The modern transformation of Korean political thinking : revisiting the political ideas of the Late-Nineteenth-Century Reformists

Kim, C.Y.

Chapter Two

The Transformation of Korean Political Thinking in Late Chosŏn:

The Worldview of *Sirhak* Scholars

The purpose of this chapter is to survey the worldview of the reformist Confucians who lived in the period from the late seventeenth to the early nineteenth century. Our aim is to trace the relationship between these reformists' ideas (*Sirhak*) and orthodox Neo-Confucianism and to lay the foundation to compare *Sirhak* with the worldview of *Kaehwa sasang*, which we will discuss in the next chapter. The reformist Confucians' worldview has usually been addressed by drawing out implied attitudes contained in the individual studies on their thoughts, while the predominant academic discussions have been conducted over the modern or pre-modern character of *Sirhak* itself. Due to the ongoing discussions over the modern/pre-modern character, concrete investigations into *Sirhak* scholars' worldview and its effects on their thoughts have scarcely been made.

Among previous studies, most have illuminated the modern characteristics of *Sirhak*, although not all the studies have championed this view. A number of recent researchers have criticised this dominant interpretation, arguing that the late Chosŏn reformist Confucians did not aim for modernity.[94] In this chapter, I do not use the modern vs. pre-modern framework

[94] While examining the ideas of state reformation proposed by Yu Hyŏngwŏn and Chŏng Yakyong, Kim T'aeyŏng has argued that these *Sirhak* scholars took the institutions of ancient peaceful times as their model, so their views were basically idealistic and not pertinent to current Chosŏn, and their reforms were more pre-modern than modernity-based. (Kim T'aeyŏng, *Sirhak ŭi kukka kaehyŏkron* [The Ideas of State Reform in *Sirhak*] (Seoul: Sŏul taehakkyo ch'ulp'anbu, 1998)) Opposing the so-called Internal Development Theory in late Chosŏn, Yi Yŏnghun has insisted that *Sirhak* was the

because modernity exists within a wider basis of tradition and Confucian political ideas included elements that led Chosŏn society to modernity. At any rate, the reason why the academic debate over *Sirhak* has been tilted to the modern or pre-modern discussion is closely related with the founding of *Sirhak* as a research subject. Therefore, in the introduction of this chapter, I will describe the historical context in which the *Sirhak* studies originated.

Sirhak, the academic trend in late Chosŏn that is characterised by scholars' earnest interest in current national problems, varying academic disciplines, and the reinterpretation of Confucian texts outside of Zhu Xi's views, has been illuminated in multiple academic fields for decades. A major reason why *Sirhak* caught researchers' interest is that elements of modernity are found in the works of a number of Confucian scholars in late Chosŏn. In the early stage of the *Sirhak* study, the founders of that field of study needed to highlight the *Sirhak*'s modernistic character. As Ch'ŏn Kwan'u has clarified, the earliest interest in *Sirhak* scholars can be traced back to the early 1900s, when the Chosŏn of those times was engaged in an intellectual struggle between tradition and modernity.[95] Those trying to uncover *Sirhak* scholars and publish their works for the first time, including Chang Chiyŏn (1864–1921), aimed to persuade conservative Confucians with the *Sirhak* scholars' reformist ideas in an

---

accommodation of self-cultivating peasant-landowners-centred Chosŏn society (小農社會), based on *Xinglixue*, to socio-economic shifts in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, not a new study opposing *Xinglixue*. (Yi Yŏnghun, "Tasan ŭi chŏngjŏnje kaehyŏkron kwa wangt'o chuŭi" [Chŏng Yakyong's reform ideas to the well-field system and the tradition that all lands are king's land], *Minjok munhwa* 19 (1996); _____, "Chosŏn hugi sahoe pyŏndong kwa sirhak" [Social Transformations in Late Chosŏn and *Sirhak*] in *Han'guk sirhak ŭi saeroun mosaek* (Seoul: Kyŏng'in munhwasa, 2001)) Likewise, in his book on the reform ideas of Yu Hyŏngwŏn, James Palais has concluded that Yu did not aim to transform Chosŏn society into a modern society. James Palais, *Confucian Statecraft and Korean Institutions: Yu Hyŏngwŏn and the Late Chosŏn Dynasty* (University of Washington Press, 1996).

