Articles

Volume 13 Number 3
September 2010
The Review of Korean Studies

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Articles

Counterbalancing Egalitarian Benevolence: A History of Interpretations of Zhang Zai's *Western Inscription* in Song China and Joseon Korea

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The Review of Korean Studies Volume 13 Number 3 (September 2010): 117-149
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What happened when an egalitarian principle was presented to the pre-modern intellectual societies of China and Korea? Unlike Buddhism or other unorthodox thoughts, this egalitarian principle was apparently already within the discourse of traditional Confucianism, particularly as it related to the term "benevolence" (*ren* 仁). Nonetheless, the degree to which this concept and debate promoted an egalitarian view was unprecedented. Could it survive over time within those societies? If it could survive, then how?

These questions are relevant to the field today, primarily due to the incompatibility of an egalitarian principle with the non-egalitarian nature of pre-modern societies of China and Korea. These questions are also not purely hypothetical. The *Western Inscription* (*ximing* 西銘) of Zhang Zai (張載: 1020-1077) and the following elaboration by Cheng Hao (程顥: 1032-1085) bear a remarkable resemblance to modern egalitarianism. To be specific, Zhang initially promoted the catchphrase of "all people are my siblings; all the living creatures are my companions" in the inscription, and Cheng wholeheartedly echoed it with the motto of "one undivided body with things." Moreover, they did not affix to them the rule of differentiation—how to treat others appropriately and yet differently according to their status and relationships—which is an essential extension of righteousness (*yi* 義) and ritual propriety (*li* 禮). In this light, despite rhetorical differences, these adages are certainly redolent of such egalitarian ideas that "people should be treated as equals in some respects" and "all human persons are equal in fundamental worth or moral status" (Arneson 2006).

Eventually, both Zhang and Cheng were consecrated as Confucian sages in 1244, and the *Western Inscription* was canonized as "one of the most celebrated in all of Neo-Confucian literature" (Chan 1999:683). Its profound impact on the pre-modern intellectual societies of China and Korea is indisputable. However, such consequences were brought about after the inscription had undergone fundamental interpretative modifications. The egalitarian ideas underlying the *Western Inscription* provoked a strong opposition, being compared to Mozi's (墨子) unorthodox doctrine of "indiscriminative love" (*jianai* 兼愛). This eventually led to the formulation of "*liyi fenshu*" (理一分殊: the unity of principle and the difference in application) by Cheng Yi (程頤: 1033-1107) in order to address this problem, and this formula was developed into a key axiom in Neo-Confucianism by Zhu Xi (朱熹: 1130-1200). A number of brief descriptions have been presented on this subject, but an in-depth study has been lacking

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(Chan 1963:498-50; Chan 1955:305-9; Shimada 1967:85-86; Hou, Qiu and Zhang 1984:130-32).

The objective of this work is to explore the history of philosophical discourses on the egalitarian conceptualization of benevolence initiated by the *Western Inscription*. After this analysis, I shall investigate the reinterpretations of this inscription by Cheng Hao, Cheng Yi, and Zhu Xi in Song China. Particularly, I focus on illuminating the process through which the unprecedented egalitarian view inherent in this text was initiated, amplified, challenged, and modified. Lastly, I will contrast this process with the course of understanding the *Western Inscription* along with the history of Korean Neo-Confucianism, from Yi Saek (李穡: 1328-1396) in the late Goryeo period, to Gi Dae-seung (奇大升: 1527-1572), Yi Hwang (李滉: 1501-1570), and Yi Yi (李珥: 1536-1584) in the sixteenth century, and to Yi Hang-no (李恒老: 1792-1868) and Yu Jung-gyo (柳重教: 1832-1893) at the end of Joseon dynasty.

Particularly, my work is also designed to correct a misunderstanding with regard to Zhu Xi's philosophy. In analyzing Zhu's "use of structural images" to describe human nature, Donald Munro has contrasted "Buddhist egalitarianism" with Zhu's "commitment to the value of hierarchical role fulfillment," concluding that Zhu "was unable to harmonize" these two values (Munro 1988:7-17). On this basis, Munro has suggested that this "weakness [in Zhu's theory of human nature] undermined the panhuman or humanitarian intentions of his ethics, robbing it of potential validity in the eyes of questioning readers as late as the twilight of the imperial era and China's entry into the modern age" (Munro 1988:10-11 and 231-32). In contrast I will take the position that the incompatibility between these two values found in Zhu's philosophy did not originate from his philosophical "errors," but mainly from his deliberate attempt to seek a fine balance between them.

Initiation: Zhang Zai's *Western Inscription*

As Wing-tsit Chan succinctly describes, not only does Zhang Zai's *Western Inscription*'s "lofty metaphysical theory combine so efficiently with the basic warmth, compassion, and humanism of ancient Confucianism," (Chan, in

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de Bary, Bloom, and Lufano 1999:683) it also "expanded [the discussion to that point on benevolence, which had been] confined to the mundane world,...to encompass the entire universe" (Chan 1963:499). Thus, it opened up a new avenue for the later development of Neo-Confucian discourses on benevolence (Chan 1955:305-09). The following is the first half of this inscription:

> Heaven is my father and Earth is my mother; even such a small creature as myself finds an intimate place in their midst.
> Therefore what fills in the midst of Heaven and Earth constitutes my body; what directs [the functions of] Heaven and Earth constitutes my nature. All people are my siblings; all the living creatures are my companions. The great ruler is the eldest son of my parents (*zongzi* 宗子); the great ministers are his stewards. **Respect the aged in the same manner that you treat your elder relatives; take care of the orphaned and the weak in the same manner that your treat your younger relatives**. The sage identifies his character with that of Heaven and Earth, and the worthy is the outstanding man. Even those who are tired, infirm, crippled, or sick; those who have no brothers or children, wives or husbands, are all my brothers in distress who have no one to turn to.... (In translation, Chan 1963:497-98, with my alterations.)

Broadly speaking, the *Western Inscription* mainly addresses a normative question of why a person ought to care about those who are not directly related to him or her. Zhang's inscription was largely along the same line as other ideas of caring about others. For example, Han Yu's "broad love" (*boai* 博愛), and more commonly the term "benevolence," can be seen as common references to this altruistic duty. The ground-breaking feature of the inscription, however, lies in its metaphysical approach.

In this inscription, three layers of symbolic structures are overlapped, shaping an extensive familial structure. The natural generative process of Heaven and Earth is transformed into a counterpart of with the family structure, and the governmental constituency of the ruler, ministers, and the people is seen as membership in a familial organization. It is not necessary to reiterate the significance of family in the Chinese civilization, and it is evident that Zhang had recourse to this cultural bedrock to bolster his claim. This familial model is reminiscent particularly of Zhang's genealogical pattern of thinking (to be specific, *zongfa* 宗法) (Zhang 1978:258-61). As

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the current multitude of family members originate from "the same root" (*yiben* 一本: i.e., progenitor), when expanding it to the cosmological scale, all members comprising the entire universe also originate from the same root of Heaven and Earth.

