

Special Feature

# Flourishing *Yin* and the Decline of the Universe: *Qishu* Theory and Cosmological Interpretation on the Rise of 'Barbarian Power' in the Late Joseon Period

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## Introduction

Our deceased king had developed the Confucian scholarship succeeding the learning of Confucius and Zhu Xi, and cultivated the *dao* of saints Yao and Shun. It is difficult to find that kind of king even once during five hundred years. However, we are very unfortunate now, and we cannot uncover the holy tradition of the saints any longer, because heaven has restricted the span of his life. Alas! The death of our king is probably caused by *qishu* [the fate of *qi*]. Alas! Our misfortune! (*Joseon wangzo sillok* (hereafter *Sillok*), vol.47: 294)

In the records of the deceased King Jeongjo (*Jeongjo daewang baengjang*) included in *The Annals of the King Jeongjo* (*Jeongjo sillok*), Yi Mansu (1752-1820) chose the term “*qishu*” to emphasize his sadness in the final sentence. This term *qishu*, like other phrases such as “cultivated the *dao* of saints Yao and Shun” or “It is difficult to find that kind of king even once during five hundred years,” was a rhetorical expression that was typically used in the records of the deceased king. Although it was a cliché decorating the records, *qishu* was an appropriate word for Yi Mansu to express his admiration for the deceased scholarly king, his grief over the inevitability of fate, and his feeling of helplessness due to the sudden death of King Jeongjo.

The expression *qishu*, meaning the fate of *qi*, was adopted not only in the records of the deceased king, but also in much literature and in many of the discussions of Confucians in the late Joseon period. It was used in Confucian writing and discussion to explain some misfortune that had occurred in spite of human effort and human struggle. The conversation about the fashion of smoking cigarettes (*namcho*) between King Jeongjo and Yi Byeongmo (1742-1806), recorded in *The Annals of the King Jeongjo*, could be another example of using the expression *qishu*.

King Jeongjo said, “Is it impossible to ban people from smoking Namcho?” Yi replied, “A prohibition on smoking Namcho is different from a prohibition on drinking alcohol. If we want to ban smoking, it will be not so difficult. However, nowadays, smoking Namcho is in strong fashion everywhere under heaven. Was that caused by *qishu*?” The King said, “You are right. Namcho was brought to our country from the south, but it first came from a Western country. Recently, Western knowledge is being transmitted and circulated in China. Is it not caused by opening the phase of western *qi*?” (*Sillok*, vol.47:32)

This conversation reflected the complicated situation concerning the fashion of smoking *namcho*. The recently-adopted fashion of smoking caused a rapid increase in the land area devoted to growing *namcho* and developing the cigarette industry (Hamel 1668). Conversely, it caused a rapid decrease in the land area growing food grains (Yi 1990:13-28). Therefore, the Joseon government could access new tax sources and collect more taxes from the farmers growing *namcho*. *Namcho* had already proved economically profitable to the farmers, merchants, and officials related to the *namcho* industry (The Monopoly Bureau 1982). In addition, many Confucians and governors, even including King Jeongjo, were addicted to smoking *namcho*. King Jeongjo was one of the people who praised *namcho* (KHRA 2005). However, the rapid increase in land area growing *namcho* had the potential to cause a food crisis, so the government could not leave the situation as it was. The Joseon government and the King had to emphasize the significance of agriculture, especially the growing of crops for food, and they sometimes promulgated prohibitions on the growing of *namcho*. However, these actions by government were completely ineffective (Kim, Jeonghwa 2000:56).

King Jeongjo and Yi were already familiar with this complex situation, and that matters had gone too far to be reversed. Nevertheless, they had to express their concern about that situation and to discuss that problem. Therefore, we can say that the phrase ‘was that caused by *qishu*’ by Yi was reflecting the complicated situation concerned with smoking *namcho*, and the contradictory attitudes of the King and government. If *qishu* had not given rise to that situation, how could matters have developed beyond the point of no return?

As seen in the conversation about smoking *namcho*, *qishu* theory was used as an easy tool of logic to explain a complex situation lying below the surface of certain misfortunes and to justify acceptance of, and adaption to, changed situations by late Joseon Confucians.

However, this expression *qishu*, which had a fatalistic implication, was not used without hesitation at all times and by all Confucians of the Joseon dynasty. The term *qishu* had already been used in some Confucian literature and *The Annals of the Joseon Dynasty* (*Joseon wangjo sillok*) in the early Joseon period. However, it was not used as frequently at that time compared to its use during the late Joseon period. We must pay attention to the fact that the term *qishu* as a rhetorical expression began to be used in the records of deceased kings beginning with *The Annals of the King Hyojong* (*Hyojong sillok*) published in 1661.