[95] Ch'ŏn Kwan'u, "Chosŏn hugi sirhak ŭi kae'nyŏm chaegŏmt'o" [Revisiting the Concept of *Sirhak* of Late Chosŏn] in *Yŏnse sirhak kangjwa* 1 (Seoul: Hye'an, 2003), pp. 27–35.

eclectic manner.[96] In the 1930s, a number of Korean researchers, including Chŏng Inbo (1893–1950), Mun Ilp'yŏng (1888–1939), and Ch'oe Ikhan (1897–), spotlighted *Sirhak* afresh as Koreans' voluntary intellectual movement for modernisation. Under Japan's colonial rule, those nationalist scholars needed to highlight *Sirhak* as Korean national studies known as *Chosŏnhak* (朝鮮學) in opposition to the Japanese authorities' pejorative view of Korean history. During this period, the term '*Sirhak* (實學)' began to be used for the first time.[97] In the wake of these preliminary efforts, from the late 1950s a number of researchers, including Ch'ŏn Kwan'u, Hong Isŏp, and Han Ugŭn, delved into *Sirhak* scholars in a fully fledged way and turned it into a core research subject of Korean history. Therefore, from its origin, *Sirhak* served Koreans' social needs to prove that it was voluntary modernisation from within. In this context, the modern/pre-modern controversy has become the main theme of academic discussions of *Sirhak*.

However, apart from the term '*Sirhak*' referring to practical studies in late Chosŏn, the word '*sirhak*'[98] had been used by East Asian intellectuals when they were trying to establish their studies as useful and pragmatic in contrast with a previous trend. For example, in early Chosŏn, the Confucians claimed that their Neo-Confucian study was *sirhak* in comparison with the literature-centred studies of late Koryŏ. Even in Chinese history, Zhu Xi himself called Song Confucianism *sirhak*, which was positioned in opposition to the

---

[96] The early explorers of *Sirhak* mainly used the term "*silsa kusi jihak*" (實事求是之學, Learning for Substantiating Affairs and Seeking Truth). Yi Kwangnin, "Kaehwagi chisik'in ŭi sirhakgwan" [The View of *Sirhak* of the Late Nineteenth-Century Reformists] in *Yŏnse sirhak kangjwa* 4 (Seoul: Hye'an, 2003), pp. 359–64.

[97] Chŏng Hohun, "Han'guk kŭnhyŏndae sirhak yŏn'gu ŭi ch'ui wa kŭ munje ŭisik" [The Tendency of *Sirhak* Studies in Modern Korea and Their Questions], *Tasan kwa hyŏndae* 2 (2009), pp, 347–51.

[98] In order to make a distinction from the late Chosŏn *Sirhak*, I use *sirhak* with a lowercase 's' here.

linguistic and philological studies in the previous Han and Tang era.[99] Therefore, the advocates of *sirhak* had their counterparts in history. When the Korean researchers named the late Chosŏn studies *Sirhak*, they also had a counterpart; that is, the Neo-Confucian ethical philosophy. Indeed, the *Sirhak* scholar Hong Daeyong used the word "*hŏhak*" (虛學, insubstantial studies) in his book *Ŭisanmundap* (醫山問答, Dialogue in Mount Yiwulu) and in context it indicated the scientifically groundless Neo-Confucian cosmology. Thus, the term *sirhak* itself represents a meaningful intellectual change in East Asian history, and many researchers dwelling on late Chosŏn *Sirhak* interpreted the change as modernity. If we want to express the elements of the change with the concept 'modernity' as a generic term, it is understandable. Nevertheless, a core premise upon which this study is based is that modernity was not something very new or fetched fully from the outside world, but one that existed within the Confucian ideas themselves.

In this context, regardless of the modern/pre-modern character, this chapter focuses on excavating the shift in worldview within *Sirhak* scholars. It first explores two intellectual moments that shaped *Sirhak* and then examines one of its core characteristics, the reinterpretation of Confucian texts.

1. Returning to Classical Texts and Widening of Academic Interests

[99] According to Hwang Wŏn'gu, even Wang Yangming and his disciples in Ming China called their study *sirhak* in comparison with Song Confucianism, while Yan Yuan (顔元), a scholar in Qing, stated that *Kaozhengxue* was a practical study in contrast to the Han Studies. Hwang Wŏn'gu, "Han'guk esŏŭi sirhak yŏn'gu wa kŭ sŏngkwa" [The *Sirhak* Study in Korea and Its Achievements] in *Yŏnse sirhak kangjwa* 1 (Seoul: Hye'an, 2003), p. 79.