It is noteworthy that in forming this familial model, Zhang Zai refrained from resorting to the top-down authority in a familial or governmental structure (a father's authority over sons or a ruler's authority over the subject). Rather, he inferred the necessity of sympathetic caring about other fellow creatures from the metaphysical account of the horizontal relationships between individuals in equal status (being equal as the same children of the common parents of Heaven and Earth). Put another way, the reason that an agent ought to fulfill this duty derives less from the duty of obedience to a higher authority of Heaven-and-Earth, the ruler, or parents than from the metaphysical "fact"[1] that all creatures, despite differences in social standing and living conditions, are indiscriminately interconnected with each other ("my siblings" and "my companions") directly from the perspective of these higher authorities.[2]

Returning to the normative question posed above, the bond or reciprocal caring among "family" members is defended not only in a genealogical or retrospective manner; but Zhang also took a ground-breaking naturalistic approach. Starting with the belief that all living creatures in the universe are created by the same "parents," these "family" members resemble siblings who innately share common physical and psychological dispositions ("body" and "nature" in the *Western Inscription*) inherited equally from the same parents. Following from this belief is the

1. It is controversial, however, whether Zhang's use of the familial model in a cosmological dimension, "Heaven as father and Earth as mother," is metaphorical or metaphysical. Lu Jiushao (陸九韶: ?-1176), a brother of Lu Jiuyuan (陸九淵: 1139-1192) once expressed his critical opinion to Zhu Xi, saying that "human beings and living creatures are all borne by parents, but Heaven and Earth have nothing to do with it. [In the *Western Inscription*, Zhang Zai] **expediently used hyperbole** (lit., vast and grand words) **to figuratively** depict the substance of benevolence, and thus eliminating selfishness." In response, Zhu brought in the cosmological framework of the Great Ultimate (*taiji* 太極) to define this parental account as a metaphysical truth (Zhu 1996:1567). But I will leave this issue aside for future study.
2. For this reason, my interpretation of the *Western Inscription* makes a sharp contrast with Hyang Joon Lee's analysis, which underlines the authoritative "strict-father" model and the metaphor of "give-and-take" (Lee 2005).

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premise that even though individual beings are physically separated from each other, such common dispositions enable them to feel connected to each other. Put differently, one's care for other beings is not simply an obligatory duty imposed from an external authority but derives from one's own natural disposition that spontaneously drives one to feel and act accordingly. Thus, Zhang intended to substantiate altruistic or sympathetic caring which had been construed as an obligatory responsibility by laying a solid naturalistic foundation. In so doing, as the emphasized passages in the above quotation explicitly suggest, the familial structure is transformed, conversely, into an extensive framework, leading to the elevation of all-inclusive responsibilities over the natural predilection for the self and one's own family members. As we will see below, this naturalistic approach embedded in Zhang's inscription was greatly amplified by Cheng Hao.

Depending on the degree to which one would highlight the egalitarian implications of the *Western Inscription*, this short text is open to a wide range of interpretations. Particularly, Zhnag's explicit instruction to treat "the [unrelated] aged" and "your elder relatives" "in the same manner," for example, directly conflicts with the following statement by Mengzi:

> Mengzi said, "Gentlemen, in relation to animals (*wu* 物), are sparing (*ai* 愛) of them, but are not benevolent (*ren* 仁) toward them. In relation to the people, they are benevolent toward them, but do not treat them as kin (*qin* 親). They treat their kin as kin, and then are benevolent toward the people. They are benevolent toward the people, and then are sparing of animals." (*Mengzi*, 7A.45. In translation, Van Norden 2005:154)

In contrast to Zhang's statement that apparently resembles the egalitarian ideal of "treating others equally," Mengzi overtly justified a discriminative approach to caring. Presumably, this discrepancy best demonstrates the ground-breaking aspect of the *Western Inscription*, but it also amounted to the foremost obstacle to be removed in order for this inscription to be canonized.[3]

3. In his comment on this passage, Zhu employed the concept of "the unity of principle and the difference in applications," in order to contrast the universal and all-inclusive nature of benevolence, conceptually, with the inevitability of "discrimination in acting" with respect to caring in real life (Zhu 1990:7A.45).

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Modern studies from different perspectives on this egalitarian aspect yield diverging conclusions concerning the *Western Inscription*. For example, Shimada Kenji suggests three distinctive, though not necessarily contradictory, perspectives of appreciating this inscription. He puts forth "cosmological familism" to characterize the ethical foundation of the *Western Inscription*. Certainly, this suggested title appropriately encapsulates its most noticeable elements. However, he also contrasts his interpretation with two other extreme—though not necessarily incorrect—interpretations. For negativity, he identifies patriarchic implications which are based on the discriminative, top-down nature of Confucianism. Additionally, while acknowledging a slightly stretched process of deduction, he cautiously draws attention to an undertone of egalitarian utopianism (Shimada 1967:85-86). While agreeing with the presence of an egalitarian element—particularly, the idea of the commonality of a shared *qi* and nature among each and every individual, the authors of *Songming lixue shi*, on the contrary, have concluded that Zhang Zai's primary concern was to philosophically bolster the ideas of filial piety and top-down authority, thus ideologically contributing to a feudalistic value-system and hierarchical order (Hou, Qiu, and Zhang 1984:130-32). However, the historical fact that this inscription would become one of the most celebrated works in Neo-Confucian literature requires us to investigate the course through which the egalitarian ideas in this work eventually took root in the main current of this intellectual tradition.

Amplification: Cheng Hao's "Discerning Benevolence" (*shi ren* 識仁)

Those who staunchly defended the *Western Inscription* and thus firmly established the unshakable authority of the *Western Inscription* in the Neo-Confucian tradition were Cheng Hao and Cheng Yi. It is widely known that Zhang Zai's school had been growing increasingly competitive with the Cheng brothers' group in the mid-eleventh century (Kasoff 1984:1-2 and 125-46). Nonetheless, concerning Zhang's *Western Inscription*, the Cheng brothers unanimously paid it the highest compliment, saying that "[it] brought to light what previous sages have not yet expressed. In this his contribution is equal to that of Mengzi's doctrines on the original

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goodness of human nature and on nourishing *qi*" (Yang 1974:16:6a-b). Cheng Yi once expressed his ambivalent opinion by saying that "Hengpu's (Zhang Zai's courtesy name) words also contain errors.... Yet, if taking into consideration the *Western Inscription* alone, who else [except Zhang Zai] can write a work like this!" (Cheng and Cheng 1981b: 23.196). Yin Dun (尹焞: 1071-1142) recalled that half a year after he had first met Cheng Yi, Cheng gave him this inscription together with the *Great Learning* to read. This anecdote tells us that this text was adopted as one of the required readings in the Chengs' school (Yin 1983:8.2b). Yang Shi (楊時: 1053-1135) also recollected that Cheng Hao "had given [me] the *Western Inscription*, requiring me to read it" (Yang 1974:16.8a).

Most of all, Cheng Hao's supplementary essays had the greatest bearing on the canonization of the *Western Inscription*. The following is his "Discerning Benevolence," which amounts to a tribute to the *Western Inscription*.

