certain scholars³⁵ who did not hesitate to use this text, and Toegye was among them. Toegye was deeply convinced that *Cantong qi*, or at least certain passages, was fully compatible with Confucian doctrine and he followed Zhu Xi’s example of commenting upon and using the text. The framework for his inquiry of *Cantong qi* was *Gyemong jeonui* (*Transmitted Doubts about the Introduction* 啓蒙傳疑), his treatise of the *Changes*, numerology, and divination. This work was intended as an explication of Zhu Xi’s text *Yixueqimeng* (*Introduction to Studies of the Changes* 易學啓蒙) and numerous later commentaries on the topic such as *Qimengyijian* (*Views on the Introduction* 啓蒙意見) by Han Bangqi 韓邦奇 (1479-1555) and others.

34. *Seonjo sillok*, 35/4/23#1: “而只言修鍊之方。方外之書，非人君所當論也。” For Seonjo’s studies on the text see Jo 2013, 395-425.

35. There were three Joseon commentaries on the text: Gwon Geukchung’s 權克中 (1585-1659) *Chamdong gye jubae* (*Commentary on Cantong qi 參同契註解*), Nam Guman’s 南九萬 (1629-1711) *Chamdong gye to ju* (*Glosses and commentary on Cantong qi 參同契吐註*) and Seo Myeongeung’s 徐命膺 (1716-1787) *Chamdong go* (*Investigation on Cantong qi 參同攷*). See Yi 2008, 61-87; Yi 2012, 152-73.

Toegye's commentary is, within the context of his own work somewhat unusual as Toegye, in contrast to many of his contemporaries, displayed no special particular in numerology; he was well versed in the *Changes*, but was reluctant to use his knowledge for purposes of divination. His attitude was well described by Yi Deoghong who remarked that "The master's relation to divination was that although he knew such theories, he found no delight in practicing them."³⁶ The *Changes* was an integral part of the Confucian canon, but at the same time it was a work that bordered upon numerous divinatory or Daoist texts which themselves were far from being orthodox. The mentions and citations of *Cantong qi* in *Gyemong jeonui* reveal that Toegye maintained a distinction between the acceptable parts of *Cantong qi* and its more suspect ideas, which remained unmentioned by him. In his foreword to *Gyemong jeonui*, he proclaimed that the purpose of the book should be to help readers comprehend the teachings of principles and numbers, which are broad and subtle, complicated and entangled, and hence not easy to explore,³⁷ and he kept to this orientation. *Cantong qi* was cited a few times in the text and always within the context of numerology or divination and not in relation to alchemy. The longer chapter entitled, *Cantong qi*, was introduced with a definition of the source and dealt with classical numerological thinking as related to Hetu and Luoshu or the numbers and Five Elements; other passages related to *Cantong qi* such as the diagram *Chamdong gye napkkap do* (*Diagram of Matching the Stems in Cantong qi* 參同契納甲圖) are related to numerology and do not discuss alchemy. In the chapter on the comparison of the diagrams of Zhu Xi and Dong Zhu 董銖 (1152-1214) on *yin* and *yang* transmutations, Toegye inserted a brief remark about the cinnabar stove or furnace (*zao* 竈) and *Cantong qi* (*danjo Chamdong gye* 丹竈參同契),³⁸ but there are no further mentions of cinnabar or other elixir-related topics.

An interesting point is that Toegye, in the commentary to the *Cantong qi* diagram, also cites the *Zhouyi cantong qi fahui* (*Elucidation of Zhouyi Cantong qi* 周易參同契發揮) of Yu Yan 俞琰 (ca. 1253-1314), proof that he was well supplied with later literature on this topic.

36. *Ganjae jip*, 5:16b: "先生於卜筮之事。雖知其說。亦不喜爲之。"

37. *TGJS*, 42:6a.

38. *Seonjo sillok*, 35/4/23#1: "而只言修鍊之方。方外之書，非人君所當論也。" For Seonjo's studies on the text see Jo 2013, 395-425.