Therefore, we must say that the term *qishu* came into frequent use, from its prior occasional appearance in the writings of Joseon Confucians,

at some point. When did the Joseon Confucians begin to use the expression *qishu* as widely as in the eighteenth century? What was the reason? In this article, I describe this course of development, and try to propose the possible reply to these questions.

To describe this change, I would first like to explain the various meanings of *qishu*, and to discuss the theory's close connection to the cosmological chronology. The cosmological context of the expression *qishu* brought about the implication of fatalism. The Confucians recognized this fatalistic implication of *qishu* theory, and some of them strongly rejected and criticized the use of *qishu* theory in the analysis of many problems. Consequently, I want to say that war, especially the invasion of the Manchurian army in 1636, provided the main impetus for this change. Therefore, after the mid-seventeenth century, *qishu* theory began to be used in many writings of Joseon Confucians. In addition, I will show that *qishu* theory and the cosmological scheme explaining the victory of 'barbarian Qing' was easily converted to explain the rise of Western power in the nineteenth century.

## ***Qishu*, Cosmological Chronology, and Fatalism**

In the context of Neo-Confucian literature, *qishu* means, literally, the number of *qi*. The term *qishu* can also signify the size of *qi*, the longevity of *qi*, the clarity of *qi*, and the brightness of *qi*. According to this context, everything consisting of *qi* can be divided into those having a long-term existence and those having a short-term existence. The life-spans of things comprised of a large amount of *qi* are long, while the life-spans of things comprised of a small amount of *qi* are short. The beings comprised of a clear *qi* have good fortune, whereas the beings comprised of an impure *qi* have misfortune.

The meaning of *qishu* was not limited to defining the characteristics of things. It expanded gradually to explain the fate of human beings or nonhuman things consisting of *qi* (Kim, Yung Sik 2000:70-3). To understand the meaning of *qishu*, it will be sufficient to be reminded of a phrase spoken by Zhu Xi from *Zhuzi yulei*.

[As for] a man whose endowed *qi* is thick, [his] happiness is thick; if the *qi* is thin, [his] happiness is thin. If the endowed *qi* is luxurious, he is rich and flourishing; if [*qi*] is declining, he is lowly. If the *qi* is long, he lives long; if *qi* is short, he dies early. (*Zhuzi yulei*, vol.4: 21)

[T]here can be a man whose *qi* is clear and bright but who has no happiness or wealth. *Qishu* makes it so. (*Zhuzi yulei*, vol.1: 7)

The expression *qishu* was used many times to explain man's lot, some political affairs, some appearance of portents in heaven and on earth, the outbreak of war, and the changes of dynasties (Miura 2005: 42-64).

As for the explanation of historical matters, like the changes of dynasties or the outbreak of war, Neo-Confucians used a more systematic theory that could be characterized as a cosmological chronology. The cosmological chronology that arranges historical affairs using the time scales of cosmological theory was established with *qishu* theory as its basis. So, we can say in reverse that using the concept of *qishu* was always connected to some cosmology.

The most important and influential cosmological chronology was the *yuanbui yunshi* theory proposed by Shao Yong (1011-1077) who was a famous scholar of the Sung dynasty of China. Shao Yong had speculated on evolution or change in the universe in the *Huangji jingshi shu*.

According to Shao Yong, the greatest cosmic cycle, called *yuan*, was of the duration of 129,600 years. One cosmic cycle (*yuan*) consisted of twelve epoch (*bui*) of 10,800 years each; one epoch, in turn, was made of thirty *yun*, each lasting 360 years; one *yun* consisted of twelve *shi* (generations), each of which was 30 years long.

With this cosmological time scale, he analogized change in the universe in the great cycle of *yuan* to the change of one year: as there are four seasons in one year, similarly there are four seasons in the great cycle of the universe. Just as every creature is born and rises in spring, develops and matures in summer, declines in autumn, and dies in winter, the universe also has a great beginning (*kaipi*), rise and development, decline, and eventual collapse. In addition, within every phase of this great change, there are small cycles of change.

With this analogy and universal time unit, Shao Yong arranged historical fact from ancient times to his contemporary times according to this cosmological time unit. Therefore, the front volumes of this book were filled with chronological tables that arranged historical facts with the cosmic time units of *yuanbui yunshi*.