Hŏ Mok's (1595–1682) return to Six Classics and the inheritance of the two distinguished *namin Sirhak* scholars Yi Ik and Chŏng Yakyong have already been highlighted by researchers, in that their return to classical texts was conceived as a clear point of departure from the Neo-Confucian framework.[100] Previous studies, however, have not sufficiently heeded the *effects* of their return to classical texts. In this section, I will claim that these *Sirhak* scholars' practical, open-minded attitude towards scholarship and their widening of academic interests were greatly encouraged by their return to classical texts.

In the preface to his corpus *Kiŏn* (記言, Writing What Was Spoken), Hŏ Mok epitomised his fifty-year study as follows: "*Kiŏn* is based on Six Classics, has referred to *ye'ak* (禮樂), and has pierced the ideas of A Hundred Schools (百家) [of ancient China]."[101] This summary well describes the characteristics of Hŏ Mok's academic inclination. Indeed, in his corpus he hardly addresses Chosŏn's famous *li-qi* philosophical debate on the structure of

[100] This view was first suggested by Chŏng Okja and Han Yŏngwu, and later studies have followed these two researchers' view. (Chŏng Okja, "Misu Hŏ Mok yŏn'gu: kŭŭi munhak kwan ŭl chŭngsim ŭro" [A Study of Misu Hŏ Mok: with a Focus on His View of Literature], *Han'guksaron* (1979), pp. 197–232; Han Yŏngwu, "Hŏ Mok ŭi kohak kwa yŏksa insik: <Tongsa (東事)> rŭl chungsim ŭro" [Hŏ Mok's Ancient Learning and His Understanding of History: with a Focus on *Tongsa*], *Han'guk munhwa* 40 (1985), pp. 40–87.) On the other hand, this illumination of Hŏ Mok's ancient learning (古學) has led researchers to focus on the *namin* scholars of *pukin* (northerners) origin of the seventeenth century, including Yun Hyu and Yu Hyŏngwŏn, as a way to unearth their peculiarly practical and open-minded attitude towards scholarship, notably different from most of the orthodox Neo-Confucian scholars of the time. According to recent researchers, the *namin* scholars of *pukin* origin were affected by the two great scholars of the previous age, Sŏ Kyŏngdŏk (徐敬德, 1489–1546) and Cho Sik (曺植, 1501–1572), in academic lineage, who had had a more practical and classical text-based understanding of Confucianism. These researchers found the *namin Sirhak* scholars' interest in practical matters of their time in Sŏ and Cho's academic inclinations. It is acceptable that the academic legacy of both figures was handed over by the *namin* scholars of *pukin* origin, but in the case of Hŏ Mok, the academic inheritance from the two figures is not clear. At any rate, the *pukin*'s academic tradition contributed to the burgeoning of *Sirhak* as seen in Yun Hyu and Yu Hyŏngwŏn. See Sin Pyŏngju, *Chosŏn chunghugi chisŏngsa yŏn'gu* [Studies of Intellectual History in the Mid and Late Chosŏn] (Seoul: Saemunsa, 2007); Chŏng Hohun, *Chosŏn hugi chŏngch'i sasang*.

[101] "**記言之書 本之以六經 參之以禮樂 通百家之辯**." Hŏ Mok, "Kiŏn sŏ" (**記言 序**) in *Kuk'yŏk Kiŏn* (國譯 記言) Vol. 1 (Seoul: Minjok munhwa ch'ujinhoe, 2006), p. 2. As *Sirhak* itself was centred in Seoul and Kyŏnggi province, Hŏ Mok was born and lived in Kyŏnggi province.

humans' minds and hearts, and his writings on Confucianism are mainly about subjects from classical texts.[102] Just as ideas in classical texts are usually didactic and pragmatic rather than metaphysical and speculative, Hŏ Mok's writing on Confucianism was not much different from this practice.

With respect to Hŏ's inclination to classical Confucian texts, two points are distinctive within his works. Firstly, the value of Confucianism was not its philosophical ideas but its practical usefulness. For example, in an essay in the first book of his corpus in which he dealt with the intellectual disorder after the Six Classics, he saw the Six Classics as main sources that led to the ancient peaceful times in the states of *Yu Xia Yin Zhou* (虞夏殷周). According to Hŏ, "nothing is better in rectifying people than *Shijing* (詩經), *Shujing* (書經), *Liji* (禮記), and *Yuejing* (樂經); nothing better in gaining wisdom in governing a country than *Chunqiu* (春秋); and nothing in knowing mysterious changes than *Yijing* (易經)."[103] His basic idea was that the prosperity of the ancient times was intellectually based on classical texts, whose teachings are essentially practical and didactic. This practical concern with Confucian ideas is also exhibited in Hŏ Mok's works. In his two main writings on Confucianism, *Kyŏngsŏl* (經說) and *Sŏsul* (敍述), he addressed useful summaries of the core ideas of the Six Classics, and extracts on certain subjects, such as

[102] In his letter to an anonymous scholar, Hŏ says that he has read ancient people's works for fifty years without giving a glimpse into the sentences of later ages that concentrate on embellishing ancients' works. (**僕讀古人之文五十年 後世彫琢之文 未嘗一經於心目 發憤求聖人之心**). "Tap kaekja ŏnmunhaksa sŏ" (**答客子言文學事書**) in *Kiŏn*, vol. 1, p. 65.