The case of *Cantong qi* is important in the context of Toegye's relation to Daoist discourse: it helps us to determine his definition of the border between the acceptable and unacceptable within the usage of elements of heterodox sources. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Toegye did not reject *Cantong qi* as a suspect work and freely used it within the framework of Confucian discourse. The motivation to accept this text was probably based on the precedents set by Zhu Xi and other Confucian scholars; for Toegye, this would have provided sufficient proof of the text's plausibility. The phenomena of Zhu Xi's commentary and the mixed reactions of Korean literati amply illustrate how different the atmosphere of the Song Confucians had been: they were in free communication with Daoist currents, as opposed to their Korean heirs who were much less inclined to any kind of dialogue with false learning and were openly puzzled as to why such an illustrious sage like Zhu Xi would comment on Daoist writings such as *Cantong qi*³⁹ or *Yinfu jing*. It is a certain paradox that Toegye's respect for Zhu Xi enabled him to deal, fairly non-problematically, with this text, considered by his contemporaries as unacceptable. His positive approach to *Cantong qi* was accompanied by a clear notion of the problematic parts of the work: we can state that unlike many of his colleagues who drew the border of orthodoxy before *Cantong qi*, for Toegye this border ran through the book itself. The usage of citations from *Cantong qi* in *Gyemong jeonui* indicate that Toegye kept a distance between the layers of the books: numerology and divination were acceptable but the inner alchemy parts were left aside.

Toegye composed *Gyemong jeonui* at a very advanced age (1557) but there are several hints that his knowledge of *Cantong qi* could be traced to his earlier decades. In 1535, he noted that during his visit to Silleuksa Temple he discussed the "*Inner Chapters [of the August Ultimate]* and methods of cultivation and refinement in *Cantong qi*" with two local officials.⁴⁰ There is, however, the dire lack of *Cantong qi* mentions in Toegye's other texts. We find a short mention in the list of questions on Zhu Xi's works sent to Toegye by Yi Dam 李湛 (1510-1574), a mention of the usefulness of *Cantong qi* in connection to numerological problems,⁴¹ and a brief reference to vein problems in the above-

39. Dasan even stated that commentaries to *Cantong qi* (including most probably also Zhu Xi's text) are "injuring society." See *Yeoyudang jeonsoe*, Dosan sasuk rok, 9a.

40. *Toegye seonsaeng byeoljip*, 1:2a: "論內篇及參同契修鍊之法."

41. *TGJS*, 13:13a.

mentioned letter to Pak Jihwa; apart from a few hidden allusions, however, it is difficult to find any further discussions on the topic. *Cantong qi* was not a book for public Confucian debate and Toegye was not too loud in articulating his good knowledge of this Daoist Classic. All Toegye's references were used either in highly technical treatises such as *Gyemong jeonui*, comprehensible only to advanced scholars, or in private correspondence where there was no risk of granting publicity to a suspicious publication. Toegye strictly distinguished between his public works which avoided any positive contacts between Daoist and Confucian discourses and his private writings with seasoned scholars with whom he could speak more freely. The detailed biography of Zhu Xi contained in Toegye's most time-consuming publication project, *Songgye Won Myeong ihak tongnok* (*Record of the Learning of Principle in the Song, Yuan, and Ming Dynasties* 宋季元明理學通錄) does not mention the Song master's interest in *Cantong qi* or his commentary on this work, as it was meant to provide only an orthodox perspective on Zhu Xi. In 1553, however, he composed a postface (*hu* 後) to eight treatises on longevity which had been shown to him by a local official with the exclamation, "How much more I understand the meaning of Hui'an's [Zhu Xi's] earnest interest in [Wei] Boyang's writings!"⁴² In the presence of older scholars who knew the topic well it was not necessary to hide the Daoist-related facts of Zhu Xi's life.

Immortals

The Daoist motives of seclusion or immortals were an indispensable part of the world of Joseon, occupying a substantial part of the Confucian literati imagination. Techniques of immortality were not permissible, but poems about the meeting of immortals in mountains were for the most part a welcome component of poetry sessions during literati journeys. The same picture is visible in the works of Toegye: his poetic writings are strewn with mentions of immortals and related symbols. What was not permitted in social-political debate was permissible, and even desirable, in the poetic realm.