> First of all, students must be able to discern benevolence. By benevolence we are one undivided body with things (*hunran yuwu tongti* 渾然與物同體). Righteousness, propriety, wisdom and good faith are all benevolence. It is only necessary to be able to discern this principle and to preserve it by sincerity (*cheng* 誠) and inner mental attentiveness (*jing* 敬)....This way is not the opposite of anything, so that 'great' is too weak a word to describe it [i.e., while things are all Yin or Yang, the Way is not relative to anything but absolute]. The functions [contrast 'substance'] of Heaven and Earth (*tiandi zhi yong* 天地之用) are all my functions. Mengzi says that 'the innumerable things are all complete in me,' and that there is supreme joy only when I look into myself and find sincerity. Until there is sincerity, there are still two things in mutual opposition; in this condition, it will never be possible to unite the self with the externals (*yi ji he bi* 以己合彼), not to achieve this joy. The purport of Zhang Zai's [*Western Inscription*] is to give a complete account of this substance (i.e., benevolence). If we preserve it according to [the idea of the *Western Inscription*,] there will be no more to do....If you can preserve it you will be able to unite [yourself with the externals], for one's innately good knowledge (*liangzhi* 良知) and ability (*liangneng* 良能) have never been lost....This principle is perfectly simply, the only difficulty is an inability to abide by it; but when we find joy in being able to embody it, there is no more of this difficulty. (Cheng and Cheng 1981b:2A.16-7. In translation, Graham 1992:100 with my alterations.)

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Zhang Zai did not directly refer to benevolence in the *Western Inscription*, but it is Cheng Hao who was responsible for associating the all-inclusive caring suggested by this inscription with benevolence. Cheng reformulated the descriptive account of this inscription into the maxims of "one undivided body with things" and of "uniting the self with the externals." Then, he recapitulated these maxims with the single notion of benevolence.

Cheng Hao identified benevolence in two distinctive directions. In an external and expansive manner, he projected benevolence into the universe. He singled out benevolence as the supreme virtue in the human realm, encompassing the other cardinal virtues such as righteousness and propriety, and magnified it as the sole principle penetrating the entire universe. He thus characterized the natural realm (here, "the functions of Heaven and Earth") with this principal human virtue in the Confucian tradition. Conversely, he encapsulated this boundless implication into benevolence as a moral virtue, thereby internalizing it as the essential trait innate in each individual being. In this dual course of conceptualizing benevolence, Cheng not only supported the idea of unity between the self and the externals in a mundane world, but he was also able to bridge the divide between the human realm and the universe, which is surely reminiscent of "the unity of men and Heaven" (*tianren heyi* 天人合一).

When recapitulating the cosmological scale of the *Western Inscription*, Cheng Hao placed the focus on explicating how one could, and should, "abide by" the supreme principle of benevolence in practice. It is noticeable in this prescriptive account that he took a minimalist course, consistently highlighting simplicity, and suggested "sincerity" and "inner mental attentiveness" as the sufficient practical principles to realize benevolence. Apparently, he did not intend to provide further descriptions on them in this essay. As is well known, however, these practical principles would be developed as one of the key concepts in the Neo-Confucian doctrine of moral self-cultivation through the elaborations of Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi.

In addition, Cheng Hao further advanced Zhang Zai's naturalistic account of all-inclusive interconnectedness.

> Medical books use the term "unfeeling" (*buren* 不仁) for numbness in the hands and feet; this is an extremely good way to describe it. By benevolence Heaven and Earth and the myriad things are regarded as one body (*tiandi*

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> *wanwu wei yiti* 天地萬物爲一體), so that nothing is not oneself; and when this is recognized there is nothing one will not do for them. If one had no benevolence in the self, naturally there would be nothing related to (*xianggan* 相干) the self, just as when the hands and feet are "unfeeling," the *qi* cannot penetrate into them; if so, they no longer belong to oneself. (Cheng and Cheng 1981b:2A.15. In translation, Graham 1992:98-99 with my alterations.)

Here, Cheng Hao expanded the meaning of benevolence and interconnectedness by re-defining them as "sympathetic moral sensitivity" (*zhijue* 知覺) and once again rephrased "all the living creatures are my siblings" in the *Western Inscription* into "one body with Heaven and Earth and the myriad things." In this statement, no prescriptive account of ought-ness is involved, but along the lines of a naturalistic reasoning, the normal condition of sympathetic sensitivity is contrasted with an abnormal "unfeeling" condition of insensitivity.

Cheng Hao's "one-body" metaphor was reverberated in the works of his followers. Lü Dalin (呂大臨: 11th cent.), who was a disciple of Zhang Zai as well, said that "the living creatures share the same *qi* and, [thereof, originally] are one body. Then, why do we act against benevolence? It is because the self is dominated by selfishness...." (Lü 1983:73.18a-b). Xie Liangzuo (謝良佐: ca.1050-ca.1120) also succinctly summed it up into a phrase, "benevolence is nothing other than feeling sympathy (lit., pain) [for those in distress]" (Xie 1983:1.2-3)

Counterbalancing: Cheng Yi's "the Unity of Principle and the Difference in Application"

By the mid-twelfth century, if not earlier, Zhang Zai's *Western Inscription* attracted a rapidly growing interest from the literati. Lin Li (林栗: 12th c.) testified, presumably with exaggeration, that "recently, the literati hold Hengju's *Western Inscription* in higher esteem than the Six Classics" (Zhu 1996:71.3691-4). In the early Southern Song period, the first systematic commentary to the inscription was presented by Zhang Jiucheng (張九成: 1092-1159), an advocate of the Neo-Confucian tradition (Zhang 1983: 15.16b-22a).

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The figure who was primarily responsible for the wide circulation of the inscription in the Southern Song was Yang Shi. Among the so-called four direct disciples of the Cheng brothers, Yang alone survived the period of transition from the Northern to Southern Song dynasty. In addition, his national reputation must have greatly contributed to the continuation of the Neo-Confucian tradition in the beginning of the Southern Song dynasty. As Ichiki Tsuyuhiko has demonstrated, it was not a coincidence that Northern Fujian, Yang Shi's place of birth, produced more Neo-Confucian thinkers, including Zhu Xi, than any other areas in the early- and mid-Southern Song period (Ichiki 2002:128-174). What is particularly important in relation to the rise of the *Western Inscription* is the following correspondence with Cheng Yi, which led to the formulation of "the unity of principle and the difference in application," an axiom cited most frequently to epitomize the overall metaphysical structure of Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi's arguments.

Initially, however, Yang had explicitly contested the quintessence of the *Western Inscription*. In a letter addressed to Cheng Yi, he expressed his anxiety that this inscription might have repeated Mozi's fault-ridden doctrine of "indiscriminate love." He said:

> The *Western Inscription* expounds the subtle import of the sages in depth. However, because [this] speaks of [benevolence] as a substance without taking into consideration its [specific] applications (*yong* 用) [in various human relationships], I am afraid that this might slip into the pitfall of indiscriminate love [of Mozi]. (Yang 1974:16.5b-6b)

In the light of Mengzi's severe denigration of Mozi's doctrine as heterodox, Yang's remarks had more implications than a mere question. In reply, Cheng Yi explicated his full endorsement of the *Western Inscription* as follows:

> Your opinions on the *Western Inscription* are incorrect. ... As a written work, however, the *Western Inscription* [expounds] how to extend *tui* (推) the [unitary] principle and, [thereby], preserve righteousness. This brings to light what previous sages have not yet expressed. In this his contribution is equal to that of Mengzi's doctrines on the original goodness of human nature and on nourishing *qi*....How can [the *Western Inscription*] be comparable to Mozi? The *Western Inscription* makes it clear that the principle is one but [its applications] commensurate with [given situations]

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> are different (*liyi fenshu* 理一分殊: or, the unity of principle and the difference in application). Yet, Mozi's teachings involve two bases without commensurate applications.... The fault of taking into consideration [only] the 'the difference in commensurate applications' is that selfishness will dominate and benevolence will be lost. On the other hand, the fault of not taking into consideration the commensurate application is that there will be indiscriminate love for all without righteousness. To establish the difference in commensurate applications and, simultaneously, to extend the unity of principle in order to check the tendency of being dominated by selfishness, is the method to [fulfill] benevolence. To make no [proper] discrimination [in relationships] and to be deluded by indiscriminate love to the extreme of denying the special relationship with one's own father, is to do harm to righteousness.... (Cheng and Cheng 1981b: 609. In translation, Chan 1963:550-51 with my alterations.)