As scholars in the tradition of Zhuzi xue or Neo-Confucianism, Joseon Confucians mostly accepted *qishu* theory. In addition, Shao Yong's *yuanbui yunshi* theory provided the Joseon Confucians with a systematic cosmology. For this reason, Shao Yong's theory spread rapidly among Korean Confucians

after the *Huangji jingshi shu* was first imported from China in the fifteenth century. Although Joseon Confucians experienced difficulty in understanding Shao Yong's book until the sixteenth century, they considered this theory to be one preserving the secrets of universal change, and they held many discussions on this theory.

However, we cannot say that every Confucian of Joseon completely accepted *qishu* theory and the cosmological chronology of Shao Yong. Rather, there were some disputes around the use of *qishu* theory, and some Confucians obviously categorically rejected the aspect of fatalism implicated in these theories. In the history of Neo-Confucianism, criticism of the fatalistic implication of Shao Yong's theory originated with Zhu Xi. However, Zhu Xi's evaluation of Shao Yong must be read in a more delicate and careful way. In many respects, especially with regard to the fatalism of Shao Yong's cosmology, Zhu Xi expressed disapproval. But Zhu Xi does not seem to have dismissed Shao Yong's entire cosmological chronology outright (Wyatt 1985:649-66).

As Neo-Confucians, Joseon Confucians had to emphasize practical effort and moral enhancement (improvement) for solving problems in practice. However, they recognized the feeling of renunciation, revelation, and fatalism in *qishu* theory and the cosmological chronology. They could ascertain this conflict between Neo-Confucianism and the cosmological chronology.

However, in Korea, beginning in the middle of the seventeenth century, rejection of the fatalism of *qishu* theory and cosmological chronology declined gradually, and disappeared in the eighteenth century. The theory of cosmological chronology was elaborately developed, and some Confucians published chronology books that applied cosmological theory to the history of Korea. How could the Joseon Confucians change their attitude toward the fatalistic implications of *qishu* theory and cosmological chronology during the seventeenth century?

## **Criticism and Rejection of Using *Qishu* Theory in the Court**

As previously noted, there were some disputes with, and rejection of, the use of *qishu* theory until the seventeenth century. Some of the Joseon Confucians objected to the use of this theory, especially when the court scholars and the

King discussed portents like solar eclipses and the appearance of comets.<sup>1</sup>

The discussion at the court seminar held in 1568 is a good example to explain the logic of rejecting *qishu* theory. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of February, a white rainbow appeared in the sky, and it looked like it was penetrating the sun. The next day, King Seonjo and assorted scholars discussed this portent in the court seminar. In this meeting, Yu Hichun (1513-1577) argued as follows:

We cannot explain the extraordinary phenomena of Heaven and Earth with just one rationale. Neither is it rational that we find the cause of every portent in human error. Nevertheless, we should not decide on the basis of *qishu*. If we do so, we will be lazy in cultivating ourselves and lacking in moral achievement. (*Sillok* vol. 21:189)

We can also find more severe critiques of *qishu* theory in other court seminars. A seminar was held in December of 1594. It was just two years after the Japanese army invaded the Korean peninsula with about twenty thousand soldiers. After seven years of struggle, the Korean government barely succeeded, despite the aid of the Ming Chinese army, in driving away the Japanese army from the peninsula.

During wartime, the King had been attracted to the *Yi Jing*, and the subject of the court seminar was always about *Yi Jing* during that period. In 1594, King Seonjo and his Court were still struggling against the Japanese army. So, it was not a very strange thing that Jeong Tak (1526-1605) explained the cause of war with the theory of *qishu*. He said:

I do not dare to put forward details of *qishu* theory. However, I have not discovered a disaster similar to this war in Korean history. Though we must acknowledge that human affairs and human mistakes are the true reasons for this war, how could we regard it as something caused only by human affairs? Probably, this war was caused by a change of *qishu* within the universal change. (*Sillok* vol. 22:395)

However, Jeong Tak's opinion was severely criticized by a contemporary court historian, and this criticism by the court historian was recorded for posterity

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1. Concerning the subject of the occurrence of portents, like solar eclipses, the appearance of comets, etc. at the court seminar (*gyeong'yeon*) and the political implications of discussions between the King and court scholars during the Joseon dynasty, a good study is that of Park Seongrae (Park 2005).

in *The Annals of the King Seonjo* (*Seonjo sillok*). After he reported the entire conversation between King Seonjo and Jeong Tak, he commented as follows:

As a Court historian, I say as follows: It was beautiful scene when the King held the seminar in his Court to discuss the principles of *Yi Jing* during this period of war. The King's will to hold a Court seminar and discuss Confucian classics in spite of these hard times would be sufficient to suppress the Japanese invasion.