In the autumn of 1563, Toegye climbed Cheonyeon Terrace in Dosan,

42. *TGJS*, 43:10b: "益知晦菴拳拳於伯陽之書之意."

and after reciting Zhu Xi's poem on the Nine Bends of Mount Wuyi, he composed his own poem opening with the line "In the middle of the night I woke up from a dream about being a wandering immortal."⁴³ Devotion to Zhu Xi was freely and non-problematically blended with Daoist symbols. In poems it was possible to use rhetorical figures which otherwise would be hard to locate in the mind of an orthodox scholar. In connection with Haeinsa Temple, Toegye spoke of Choe Chiwon 崔致遠 (857-?), a scholar toward whom he otherwise had a very dismissive opinion: "In the mountains I have heard there is Haeinsa Temple, its golden halls and jade rooms are the house of a true immortal. It is a thousand years since Immortal Choe left."⁴⁴ The problem we encounter in this case is that we cannot discern the context of the poem and such statements could only have been a part of a poetic exchange with other scholars who had chosen this topic. In a 1553 postface, Toegye praised the author of longevity treatises: "Sugok was able to become an earthly immortal.⁴⁵ Is it only me who is not able to do that?"⁴⁶ Was this exclamation mere polite praise? There are signs that at least in certain moments Toegye was receptive to such Daoist ideals. The postface text is introduced by the citation "I do not want to become a celestial immortal, I will become an earthly immortal."⁴⁷ The commentary to Toegye's collected writings compiled by Yu Dowon 柳道源 (1721-1791) indicated a source "Immortal Classic" (*Seongyeong* 仙經) but we also find the quote in the works of Chinese poet Liu Kezhuang 劉克莊 (1187-1269) and other sources.⁴⁸ Regardless of the origin of the citation, Toegye seemed to like the verse and used it as well earlier in his poetic exchange with Kwonpo Eo Deukkang 灌圃 魚得江 (1470-1550) in 1533.⁴⁹ Even more interesting is the fact that Toegye was the first person to use this trope in Korea. There clearly was something appealing in the picture of an immortal remaining on earth as we find it once more in Toegye's biography composed by his favorite disciple Hakbong Gim Seongil

43. *Toegye seonsaeng sokjip*, 2:24b: "半夜游仙夢自回。"

44. *Toegye seonsaeng byeoljip*, 1:2a: "山中聞有海印寺。金堂玉室眞仙家。崔仙去後一千載。"

45. Earthly immortals are a lower category of immortals who do not ascend to Heaven but remain on this earth. See Kohn 2016, 172.

46. *TGJS*, 43:10b-11a: "守谷能作地仙。而余獨不能耶。"

47. *TGJS*, 43:10b: "不願天仙作地仙。"

48. The authorship of the citation was probably not known among Joseon literati. Gwon Dugyeong 權斗經 (1654-1725) in 1708 identified the authorship only as the "words of ancient people" 古人語, see *Changseoljae jip*, 4:2a.

49. *Toegye seonsaeng byeoljip*, 1:4a; qtd. in Gwon 1991, 29-64.

鶴峰 金誠一 (1538-1593),

During the time he spent as a magistrate of these two counties [Tanyang and P'unggi], Toegye's behaviour was clear and transparent, without the merest spec of private thought. When he completed filling official documents, he either found his pleasure in reading various writings and histories, or detached himself from others and wandered about solitary and unhurriedly in natural sceneries. Old people in the field and farmers looked upon him as though he were a divine immortal. Soon after that he abandoned his official career and returned home.⁵⁰

This image of the wandering immortal withdrawn from the mundane world was close to every Joseon literate and despite its Daoist connotations it appealed to both simple villagers and Toegye's favourite disciple.⁵¹ Confucian ideals and the Daoist imaginary were sometimes very close. There are several stories of Toegye discussing the *Changes* with the hero of Korean Daoist genealogies, Jeong Heuiryang 鄭希良 (1469-1502); in the folk tradition, the legends of his meeting and lunch with Nam Sago 南師古 (1509-1571), a legendary scholar and master of Daoist techniques, lived on (Gang and Hong 2011, 297-98). Legends and immortals were never too far from prodigious Confucian scholars.