The challenge posed by Yang Shi reveals a critical problem intrinsic to the discourses on benevolence up to that time initiated by the *Western Inscription*. Neither Zhang Zai nor Cheng Hao intended to set up an egalitarian principle. Rather, they focused on formulating a metaphysical viewpoint explaining why one ought to overcome egocentric propensities as well as indifferences to others. In effect, however, their narrow emphasis on all-inclusive "unity" was certainly reminiscent of Mozi's "indiscriminative love," and Yang accurately pointed that out.

In response, Cheng Yi sought to counterbalance this idealistic view of benevolence with more realistic aspects of differentiation and discrimination. To do so, he resorted to righteousness (*yi* 義), a concept as substantial as benevolence in the Confucian tradition. The problem arose not because of the amplification of benevolence as all-inclusive care about others, insomuch as overcoming selfishness was regarded as a central ethical issue to becoming a moral being. Yet, this issue is crucial because this ideal did not fit into the Confucian perspective of an orderly society with presupposed discrimination and differentiation. In this perspective, for example, it contradicted the understanding of human nature to treat one's own father and someone else's father equally. One should not be indifferent to anyone else, but the intensity or degree of one's care must be "commensurate with" the degree of importance (*fen* 分) that people have in relationship to oneself. To rephrase the dilemma, benevolence as a supreme principle cannot be unconditional

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or indiscriminative; an agent ought to measure the proper degree of benevolence commensurate with the status and relational affinity of others under consideration.

Despite "the differentiation in commensurate applications," Cheng Yi argued, the principle of benevolence itself still maintains its substantial identity (*yi* 一). What must be differentiated is the degree, not the kind. He employed the term "extension" (*tui* 推) to illustrate this point. To be specific, this practical term prescribes why an agent should extend the same benevolence immanent in the self as far as possible, but its actual applications should be practiced differently based on relational proximity from near to far, showing a gradation in manifestation—stronger for his intimate relations and weaker for the more remote. In the letter translated above, Cheng Yi quoted the following passage from the *Mengzi* to illustrate his point:

> To treat the elders in one's own family with respect and the young with tenderness and then extend that respect and tenderness to the elders and young in other families shows that '[all the living creatures] are one in principle', whereas Mozi's doctrine of indiscriminate love means that there are two bases. (Cheng and Cheng 1981b: 609. In translation, Chan 1963:550-551 with my alterations.)

It is noteworthy that rather than merely striking a balance, Cheng Yi's "the unity of principle and the difference in application" fundamentally altered the gist of the *Western Inscription*. The unrestrained feeling of unity with all beings in the latter was replaced with a conceptual unity combined with the practice of meticulously measuring differences. Yang Shi explicated this replacement clearly, "measuring things and justly applying" (*chengwu pingshi* 稱物平施) quoted from the *jian* (謙) hexagram of the *Book of Chang* (Yang 1974:16:7b-8b). He explained as follows:

> Sages "measure things and justly apply [it]." This is the way of both the utmost of benevolence and the exhaustion of righteousness. What does "measuring things" mean? "Measuring" indicates [making benevolence toward] one commensurate (*fen* 分) with [the relational distance between him/her and me] in the proximity and remoteness [of relatives] and the distant and close [in non-familial relationships]. What does "justly

> applying" means? In applying [benevolence], [despite its actual differences,] the mind is one (*xinyi* 心一), therefore it is just (or in equilibrium) [in this regard]. (Yang 1974:16:8a)

Though it requires further examination, my preliminary research suggests that Cheng Yi was reluctant to promote the maxim of "one body with the myriad things," so he deliberately replaced it with "the unity of principle." As a matter of fact, the term "one body" (*yiti* 一體) appears only twice throughout the chapters ascribed to Cheng Yi in *Henan Chengshi Yishu* (河南程氏遺書)—from Chapter 15 through Chapter 25—(Cheng and Cheng 1981b: 18.193; 22A.287) and furthermore these two occurrences of the phrase connote something other than "one body with the myriad things."

Kenjirō Tsuchida provides valuable insight on this matter (Tsuchida 2002:247-80). He argues that the idea of "one body with the myriad things," though expressed differently, was commonly shared by the founders of the Neo-Confucian tradition—specifically, Shao Yong, Zhang Zai, and the Cheng brothers. However, the conception of "the unity of principle and the difference in application" particularly epitomizes Cheng Yi's theoretical breakthrough on a vital problem inherent in this maxim—how to differently and appropriately distinguish ethical rules relevant to family members from those relevant to the entire human race and to non-human living creatures, respectively. As Yang Shi demonstrated, the idea of "one body with the myriad things" alone cannot resolve this problem.
Following Tsuchida, as for the "unity of principle," Cheng Yi identified "unity" with an abstract notion of "so-of-itself" (*ziran* 自然). This notion indicates the full manifestation of qualities intrinsic to each thing and event, but specific qualities can vary between things or events in question. For example, the principle pertinent to a father is to love his children, and the principle pertinent to a son is to be filial to his parents. In this case, the specific principles are different, but they are equal in the sense that that both of them commonly refer to the so-of-itself quality either of a father or a son. By doing so, Cheng could encompass all—that all principles are equal in terms of so-of-itself—and thus conceptually holding the connotation of unity in the maxim of "one body with the myriad things" (Tsuchida 2002:247-80). On the other hand, he could also address the problem of how to treat others differently, but justly, commensurate with the degree of

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importance. Principle (*li* 理) is also used to refer to a specific rule pertinent to a particular thing, phenomenon, or situation, so the actual difference in the specific contents of principles (i.e., "the difference in application") is not inconsistent with "the unity of principle." In short, the word for principle can refer either, as a generic term, to the principle of all as so-of-itself and to a particular principle pertinent to a particular thing.

Noteworthy in this distinction is that Cheng Yi thus transformed the naturalistic account of all-inclusive unity of all into a conceptual consistency of the unity of principle. At the same time, this transformation brought about a marked transition from the unity in association with the rich implications of benevolence deeply rooted in the Confucian tradition to the purely abstract notion of principle.

Equilibrium: Zhu Xi's Commentary to the *Western Inscription*.

As a matter of fact, Cheng Yi mentioned "the unity of principle and the difference in application" only once in the letter addressed to Yang Shi cited above. It was Zhu Xi who fully developed this expression into a key axiom in Neo-Confucianism, thereby concluding the controversy initiated by the *Western Inscription*. The following are his concluding remarks on his systematical commentary to this inscription.