However, it was very unfortunate that one attendant was so stupid and showed his crudeness in scholarship by advocating *qishu* theory. He may have confused the wisdom of our saint king. Alas! Did he really know the true purpose of the Court seminar on the *Yi Jing*? (*Sillok* vol. 22:395)

With this criticism, the court historian wanted to emphasize that what was needed was not a fatalistic analysis of causes, but moral reflection and practical efforts to overcome the national crisis. Even in wartime, interpretation using *qishu* theory was regarded as constituting a severe mistake disturbing the mind of the King.

We can find other examples of rejection to *qishu* theory. These were submitted by court scholars and officers. In 1648, there occurred a portent in heaven, which had been regarded traditionally as a warning from Heaven against errors in the politics or the governance of the King or Court staff. Young Confucian officers of the Administration of Opinions (*Saganwon*) submitted, as was customary, a document of appeal recommending that King Injo reflect on himself and receive the opinions of the court Confucians. They expressed a critical point of view about *qishu* theory or fatalistic interpretation on the portents as follows.

If the *qi* of the Heaven and Earth is not compromised, and so the portents of Heaven and Earth continuously materialize, the King must fear Heaven and carefully consider creating a world of compromise and harmony. It is obviously wrong that the King makes an excuse based on *qishu* theory and disregards the practical situation. (*Sillok* vol.35:336)

In March of 1656, there appeared a portent in the heavens again. In this case, it was a comet, which was regarded as a more severe warning from Heaven. The document of appeal to the King submitted by Hong Wi (1620-1660) (who was just a low-ranked staff member of the court organ for the promotion of learning (*Hongmun gwan*)) represented the critical stance of contemporary Confucians. He said:



Through the ages, there was never a country that did not perish by taking a conservative approach despite a clear warning from Heaven and the loss of the people's affection and support. *Qishu* is concerned with the distant heavens, whereas the practical problem is right beside us. Nevertheless, if we make a weak excuse using *qishu* theory of rather than analyzing the practical problem and cultivating ourselves, will the practical problem be solved or the situation improved automatically? (*Sillok* vol.36:49)

As seen above, during the Joseon dynasty, until the middle of the seventeenth century, *qishu* theory had faced strong rejection by many Confucians in the critical atmosphere that attributed the cause of portents of Heaven and Earth to human errors or practical mistakes, and which placed emphasis on human effort.

## Acceptance of *Qishu* Theory and Cosmological Interpretation of the Rise of the Qing Dynasty

The situation started to change in the middle of the seventeenth century. The rejection by Joseon Confucians of the fatalism of *qishu* theory and cosmological chronology gradually declined. What caused the situation to change? I think that two factors played a role in developments of that period.

First, this change occurred because the sophisticated ideas of Shao Yong's cosmology had been widely circulated, and the complete volumes of Shao Yong's *Huangji jingshi shu* including the entire chronological tables were imported to Joseon in the seventeenth century. Before the seventeenth century, Confucians of the Joseon dynasty could not consult the chronological tables of *Huangji jingshi shu*, but just read the concise version of that book contained in the chapters of *Xingli daquan*.

After consulting Shao Yong's book, some Joseon Confucians began to edit and publish their own chronological tables, which were supplemented to the columns of Korean history from ancient times. In 1634, Sin Ikseong (1588-1644) published the first cosmological chronology book of the Joseon Confucians, *Gangjeol seonsaeng hwangkeuk kyeongseseo dongsa bopyeon tongjae* (Integrated version of *Huangji jingshi shu* complemented by Korean history).

Following publication of Sin's book, advanced versions of cosmological chronology books were continuously published in Joseon. *Gyeongse jijang* was published in 1758 by Hong Gaehi (1703-1771), and *Hwanggeuk ilwondo* was published in 1774 by Seo Myung'eung (1716-1787).

This tradition of publishing cosmological chronology books helped to circulate Shao Yong's ideas on cosmology and, consequently, led to acceptance of the ideas of *qishu* theory.