[103] "**教莫正於詩書**禮樂 **政莫**善**於春秋 神化莫大於易 虞夏殷周之隆 皆**六經之治也." "Sŏknan" (**釋亂 (學)**) in *Kiŏn* vol. 1, p. 9.

anecdotes about ancient figures, the lives of Confucius and his disciples, and historic natural disasters.[104]

Secondly, Hŏ Mok's academic interest was wider than other scholars of his time. Besides Confucians' usual interest in interpretations of classical texts (*kyŏnghak*) and statecraft ideas (*kyŏngsehak*) as well as literature, his interest in classical texts drove him to heed ancient rituals (古禮), ancient history, and even ancient people's calligraphy style. Moreover, Hŏ Mok accepted Daoism, which had been seen as a heretical theory in Chosŏn. He noted that Laozi (老子) was erudite on ancient affairs and liked *ye* so that even Confucius himself thought of him as a teacher. Hŏ Mok's inclination to Daoism led him to illuminate the lives of eccentric Daoist literati in Chosŏn.[105]

These characteristics in Hŏ Mok's works were closely related to the attributes of classical texts. The six classics Hŏ mainly referred to, compared with Song Confucianism, are marked by their direct revealing of ancient people's acts and ideas. Although existing in an unorganised way, those books preserve the realities of ancient China before they were interpreted or systematised by Confucians in later ages. Since these texts convey concrete situations of ancient times, the world revealed in the classical texts is essentially multifarious, material, diverse, and open-minded, which is contrasted with the philosophically systematised and closed form of Song Confucianism. Moreover, in classical texts, we cannot find the distinction between orthodox and heretical theories as promoted by Confucians in

---

[104] "Kyŏngsŏl" (**經**說) in *Kuk'yŏk Kiŏn*, vol. 2, pp. 1–86; "Sŏsul" (**敍述**) 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, in vol. 4, pp. 1–161. Kyŏngsŏl was submitted to King Sukjong (肅宗, r. 1674–1720). Hŏ Mok himself entered the central officialdom in the eighth year of King Hyojong's reign at the age of sixty-three; his career as a bureaucrat lasted for the next twenty years.

[105] Hŏ Mok depicted Daoist figures in Chosŏn, such as Kim Sisŭp (1435–1493), Chŏng Ryŏm (1506–1549), and others, and called them pure and clean intellectuals (淸士). "Ch'ŏngsa yŏljŏn (淸士列專)" in *Kuk'yŏk Kiŏn*, vol. 1.

later periods. Hŏ's focus on the practical and didactic values in the texts, his interest in historical reality,[106] and his open-mindedness on heretical theories like Daoism were the result of his study of classical texts.[107]

Now, let us see how Hŏ Mok's return to ancient texts was inherited by other scholars. Generally, it seems that most serious scholars in the *namin* faction coming after Hŏ, specifically those residing in Seoul and Kyŏnggi province, followed his lead. This trend is exhibited in Yun Hyu (1617–1680), who lived in the same age as Hŏ. The most distinctive point in his corpus *Paek'ho chŏnsŏ* (白湖全書, Entire Corpus of Paekho Yun Hyu) is that Yun read a wide range of texts beyond the Four or Seven Books and the Song masters' exegeses on them. He addressed Song Confucianism in his works, but he did not fully affirm the Song masters' views. Rather, he was critical of Zhu Xi's exegeses of core Confucian texts, and instead rediscovered the values of classical texts.[108] Specifically, in the funeral costume

---

[106] Hŏ Mok had a serious interest in history itself. In particular, he was interested in the history of ancient kingdoms on the Korean peninsula. His basic manner of seeing history was not modelled on Zhu Xi's example of ethical instruction; rather, his method involved positivist clarifications of past events. "Tongsa (東史 一二三四)" in *Kuk'yŏk Kiŏn*, vol. 1.