> ① There is only **one principle** in the midst of Heaven and Earth. However, the Way of Heaven forms male and the Way of Earth forms female; these two *qi*'s interact with each other and give birth to the myriad things; [thorough this process of creation] were generated **differences** in significance and **discriminations** in relationships. Therefore, it is far beyond our capacity to completely equalize [such differences and discriminations of the myriad things]. Unless the sages and the worthies had appeared, who could have shed light on the **unity beyond differences** (lit., uniting the differences and understanding the commonality)? This is the main purport of the *Western Inscription*. Master Cheng believed he could fully recapitulate it in the axiom of "the unity of principle and the difference in application."
>
> ② Generally speaking, there is no living creature that does not take Heaven as the father and Earth as the mother. This means that [all the living

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creatures] are one in principle. However, all living creatures including human beings [have the tendency to] regard only their own parents as parents and only their own sons as sons. Then, how is it the applications [of this unitary principle] are not different?

③ [Apprehending that] one [principle] unites [all living creatures (or all principles)] but the myriad things are different, [one can regard] the world as one family and China as one person [on the one hand,] but [one] does not fall into the pitfall of indiscriminate love [of Mozi on the other].

④ [Apprehending that] the myriad things are different but the unity [of the principle] penetrates [them all], [one can] differentiate their feelings according to relationships and discriminate their treatments of others according to their relational or social status [on the one hand,] but is not shackled by one's selfishness. This is the main purport of the *Western Inscription*.... (Zhu 2002b:145-146) Paragraph numbers added.

It is notable that Zhu Xi's interpretation of the *Western Inscription* shows a striking contrast with those of Zhang Zai and Cheng Hao. Using the cosmological framework, the latter figures exclusively stressed the naturalistic dimension of "one-body" of all. Put differently, they referred to the natural process in order to substantiate interconnectedness or unity as the primary foundation for morality and social responsibilities. By contrast, Zhu Xi inferred two distinctive implications from the cosmological framework. In Part one, he associated the natural process of Heaven and Earth equally with the phenomenal process of generating differences and discriminations surrounding the myriad things and the abstruse truth of one principle standing behind such phenomena. In brief, relating to the natural process of Heaven and Earth, while others referred to the unity alone, Zhu referred to two facts—unity and differences—symmetrically.

This parallelism between the unity and differences is spread through the rest of Zhu's remarks. In Part two, he again juxtaposed opposite statements—the unity of all living creatures and the natural tendency to put one's own family members before others—as equal truths. In Part three he put more weight on the unity, while in Part four, he reversed it. Overall, in reaction to the one-sided emphasis on the unity and one-body-ness argued for by Zhang Zai and Cheng Hao, Zhu Xi structured his commentary to demonstrate that the social discriminations and family-oriented motivations

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were as much valid truths as the unity of all.

Zhu Xi's commentary to the *Western Inscription* provoked a series of disputes among his contemporaries. Although there were those who still equated the inscription with Mozi's doctrine of "indiscriminative love,"[4] this issue was no longer a center of discussions in the mid-Southern Song. Roughly speaking, the objections raised by his fellow scholars centered on Zhu's equal balancing between the unity of principle and differences.

In the "Colophon to the *Western Inscription*," Zhang Shi (張栻: 1138-1180) contended that "the *Western Inscription* was written out of his concern for the 'tendency of being dominated by selfishness.' Therefore, [Zhang Zai] extensively illuminated the unity of principle" (Zhang 1999:33.1009; see also Zhang 1999:22.861-2). In a letter addressed to Zhu, he explained the elevation of unity and benevolence over difference and righteousness as follows: "If [one can regard] all people as siblings, respecting elders in other families is equal to respecting elders in one's own family, and treating young in other families with tenderness is equal to treating the young in one's own family. This is what [Cheng Yi meant by saying that] 'extend the unity of principle, then the differences [in its proper applications] will be naturally included in it'" (Zhang 1999:22.858-9). Zhang Shi herein interpreted the "*tui*" (推) suggested by Cheng Yi as something that is not an extension of concerns from one's own family to a wider context. Instead, employing the expressions in the *Western Inscription*, he argued that one's proper care for one's own family members is a case in the wide range of the concern for all, rather than one's care for one's own family is more essential than the concern for all. Therefore, as for Zhang, it would be at odds with the maxim of "regarding all people as siblings," if one gave equal weight to differences and unity.

Re-interpreting the correspondence between Cheng Yi and Yang Shi surrounding the *Western Inscription*, Chen Liang (陳亮: 1143-1194) composed an "Essay on the *Western Inscription*" (Chen 1983:14.6b-9a). In

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4. For example, Lin Li 林栗 sent his essay on the *Western Inscription*, saying that "[It] reverses the hierarchical statuses [of father-and-son and the ruler-and-the subject], thus disturbing the social order. Therefore, it is a great enemy to Confucianism (*mingjiao* 名教). Mengzi said, 'Yang is 'for ourselves.' This is to not have a ruler. Mo is 'impartial caring.' This is to not have a father. To not have a father and to not have a ruler is to be an animal.' I would say the same thing about the *Western Inscription*." (Zhu 1996:71.3691-4)

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it, he used the metaphors of a mirror and one-body to illustrate the unity of principle. As a mirror reflects the images of different things without losing its identity, the mind as the bearer of the principle also has the ability to respond to things differently, and yet justly, without altering its substance. As many different parts are needed to constitute the organic whole of one body, diverse individuals with different social and situational status also can belong to the human world as one body without undermining this oneness. No matter how effective such metaphors are, Chen thus explicitly revealed his intention to emphasize the centrality of the unity in understanding the *Western Inscription*. Consequently, however, such objections of Zhang Shi and Chen Liang could not disturb the equilibrium between "the unity of the principle and the difference in application" found by Cheng Yi and confirmed by Zhu Xi.

We can notice in Zhu Xi's interpretation of the *Western Inscription* what Wing-Tsit Chan calls the "Two Wheel" pattern of Zhu's line of reasoning: Zhu did not unify two possible polarities into a single higher-order principle (Chan 1989:235-54). Nor did he put emphasis on one over the other. Instead, he juxtaposed two polarities as they were and sought the equilibrium between them. In effect, however, this equilibrium signifies that his "two-wheel" approach markedly toned down the egalitarian implication of the *Western Inscription* by balancing it with the discriminative characteristic of its "differences in application."

Initial Variation: The Introduction of the *Western Inscription* into Korea

It remains unknown when the *Western Inscription* was first brought in to the Korean peninsula. Nor does it seem possible to retrace the route by which this text was imported. Yet, there is indisputable evidence that Korean intellectuals during the late Goryeo dynasty were familiar with this text.

In the "Inscription for the Six-Friend Hall," Yi Saek quoted the two key phrases in the *Western Inscription*, "Heaven is my father and Earth is my mother. All the living creatures are my companions." This inscription was composed in response to the request of one of his friends, Gim Gyeong-ji (金敬之), who named his residential hall "the Six-Friend Hall." According to

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Yi, Gim initially named the hall "Four Friends"—snow, moon, wind, and flower—referring to a phrase in the preface to *Yichuan Jirang ji* (伊川擊壤集), the literary collection of Shao Yong (邵雍: 1011-1077) who is one of the Five Northern Song Neo-Confucian Masters (Shao 1988: 2b). But Gim later added river and mountain to the list, renaming the hall "Six Friends." (Yi Saek 1988a: 3.8b-9b) Yi also quoted the phrase of "all the living creatures are my companions" in the last stanza of a poem, entitled "A Pearl Tree in the Garden" (Yi Saek 1988b:24.18a) and another poem, "A Tribute to Han Maeng-yun" (Yi Saek 1988b:19.8a).