Secondly, there was another factor that caused rejection of *qishu* theory to decline. It was the war between Manchurian Qing and Joseon which began with the invasion of the Manchurian army and ended with the humiliating defeat of the Joseon government. I already described the unfavorable atmosphere and critical attitude to *qishu* interpretation during the Joseon-Japan war (*Imjin waeran*). However, in this case, we discover a different attitude in the discussion of the causes of this later war.

In the December of 1636, the Manchurian Qing's army suddenly invaded the Korean Peninsula with a hundred thousand soldiers. The thousands of cavalry soldiers constituting the spearhead of this sudden attack proceeded straight to Seoul avoiding around Korean troops stationed on the border. This detouring tactic of the Manchurian army did not allow any time for the Joseon government to gather troops and to defend Seoul. So, King Injo and his court had no choice but to retreat into the castle of Namhan mountain (Namhan sanseong) located the south of the Han River. They were accompanied by just fifteen thousand soldiers and some food. They continued to hold the castle while waiting for reinforcements for two months. However, they could not receive reinforcements, because the Manchurian army surrounded the castle completely and cut off all external support. The King and his court were forced to surrender to the Manchurian army, and concluded a humiliating peace treaty with the Manchurian Qing after two months. King Injo had to make an obeisance to the Manchurian emperor (Qing Taizong) by bowing his head down to the ground four times.

The surrender of the King and this ceremony made every Joseon Confucian feel very humiliated. Later, they were astonished again by news of the fall of the Ming dynasty in continental China and the occupation of Beijing by the Manchurian Qing in 1644. These affairs provoked a kind of psychological shock in the minds of Joseon Confucians, and remained in their memory for a long time.

In spite of the victory of Manchurian Qing, King Injo and his court did not surrender to the Qing dynasty in their hearts. Rather, King Hyojong (the son of King Injo) and his government prepared to attack the Manchurian Qing with an army. They wanted to take revenge on 'barbarian' Manchuria (*Bukbeol*), and to restore the Ming dynasty (*Bokmyeong*). The Joseon Confucians of the seventeenth century did not want to admit that their

unprepared military forces were the cause of the surrender. Furthermore, they thought, idealistically, that they had moral supremacy over the Manchurian barbarian, and that this would provide their ultimate victory.

However, in the real world, the power of the Qing dynasty became stronger and stronger. Furthermore, the Joseon government could not find any opportunity to attack the barbarian Qing. The Qing dynasty enjoyed their strongest period on Chinese continent in the eighteenth century.

The Joseon Confucians could not accept that the barbarians were continuously victorious, so they needed to find another rationale explaining this situation and their humiliation. *Qishu* theory and the cosmological chronology could provide a likely basis for resolving this inconsistent situation.

They thought that the victories of the barbarian Qing and downfall of the Ming dynasty occurred due to circumstances beyond human control, and in spite of their efforts and struggles. The new phase of *qishu* of the great universe was regarded as the very reason that the situation had passed the point of no return. If *qishu* had not caused the situation, what could have done so?

In the second half of the seventeenth century, some scholars appeared who began to interpret the rise of the Qing dynasty with *qishu* theory and Shao Yong's theory. Yi Dansang (1628-1669) was one of them. He said the following to his friend in a letter:

The cruel death of Emperor Chong Zhen and the sudden fall of the Ming dynasty in 1644 occurred in the transitional time of *qishu*. So, we must understand that these disasters were just caused by the *qishu* of misfortune. If we investigate Shao Yong's theory and his diagram thoroughly, we can apprehend the secret of universal change. (Yi 1682:237c)

According to Yi Dan sang, like the fall of Ming dynasty, the humiliation of the Joseon dynasty was also caused by the change of *qishu*. We can find other examples explaining the rise of 'barbarian' Qing using Shao Yong's cosmology in the collection of Song Siyeol (1607-1689). In fact, Song was the main figure who advocated military revenge on the Manchurian Qing after postwar restoration. However, in a lecture to his disciples he said:

If we speculate using the *yuanbui yunsbi* theory of Shao Yong, what phase of the cosmological change of *qi* are we faced with? The time of saint Yao was in the *wubui*, and he received the *shu* of *yang*. But, nowadays it is the time of *yin* that has passed the high noon of the universal cycle already, and it will soon become the *weibui*. So, nowadays, the barbarian's power

becomes bigger and bigger, and *yinqi* flourishes. It may be a natural change. (Song 1787:143a)

In this lecture, Song Siyeol was arguing that the rise of barbarian power was caused by flourishing *yin*. Although Song used Shao Yong's cosmological terms in detail, we cannot find any difference in their arguments. To Song Siyeol and Yi Dansang, flourishing *yin* causes the decline of the Universe and the decline of human cultures.