Conclusion

The picture of Toegye's engagement with Daoist discourse was multifaceted, much as Daoist lore itself. On the one hand, Toegye was a model Confucian scholar who preached against all false learning including the "teaching of Lao and Zhuang;" on the other hand, he displayed an excellent command of their writings. This paradox can be explained in that most of the warnings against an interest in Daoism were addressed to young scholars who could be easily misled by such heretic theories. For older scholars, the same text formed a part of the literary canon and was an object of study and debate. Nonetheless, any

50. *Hakbong seonsaeng sokjip*, 5:3a-b: "其在二郡. 清風灑然. 無一點私累. 簿書之暇. 惟以書史自娛. 或超然獨往. 徜徉水石間. 田翁野老. 望若神仙. 未幾棄官歸家."

51. The earliest mention is recorded in Yu Mongin's 柳夢寅 (1559-1623) collection of miscellaneous stories *Eou yadam* 於于野譚 (*Wild Tales of Mr. Eou*).

supposed resemblance to Daoist teaching was still the object of harsh critique as seen in the case of attacks on Nammyeong. A large part of the problems concerning Joseon literati usage of Daoist texts and techniques stemmed from the fact that many Song thinkers, including Zhu Xi, were their avid readers and commentators. Joseon scholars were in this case even more orthodox than their Song models and predecessors, and deliberately strived to ignore the formerly intense contacts between the two teachings. Zhu Xi's interest in Daoist works does not appear in Toegye's texts on the Song master and we can presume that this silence was, given Toegye's otherwise very detailed knowledge of all fact related to Zhu Xi, intentional.

Yet also this problem must be formulated along the lines of private and public discourse; Toegye's studies on *Cantong qi* show that, when necessary, he was able to employ Daoist knowledge within the framework of orthodox Confucian discourse, as he demonstrated in *Gyemong jeonui*. Citations of Yuan dynasty commentary to *Cantong qi* and other similar instances demonstrate that Toegye had access to a broad range of Daoist sources, or at least much better than most of his contemporaries. This could be explained by his high status which allowed him access to many materials otherwise not commonly accessible. All these facts correlate to the common picture of Toegye as the relentless fighter against false learnings, indicating that Toegye adjusted his stances according to the particular context of debate on Daoist topics. The overall picture of his activities also indicate that Toegye was very prudent also concerning public debates on the two Daoist institutions still extant and practiced in his times: the continuous existence of the old Daoist institution Sogyeokseo (Bureau of Brilliant Investigation 昭格署) and Mount Mani offerings to the Daoist deities. Toegye witnessed, during his entire life, the attempts of the Learning of the Way movement to abolish Sogyeokseo; regular pressure was exerted on the court to get rid of this last court Daoist institution.⁵² Yet Toegye mentioned the Daoist bureau only in the context of Jo Gwangjo's effort to abolish it. Such silence could be understood during his young career when it would have been politically dangerous to join the efforts of young literati, but Toegye also did not protest against Sogyeokseo even during his latter years, when he was one of the most respected Korean scholars, enjoying the respect of both court and

52. See Yi 1988, 87-190.

literati. This further validates Toegye's general methodology of dealing with false learning in the public realm: the best way of dealing with false learning was to ignore it as much as possible and to not mention Daoism at all. This public silence safeguarded young students from the possible evil influence of Daoism, but once they advanced and discovered Daoist motives contained in the Confucian discourse on their own, Toegye was ready to discuss it with them.

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Abstract

The attitudes of Joseon scholars toward Daoist discourse are often understood as hostile and, with a few exceptions, as almost exclusively negative. The example of Toegye Yi Hwang, however, shows that a negative attitude toward Daoist texts and techniques was often accompanied by a thorough knowledge on the part of the scholar attacking them. This phenomenon cannot be fully explained by the necessity of knowing the topic to be criticized in order to better refute it. Daoist discourse contained a broad range of motifs which were appropriated or close to Confucian teaching and if studied properly, Confucian scholars could use them relatively freely without the danger of accusation of heterodox tendencies. The purpose of this study is to analyze the Daoist sources available to Toegye and his treatment of them on the public and private level. This includes the texts of *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi*, inner alchemistic treatises such as the *Cantong qi*, the motif of the immortals, etc. The treatment of these sources in Toegye's works indicate that while warning against Daoist studies on a public level, he possessed a very good command of them and under certain condition allowed their use in specific areas, especially numerology, medicine, and exegesis of Song dynasty Confucian works.

Keywords: Toegye Yi Hwang, Daoism, orthodoxy, inner alchemy, immortals, Laozi, Zhuangzi