Considering Yi Saek's role in establishing Neo-Confucianism in Korea, his quotation of the phrases in the *Western Inscription* as well as his knowledge of Shao Yong's works unambiguously suggests that the inscription was introduced to Goryeo intellectuals in conjunction with Neo-Confucian literature. However, his attitude toward the text markedly differs from that of the Neo-Confucians of Song China. Yi cited phrases of the *Western Inscription* in fragments, but paid little attention to its related controversial issues.

The foundation of the Joseon dynasty did not promptly alter this fragmented style of reading the *Western Inscription*. In the early Joseon dynasty, Seo Geo-jeong (徐居正: 1420-1488) quoted "all people and all the living creatures are my siblings as well as my companions as ever" in the *Western Inscription* (Seo 1988:28.24a). He also stated in a poem that "to alarm [the people] is [the purpose of] the *Eastern* and *Western Inscriptions* of Master Zhang" (Seo 1988:12.19a). In the "Biographical Note of Zhang Zai," Gim Si-seup (金時習: 1435-1493) mentioned both the *Eastern* and *Western Inscriptions*, citing Cheng Yi's statement that "the *Western Inscription* illuminates the unity of principle and the difference in application" (Gim 1988:20.8a-b). Yet, Gim added no interpretive account upon it.

Entering the sixteenth century, Joseon intellectuals drastically changed their way of reading the *Western Inscription*, beginning to produce extensive interpretations. The following account is a part of the "Understanding of Principle" by Gi Dae-seung, who was famous for his philosophical debate with Yi Hwang over the thesis of "four sprouts and seven emotions."

> ...The Way of Heaven and Earth is so-of-itself. The Way of all the living creatures is incessant. The Way of the multitude of profundity is the unity of principle. Being rooted at the original is called benevolence and

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> righteousness. Being original, therefore "all people are my siblings; all the living creatures are my companions." ... From the perspective of the original, things are the self, and the self is a thing. How can there be [the distinction] between things and the self. ... Inferring from this point, [we can see that] originally there is no distinction between the other and the self. ... Heaven and Earth and I are the same body, and all the living creatures and I share the same *qi*. (Gi 1988:2.17a-b)

Gi's interpretation makes a sharp contrast with those of Zhu Xi and, as we will see shortly, of Yi Hwang and Yi Yi. His reference to "the unity of principle" evidently shows that he was not ignorant of the discussions surrounding the *Western Inscription* by Cheng Yi, Yang Shi, and Zhu Xi.

It is self-evident that Gi's interpretation deviated substantially from the interpretations of Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi. Furthermore, it is not an exaggeration to say that he markedly exceeded Cheng Hao's "Discerning Benevolence" in amplifying the egalitarian tenet in the *Western Inscription*, so that it is reminiscent rather, for example, of "the dream of butterfly" in Zhang Zai's "The Sorting Which Evens Things Out" (*Qi wu lun* 齊物論). At least in the statement quoted above, Gi completely left out the part of "the difference in application," and exclusively amplified the tenet of "the unity of principle." He drew attention to the point that in "the original" state (meaning the original qualities of human nature), no discrimination can exist at all. But he took one step further, arguing that the human consciousness is originally free from the most basic distinction between the self and others. He thus led the argument to underscoring the indiscriminative relationship between the self and the others, but did not show slightest intention to counterbalance it with the discriminative aspect.

Gi concluded the argument with a stress on "inner mental attentiveness" (*gyeong* 敬) and "sincerity" (*seong* 誠), the principal methods of moral self-cultivation in Neo-Confucianism. He articulated that the ultimate end of such moral self-cultivation (to use Gi's words, "learning" [*hak* 學]) consisted in "keeping human nature whole and intact" (*jeon gi seong* 全其性) and consequently in "comprehending with the mind the Way of Heaven and Earth, of all the living creatures, and of the multitude of profundity." This utmost state of self-cultivation indicates the recovery of "the original" state, which connotes a strongest version of the egalitarian perspective, which

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does not allow even the slightest distinction between the self and others (Gi 1988:2.18a-b).

It is highly probable that this piece of Gi's writing is one of the earliest interpretive essays devoted to the *Western Inscription* by Korean thinkers.[5] In the preface to "Three Understandings," in which the "Understanding of Principle" is located, Gi mentioned that he wrote this essay to express his intention to not take the civil service examination (Gi 1988:2.15a). From the fact that he finally passed the examination in 1588, we can infer that Gi's essay is at least a decade ahead of Yi Hwang's *Seonghak sipdo* and Yi Yi's *Seonghak jipyo*, which were presented to King Seonjo in 1568 and 1575, respectively. As will be detailed in the following chapters, however, Gi's egalitarian interpretation was not echoed by his contemporary and future scholars, but was completely eclipsed by the balanced view presented by Yi Hwang and Yi Yi.

Restoring the Equilibrium: The *Western Inscription* in Sixteenth Century Joseon

It is of no surprise that debates as to the egalitarian implication of the *Western Inscription* did not recur among Joseon intellectuals. They were well aware that the debates had been concluded with the ascendancy of Zhu Xi in Song China, and that the authority of Zhu's commentary could not be easily overruled. Nonetheless, it does not necessarily imply an absence of interpretive latitude for Joseon thinkers.

It is intriguing that the comments put forth by Yi Hwang and Yi Yi – the first systematic expositions of the *Western Inscription* in Joseon – share a common feature, which is markedly different from Zhu's interpretation. The second item in Yi Hwang's *Seonghak sipdo* (聖學十圖) is devoted to the *Western Inscription*. Together with the diagram, Yi Hwang briefly cited Zhu's comments as well as the remarks of Yang Shi and Rao Lu (饒魯: fl. 1256),

5. Gim Inhu (金麟厚: 1510-1560), a contemporary of Yi Hwang, is said to have written "The Diagram of Revering Heaven in the *Western Inscription*"(*Seomyong sacheon do* 西銘事天圖), but this diagram is no longer extant.

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underlining "the unity of principle and the difference in application" as the gist of this inscription. However, he left out the concept of "righteousness," which, as we have seen above, Cheng Yi, Yang Shi, and Zhu Xi maintained in order to counterbalance the egalitarian tenor of the inscription. Yi Hwang concludes with the following comment:

> ... The learning of the sages consists in the seeking of benevolence. It is necessary to deeply inculcate in oneself the intention [of becoming benevolent], and then understand that one forms one body with Heaven and Earth and the myriad creatures. To truly and actually live this way is what is involved in becoming benevolent. One must personally get a taste [of this experience]; then one will be rid of the problem [of thinking that] it is something so vast as to be unobtainable and also will be free from the mistaken notion that other things are identical with oneself, and the inner dispositions of one's mind and heart will thus become perfect and complete.... (Yi Hwang 1993:7.15a. In translation, Yi and Kalton 1988:57-8 with alterations.)

Here, Yi Hwang overtly showed his objective to draw exclusive attention to benevolence in interpreting the *Western Inscription*. Instead of compromising it with righteousness, he simply reiterated "forming one body" as the true and actual way to realize benevolence, and it clearly resembles Cheng Hao's "Discerning Benevolence" more than Zhu's commentary. It is intriguing to find that in *Seonghak jipyo* (聖學輯要), Yi Yi also concisely describes how "the *Western Inscription* concerns the learner's exertions to be benevolent" (Yi Yi 1988:6.4a), but he did not refer to righteousness or "the differences in commensurate applications" at all.