We must also recognize that there were no comments about fatalism and no rejection of *qishu* theory from friends and disciples. As Song Siyeol was an idealist and opinion leader in the main groups of Joseon Confucians of those times his argument had an effect on many Confucians. It can also be that even if some Confucians had an opinion opposite to Song's, they would have had difficulty expressing it. In any event, we cannot find any obvious rejection of *qishu* theory following the end of the seventeenth century.

In eighteenth-century Korea, some Confucians wrote more extensive material on *qishu* theory that discussed the rise of barbarian power and the fall of the civilization of China. Yi Gysang (1727-1799) was the one of them. In *Discussions on the world (Saegae seol)*, he want to systematize the theory by arranging historical events related to the barbarian victories. He said:

The rotation of *yin* and *yang* in turn is the principle of the Universe. The rotation of peaceful times and troubled times in turn is the governing principle. Many saints appeared and accomplished a great deal during the golden ages. The three saints of Yao, Shun, and Yu created the reign of peace because it was a time of *yang*. So, the fortunes and strength of China flourished in those days. (Yi 1935:18a)

The rotation of peaceful times and painful times by turns is the result of Universal changes. Many massacres occurred because *yin* had taken the lead in changes of the Universe. In the times of the ancient Qin dynasty, the fortune of *wubui* had already declined. Therefore, the massacres became severe, the appearance of saints became rarer and rarer, and barbarian power became stronger and stronger. After the rise of the Hun (Xiongnu) people, there were the five barbarians (Wu Hu), the Liao dynasty, the Jin dynasty, and the Mongolian dynasty which arose and were established in turn. The barbarians became stronger and stronger at every turn. Now the Manchurians had occupied the Chinese continent. (Yi 1935:18b)

Yi Gysang predicted that "the barbarians who live out of Manchuria will be a more brutal people." And he said that "probably, other barbarians will establish

an empire in turns, because the *qi* of *yin* has become stronger.” He concluded that this natural change was caused by the trans-phase of twelve *bui*.

Jeong Beomjo (1723-1801) also proposed a similar cosmological interpretation in his *Qishu lun*. He said:

In the past, the *zhonghua* became ‘the master’ (*zhu*) and the barbarians became the visitor (*ke*). Nowadays, the barbarians have become ‘the master’, and the *zhonghua* became the visitor. This is the consequence of the great change of *qishu*, so human civilization cannot be restored again. (Jeong 1867:173a)

Now Heaven wants to dominate the world by employing the barbarians, and to rule over the people under heaven by employing barbarian rulers. (Jeong 1867:173b)

We must know that it is already heaven’s will that she does not deem for the barbarians a humble existence any more. Heaven set these barbarians to work for the people of the world. Although one person is a saint, he should not think that it is not a right situation by himself, form a desire to upset the barbarian domination, and plan an outbreak of war to fight the barbarians. It would just be an imprudent project to drive people to their deaths. (Jeong 1867:173c)

According to Jeong Beomjo, it was considered a very dangerous plan to prepare for a military attack on the Qing dynasty. It also would be dangerous to plan to take revenge on the barbarians, and to restore the Ming dynasty. These were regarded as behaviors that went against the general tendency of *qishu*.

The arguments of Yi Gyusang and Jeong Beomjo reflected the situation of second half of the eighteenth century when the reign of the Qing dynasty became stabilized in continental China, and advocacy of a war of revenge had disappeared. Furthermore, some Joseon scholars began to promote the Learning North (Bukhak) movement from this period. In the second half of the eighteenth century, the Confucians did not refer to the Qing dynasty as a barbarian’s dynasty any longer. It is also very interesting that there remained no feeling of resentment toward the Qing dynasty in the writings of Confucians of the eighteenth century. They did not remember their grandfathers’ feelings toward the Qing dynasty. Nor can we find any obvious rejection of *qishu* theory again.

## Interpretation of the Rise of Western Power in the Nineteenth century

In the nineteenth century, the Joseon Confucians faced a new barbarian power: Western military power. They had some information about Western learning, such as Western astronomy, geography, and mathematics. Some scholars admitted the accuracy of Western science. But, they were not cognizant of the military power of Western countries, until they learned of the First Opium war (the First Anglo-Chinese War) in the 1840's. In 1866, the French army also invaded and occupied Ganghwa island of Joseon for one month. After the middle of the nineteenth century, Western power began to appear as a truly frightening force.

Again, the Joseon Confucians interpreted the 'sudden rise' of Western power in the terms of *qishu* theory. *Qishu* theory and the cosmological scheme explaining the victory of the 'barbarian Qing' was resurrected to explain the rise of Western power in the nineteenth century. But, this time, Western power was endowed with the role of barbarians instead of Manchurian Qing. In this new nineteenth-century interpretation, the Qing dynasty now, interestingly, did not take the important role any more.

Yi Hangno (1792-1868) was a very important scholar who used *qishu* theory to criticize Western power. He used similar theories to those of eighteenth century scholars.

It is normality that the *zhonghua* (China) located in the center of the world rule over the *tianxia*. It is abnormality that the barbarians rule over the *tianxia*. There is normality and abnormality in this ruling of the world, because there must be fluctuations in the universal Changes. (Yi 1899:431d)

The west is the direction of *yin* which brings out the forces of war and death. A man who is born under the influence of western *qi* will favor technology and personal profit through manufacturing. (Yi 1899:432a)

He also thought that the Western barbarian power with technology could rise and surge into the Eastern world, because they rode on the general trend of flourishing *yin* and Western *qi*. In the same scheme, though he admitted that it was impressively exact, he also considered Western science as a humble one representing the category of *Xingqi*, whereas he linked the Neo-Confucianism to the noble category of *daoli*.

Yu Inseok (1842-1915) also explained his contemporary period was dominated by the rising fortune of Western countries. In the "A Conversation

about Cosmos" (*Uju mundap*) in *Ui'am jip* (*Collected writings of Yu Inseok*), he said, "Nowadays the Western countries are taking advantage of rising fortune [of *yin qi*]" (Yu 1913: 356b). He was questioned by someone about the problem of *qishu*, and replied in this way:

Do you think that these are times of good fortune? I think not so much time remains until the total closedown of *tiandi* (Heaven and Earth). Human beings and material things will be exhausted, because the fortune of the *tiandi* will decline faster and faster. Why would not the *tiandi* be closed after the exhaustion of human beings and material things? For this reason, I would say that these are times of bad fortune. (Yu 1913:356a)

Like Yu Inseok, many Korean scholars of the nineteenth century interpreted the world situation of a rising West and descending East using the cosmological chronology.

## Conclusion

We can see that there had always been, among the Confucians of the late Joseon period, simultaneous tension and conflict between fatalism and activism in discussions concerning *qishu* theory. It is likely that this tension and conflict emerged from two different perspectives. The first is the fatalistic perspective implicated in the naturalism which interprets all phenomena and events in the terms of natural principles. The second is the practical perspective emphasizing moral cultivation. Of course, these two perspectives were intrinsic to Neo-Confucianism. Therefore, this tension and conflict became greater and greater according to the wide circulation of Neo-Confucian's natural philosophy and the development of the cosmological chronology in late Joseon period.

In the literature of the Joseon Confucians, the pendulum shifted between fatalism and activism according to the vagaries of time and circumstance. However, extreme misfortunes such as defeat in war caused the balance to swing toward fatalism. In the mid-seventeenth century, affairs such as the Manchurian invasion of the Korean peninsula, the humiliating defeat of Joseon government, and the Qing's victory in continental China provided a strong impetus for this swing toward fatalism. In accordance with this change of situation, Joseon Confucians conceded to the fatalistic implications of *qishu* theory and cosmological chronology, and they began

to interpret the victory of the Qing dynasty as reflecting the change in *qishu*, from a phase of *yang qi* domination to a phase of *yin qi* domination. They thought that the rise of barbarian power and the gradual decline of civilization reflected the new phase of great universal cycle entering into the decadence phase of *yin qi*.

The influence of these ideas continued to remain in the literature of conservative Confucians, in some religious movements such as *Donghak* (the East Learning) movement in the 1890's, and in new nationalistic religions (*Sinbeung Jong'gyo*) of twentieth-century Korea.