It seems, however, that neither Yi Hwang nor Yi Yi intended to alter the balance between the unity of benevolence and differences in reality set by Zhu. Instead, considering that both *Seonghak sipdo* and *Seonghak jipyo* were devoted to tutoring the ruler, they might have deliberately accentuated this unity with the people as the supreme virtue for the ruler. In this regard, Yi Yi's following comment is particularly suggestive:

> That which is described in this chapter (i.e., the *Western Inscription*) does not exclusively relate to the duty of the ruler. Nonetheless, the ruler should respect Heaven as father and Earth as mother and also regard his people

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> as brothers and myriad things as his fellows, thereby filling the mind of benevolence to the utmost. Only then can he complete his responsibilities. Therefore, this work is more relevant to the ruler [than anyone else]. (Yi Yi 1988:6.4a)

The balance between unity and differences seems to be less relevant to the ruler. The ruler standing on the top of a hierarchical order, by definition, represents a discriminative structure of a society and government, but benevolence toward the people is the supreme duty that the ruler should fulfill. On the other hand, from a moral perspective, each and every human being should take benevolence as one's duty, but from a hierarchical-political perspective, the ruler is the one who can also practice "the unity with all" most legitimately and effectively. Apparently, Yi Yi as well as Yi Hwang intended to underline the role of benevolence in the *Western Inscription* so as to task the ruler with the supreme duty of benevolent caring for the people.

By contrast, when introducing the *Western Inscription* to broader audiences, both Yi Hwang and Yi Yi kept the balance between the unity and differences. In "Seomyong gojeung gang-I" (西銘考證講義), though it was originally for the classic mat (gyeongyon 慶筵), Yi Hwang also raised the issue of egalitarian benevolence as follows:

> With regard to forming one body with the myriad things, one should first take oneself as the origin and master, and then [seek to] understand the unity of principle between the self and things. Otherwise, ... the substance of benevolence would become something so vast as to be unobtainable, having nothing to do with oneself. The problem of the indiscriminative love of Mozi as well as the mistake of regarding things as the self in Buddhism arises because they did not understand this point. (Yi Hwang 1993:7.50b)

The following remarks are cited from Yi Yi's poetic exposition, entitled "the unity of principle and the difference in application."

> Despite the complete wholeness of the entire body, how can there not be a clear order in relationships? ... Alas, the people are said to be my siblings [in the *Western Inscription*], but love [for the people] cannot be put before treating my own parents as parents: Alas, all living creatures are said to be my companions, but responsibilities [for living creatures] cannot be more urgent than being benevolent toward the people. (Yi Yi 1988:1.15a)

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The passages cited above attest to the deep concern of Yi Hwang and Yi Yi about the egalitarian tenor of the *Western Inscription*. It is self-evident that they implemented the same rhetoric as Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi to combine differences and discriminations with the unity of principle. In fact, the egalitarian issue had been resolved in 1244 when the Southern Song government enshrined Zhu Xi at the National Confucian Temple. Zhu's commentary provided the orthodox lens through which to read the *Western Inscription*, and it was largely thus throughout the Joseon dynasty.

Continuity: During the Late Joseon Period

After Yi Hwang and Yi Yi, there was nearly no Joseon intellectual who was willing to revive the egalitarian tenet of the *Western Inscription*, as Gi Dae-seung had previously attempted. To the contrary, the interpretive history of this text through the end of the dynasty shows that they instead consistently focused on the issue of how to more efficiently tone down the egalitarian tenet, while highlighting the discriminative implications. In the nineteenth century, Yi Hang-no put forth an essay entitled "Recording Doubts on the *Western Inscription*." He therein critically reviewed Yi Hwang's comments on the *Western Inscription*. Yi Hang-no called attention to the section in the *Seonghak sipdo*, previously quoted in Chapter 6, to say as follows:

> Master Cheng (i.e., Cheng Yi) illuminated the meaning of the *Western Inscription* with the phrase of "the Unity of Principle and the Difference in Application." Master Zhu (i.e., Zhu Xi) also distinguishes it both from the vertical perspective and the horizontal perspective. Toegye's writing on the diagram of Mr. Cheng Linyin also illuminated the meaning from Master Zhu's vertical perspective, but does not reach the meaning from the horizontal perspective. Generally speaking, taking Heaven and Earth as father and mother, [we can see that] people and all the living creatures are born equally in the midst [of Heaven and Earth]. [In this view,] there is no "difference in application" between people and living creatures, between ruler and minister, ... This is what Master Zhu called the vertical perspective.
>
> In contrast, although Heaven and Earth are the father-and-mother of all living creatures, father and mother [in the human world] also indicate the father and mother of a person. Therefore, there are indeed discriminative

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> differences between people and my siblings, between living creatures and my companions, ... This is what Master Zhu called "the difference in application" from the horizontal perspective. (Yi Hang-no 2003:20.20b-21a)

Yi Hang-no herein conspicuously challenged the authority of Yi Hwang in order to highlight the significance of the equilibrium between the egalitarian perspective and the principle of social and familial discriminations. Contrary to the meaning of "vertical" in modern English, which often connotes social hierarchy, by "the vertical perspective" he referred to the indiscriminative view from the topmost position of Heaven and Earth, the creator (lit., father and mother) of all beings on earth. To put it differently, viewing the world from the perspective of the cosmological creation, all beings are equal, as the father and mother care equally about all siblings in a family. Therefore, the discriminative principle of "the difference in application" cannot be involved in this view. By "the horizontal perspective," in contrast, he indicated the perspective from a particular family. When seeing the world from the position of the father and mother of a family, it is natural that they cannot treat people in general as the same way that they treat their own children and relatives. In this way he justified that it is also true that diverse discriminative features are involved in human relationships.

Originally, Yi Hang-no borrowed this pair of perspectives from Zhu Xi's conversation with one of his disciples, Liu Li (劉礪), recorded in the *Zhuzi yulei* (朱子語類). It reads as follows:

> Yongzhi (Liu Li's courtesy name) asked: "The reason that the *Western Inscription* concerns "the unity of principle and the difference in application" is that, for example, people and things are different from "my siblings" and "my companions," respectively, and that differences are originally involved in the relationships between the great ruler and his stewards, and between the aged, the young, the orphaned, and the weak. (Zhu 1994:98.2524-5)

In this question, Liu suggested that "the unity of principle" originally involved "the difference in application." In response, Zhu pointed out shallowness in Liu's understanding. Zhu said:

> What you have said is by and large true. However, [you fail to see that] there are two [distinct] perspectives [in understanding the *Western*

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> *Inscription*]: what you suggest is to see from the vertical perspective. Yet, it is necessary to see from the horizontal perspective as well. If one is to see as you suggest (i.e., from the vertical perspective), I am afraid it becomes shallow. In the phrase of "all people are my siblings," "my siblings" contains the meaning of "the unity of principle and the difference in application;" in the phrase of "all the living creatures are my companions," "my companions" also contains the meaning of "the unity of principle and the difference in application." In the phrase of "Heaven is my father and Earth is my mother," father and mother indeed indicate the *qi* of Heaven (*tianqi* 天氣) and the matter of Earth (*dizhi* 地質). However, if considering the father and mother of one's own, there must be [the difference of] near and distant [in relations]. .... The reason that Guishan (i.e., Yang Shi) doubted that "my siblings" and "my companions" made [the tenet of the *Western Inscription*] similar to [the indiscriminative love of] Mr. Mo (i.e., Mo Di) lay at [the fact that] he could not understand "my siblings" and "my companions" originally involves the meaning of "the unity of principle and the difference in application." (Zhu 1994:98.2525)

It is noticeable that even though Yi Hang-no employed Zhu's account, his reinterpretation more efficiently underlines the balance between the discriminative and egalitarian features. Zhu put stress on the twofold meaning of "my siblings" and "my companions," in which "the unity of principle and the difference in application" are implicated as a whole. In contrast, Yi sharply divided "the unity of principle and the difference in application" into two ideas, and associate each of them with the vertical and horizontal perspectives, respectively. He thus made clearer the two different implications in "the unity of principle and the difference in application"—the non-discriminative, vertical perspective and the discriminative, horizontal perspective.