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## Glossary

Bukbeol 北伐

Bukhak 北學

Chong Zhen 崇禎

*dao* 道

*daoli* 道理

Donghak 東學

Ganghwa 江華

*Gangjeol seonsaeng hwangkeuk kyeongseseo dongsa bopyeon tongjae*

康節先生皇極經世書東史補編通載

*Gyeongse jijang* 經世指掌

*gyeong'yeon* 經筵

*Haejwa jip* 海左集

*Hansan sego* 韓山世稿

Hong Gae Hi 洪啓禧

Hongmun gwan 弘文館

Hong Wi 洪葦

*Huangji jingsbi shu* 皇極經世書

*bui* 會

*Hwanggeuk ilwondo* 皇極一元圖

*Hwaseo iip* 華西集

Hyojong 孝宗

*Hyojong sillok* 孝宗實錄

Imjin waeran 壬辰倭亂

Injo 仁祖

*Injo sillok* 仁祖實錄

Jeong Beomjo 丁範祖

*Jeong'gwanje jip* 靜觀齋集

Jeongjo 正祖

*Jeongjo daewang baengjang* 正祖大王行狀

*Jeongjo sillok* 正祖實錄

Jeong Tak 鄭琢

Jin 金

Joseon 朝鮮

*Josen wangzo sillok* 朝鮮王朝實錄

*kai'pi* 開闢

*ke* 客

*li* 理

Liao 遼

Namcho 南草

Namhan sanseong 南韓山城

Ming 明

Bokmyeong 復明

*qi* 氣

*qishu* 氣數

*qishu lun* 氣數論

Qin 秦  
 Qing 清  
 Qing Taizong 清太宗  
*Saegae seol* 世界說  
 Saganwon 司諫院  
 Seo Myung eung 徐命膺  
 Seonjo 宣祖  
*Seonjo sillok* 宣祖實錄  
 Shao Yong 邵雍  
*shi* 世  
*shu* 數  
 Shun 舜  
*Sibu beiyao* 四部備要  
 Sinheung Jong'gyo 新興宗教  
 Sin Ikseong 申翊聖  
*Songja daejeon* 宋子大全  
 Song Siyeol 宋時烈  
 Sung 宋  
*tiandi* 天地  
*tianxia* 天下  
*Ui'am jip* 穀菴集  
*Uju mundap* 宇宙問答  
*wubui* 午會  
*weibui* 未會  
 Wu Hu 五胡  
*Xingli daquan* 性理大全  
*xingqi* 形氣  
 Xiongno 匈奴  
 Yao 堯  
*yangqi* 陽氣  
 Yi Byeongmo 李秉模  
 Yi Dansang 李端相  
 Yi Gyusang 李奎象  
 Yi Hangno 李恒老  
 Yi Mansu 李晚秀  
*yinqi* 陰氣  
 Yu 禹  
*yuan* 元

*yuanbui yunsbi* 元會運世

Yu Hichun 柳希春

Yu Inseok 柳麟錫

*zhonghua* 中華

*zhu* 主

Zhu Xi 朱熹

Zhuzi 朱子

*Zhuzi yulei* 朱子語類

zhuzi xue 朱子學

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## Abstract

The term *qishu* that had a theoretical foundation in Neo-Confucian philosophy, especially the cosmological chronology, had been used in much Confucian literature starting from the early Joseon period. Until the middle of the seventeenth century, the term *qishu* and *qishu* theory sometimes faced strong rejection and criticism by court Confucians because of the fatalistic implications of *qishu* theory.

However, beginning in the middle of the seventeenth century, the situation became more generous toward using the term *qishu* in court discussions or in the writings of Confucians, and the Joseon Confucians easily proposed *qishu* theory in order to interpret many incidents or occurrences such as portents or war. This change toward accepting *qishu* theory originated first from the publication and circulation of the cosmological chronology text complemented with Korean history by Joseon Confucians, and, secondly, from the invasion of Manchurian Qing army in 1667 and the humiliating defeat of the Joseon government. Using *qishu* theory, Joseon Confucians began to interpret the victories of “the barbarian Qing” and the fall of the Ming as the decline of *zhonghua* symbolizing human civilization with *qishu*.

With *qishu* theory, those misfortunes that occurred in spite of human efforts were interpreted as reflecting a change in *qishu*, from a phase of *yang qi* domination to a phase of *yin qi* domination. Joseon Confucians thought that the rise of barbarian power and the gradual decline of civilization reflected a new phase of the great universal cycle entering into a decadent phase of *yin qi*. As an extension of this logic, the Joseon Confucians of the nineteenth century interpreted their contemporary situation of a world facing rising Western power and a declining East in terms of *qishu* theory and the cosmological chronology like their predecessors.

**Keywords:** *qishu*, fatalism, cosmology, chronology, *Huangji jingshi shu*, late Joseon period.