At the end of the Joseon dynasty, Yu Jung-gyo presented an elaborated commentary on the *Western Inscription*, entitled "Seomyong gujeol chaje" (西銘句節次第). Dividing the *Western Inscription* into sections, he elucidated the gist of each section and added his comments on it. Relating to the section that "all people are my siblings; all the living creatures are my companions," he succinctly commented as follows:

> [This section] illuminates [the meaning] that people, living creatures, and the self are one body, but there are discriminations. This is so called, "the

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> unity of principle and the difference in application," and it penetrates the entire text. (Yu 2004:30.16b)

In the following section, which covers from the phrase of "the great ruler is the eldest son of my parents" to that of "all my brothers in distress who have no one to turn to," Yu laid out a creative way of combining the discriminative perspective with the egalitarian tenet of the *Western Inscription*.

> In line with the term of my siblings, this section lists its [particular] cases. The part of "my siblings" concerns three cases in normal circumstances. When saying the ruler and ministers, it concerns the difference in official titles. When saying the elder and the young, it concerns the difference in age. When saying the sage and the worthies, it concerns the difference in virtue. There are also two cases under adverse circumstances. When saying "those who are tired, infirm, crippled, or sick," it concerns the unfortunate conditions in terms of physical body. When saying "those who have no brothers or children, wives or husbands," it concerns the unfortunate conditions in terms of human relationships.... In [treating] those in normal circumstances, the men with noble characters should exhaust the way of love and respect, and in [treating] those under adverse circumstances, [they] should also exhaust the emotions of sympathy and compassion. ... (Yu 2004:30.16b-17a)

In this comment, Yu implicitly argued that "the unity of principle" was not practicable in separation from "the difference in application." According to him, the phrase of "my siblings" does not imply egalitarian concerns about others, but generally refers to all human relationships. He then divided human relationships into two categories in the light of the circumstances, in which others are situated. Every cardinal human relationship "under normal circumstances," such as those of ruler and minister and of the elders and the young, are based on such discriminative rules as official title, age, and virtue. To put it differently, the discriminative order is an essential feature of normal human relationships, argued Yu. Relationships with those "under adverse circumstances," though not involving such discriminative rules, are also bound by the responsibility of a virtuous person, motivated by "sympathy and compassion" for those "in distress." In the latter category, though not directly including the discriminative factor, the emphasis is still located

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at the unequal relationship between the beneficent and the beneficiary. Overall, it seems that after Yi Hwang and Yi Yi restored the balance, Joseon intellectuals could not find the motivation to depart from the track set by these towering figures, but paid attention exclusively to combining the principle of discrimination to the *Western Inscription* more firmly than ever.

Concluding Remarks

Up to now, we have examined two mutually inconsistent responses to the egalitarian idea inherent in Zhang Zai's *Western Inscription*. Wing-tsit Chan succinctly and correctly appreciated its enormous influence, stating that this short text "paved the way for the culmination of Neo-Confucian theories of benevolence (orig., *jen*) in Zhu Xi (orig., Chu Hsi)" (Chan 1963:500). As we have examined above, however, the path towards this culmination was not merely a straight line of philosophical progress but involved a gradual process of moderating its egalitarian implication so as to fine-tune it to the given social settings. Cheng Hao and his disciples were unequivocal in amplifying this idea, while Cheng Yi, Yang Shi, and Zhu Xi turned their attention to reconciling it with the discriminative nature of the social structure in which they were living. The former line of interpretation continued only for a short period of time, and was soon replaced by the latter.

In 1244 when the Southern Song government enshrined Zhang Zai and Cheng Hao together with Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi at the National Confucian Temple, the egalitarian idea in their works was also perpetuated. In the sixteenth century, when Ming China was experiencing revolutionary economic growth and ensuing social and cultural changes,[6] Wang Yangming (王陽明: 1472-1528) rediscovered this egalitarian idea, repeated it nearly verbatim in the opening remarks of his catechistical essay on the *Great Learning* (*daxue wen* 大學問) as follows: "The great man regards Heaven and Earth and the myriad things as one body. He regards the world as one

6. For social and cultural changes in the mid-Ming Dynasty, see Mote 2003:743-775, Brook 1998:153-237, and Lee 2007.

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family and the country as one person" (Wang 1992:967. In translation, Chan 1963:659).

At that moment in Joseon, Yi Hwang and Yi Yi also began to revive the *Western Inscription*, but they took a different path than Wang Yangming. As is well known, Wang's learning failed in gaining wide support in Joseon. Nor did Joseon society, which was arguably as hierarchical and discriminative as—if not more than—late imperial China, have a social impetus to amplify the idea of egalitarian benevolence beyond the limit set by Zhu. However, instead of merely duplicating the view of Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi, they adeptly shifted the focus of emphasis according to their audience, although such interpretive latitude was surely permitted within the boundaries delineated by Zhu Xi. A genuinely innovative interpretation of Gi Dae-seung, unarguably due to its excessive emphasis on the egalitarian idea, was quickly and completely hidden from view; nor did anyone intend to revive it. Rather, Joseon scholars in the following generations shifted the focus to creating fresh explanations to more efficiently impose discriminative principles upon the text.

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Abstract

The objective of my work is to explore the history of philosophical discourses initiated by Zhang Zai's *Western Inscription* within the Neo-Confucian tradition in Song China and in Joseon Korea. Particularly, it concerns the ground-breaking process of reinterpreting the inscription, through which the founders of the Neo-Confucian tradition—Cheng Hao, Cheng Yi, and Zhu Xi—rendered benevolence as egalitarian and ultimately sought to locate an equilibrium between this egalitarian ideal and the non-egalitarian settings of pre-modern China and Korea. My work also shows how the conception of *liyi fenshu* 理一分殊 ("the unity of principle and the difference in application") was initially conceived, specifically, in order to counterbalance this idealistic view of benevolence with more realistic aspects of differentiations and discriminations by resorting to the concept of righteousness. In the last three chapters, I contrast this process during the formative stage of Neo-Confucianism with the brief history of the interpretations of the inscription from late Goryeo through the end of Joseon.

Keywords: the *Western Inscription*, egalitarianism, benevolence, one body with the myriad things, *liyi fenshu* 理一分殊 (the unity of principle and the difference in application)

Submission: 2010. 4. 19. Referee/Revision: 2010. 7. 23. Confirm: 2010. 8. 9.

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