[107] His propensity for the six classics, however, did not mean that Hŏ Mook took a negative opinion on Zhu Xi philosophy and renounced the entrenched ethical point of view. He rarely mentioned Zhu Xi or Song Confucian masters in his corpus, but he still maintained an ethical standpoint on national issues. Confucian ethics worked as the pillar of Chosŏn's social structure. The *namin* scholar Yun Hyu also held this duality. Although critical to Zhu Xi's framework, he still maintained the ethical view. This phenomenon is not peculiar to Chosŏn's academic development; something similar can be seen in modern European intellectual history. The Enlightenment thinkers in Germany and England, unlike the radical French thinkers of the time, did not forsake their Christian faith for their belief in the reconstruction of society based on reason. (See Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, trans. by Fritz C.A. Koelin and James P. Pettegrove (Princeton University Press, 1979, ch. 4.) This duality seems to have confused some researchers, such as Yu Yŏnghi. Yu has made the interpretation that Yun Hyu did not abandon Zhu Xi's philosophy, although he was not a pure and faithful disciple of Zhu Xi's. However, Yu has failed to capture this dual, ambivalent, and transitory character of the scholars who lived in the seventeenth century. Yu Yŏnghi, "T'al sŏngnihak ŭi pyŏnju: Misu Hŏ Mok kwa Paekho Yun Hyu rŭl chungsim ŭro" [The Variations of Post-*Xinglixue*: with Focuses on Hŏ Mok and Yun Hyu], *Minjok munhwa yŏn'gu* 33 (2000), pp. 393–428.

[108] An independent mind-set characterises Yun Hyu's scholarship. Rising up as a promising young scholar by self-study, Yun behaved as an independent thinker. At the age of 22, he composed an essay

debate (*yesong*), he drew out his references of *ye* to ancient texts, refuting his opponent Song Siyŏl's reliance on Zhu Xi's view.[109] So, in terms of his confrontation of Zhu Xi's framework, Yun's approach is slightly different from Hŏ Mok's, who did not deal with the Neo-Confucianism at all.

Regarding Hŏ's return to classical texts, we can find its clear influence on the eighteenth-century scholars of the same faction: Yi Ik and Chŏng Yakyong. Yi Ik (1681–1763), who lived his entire life as a scholar in the countryside of Kyŏnggi province, was influenced by Hŏ Mok; in turn, Chŏng Yakyong (1762–1836) was influenced by Yi Ik. Yi's return to classical texts appears to be linked to his personal study (私淑) of Hŏ Mok's works. Owing to family ties between Hŏ and Yi, Yi Ik was able to see Hŏ's works and paid him respect as a teacher.[110] Yi Ik's general academic characteristics are best shown in the encyclopaedia-style book *Sŏngho sasŏl* (星湖僿說, Miscellaneous Accounts of Sŏngho Yi Ik), in which he clarified his attitude towards Confucian studies.[111] In an article, Yi Ik introduced the Ming scholar Cai Qing's (蔡淸) view on how to study Confucianism and

---

commenting on the *li-qi* debate over the structure of the human mind and heart and the mechanism of moral and immoral behaviours and put forward his own position ingeniously, although that view was based on an eclectic mix of Yi Hwang's and Yi I's views. This independent mind developed further to make a series of exegeses on Confucian texts on his own. Yun Hyu, "Sadan ch'iljŏng insim tosim sŏl" (四端七情 人心道心說) in *Kukyŏk Paekho chŏnsŏ* vol. 6.

[109] His inclination toward classical texts and scepticism about later scholars' exegeses is also shown in an example where Yun Hyu advised King Sukjong to focus on the main body of Confucian texts, not on the exegeses of later scholars, at a lecture for the king. This issue unsurprisingly met opposition in the court from the advocates of Cheng-Zhu studies. Yun Hyu, "Chaeso yun owŏl isip kuil" (**再疏閏五月二十九日**) in *Kukyŏk Paekho chŏnsŏ* (國譯 白湖全書) vol. 2 (Seoul: Minjok munhwa ch'ujinhoe, 2006).

[110] The famous scholar-official in King Chŏngjo's reign, Ch'ae Chaegong (蔡濟恭, 1720–1799), composed the inscription on the stele of Yi Ik and stated that Yi studied Hŏ Mok's works out of respect for him and thus was linked to the line of *namin*. Moreover, according to Chŏng Okja, Yi Ik himself composed the inscription on the stele leading to Hŏ Mok's grave (**神道碑銘**). Chŏng Okja, "Misu Hŏ Mok yŏn'gu," p. 211.

[111] Yi Ik, *Sŏngho sasŏl*, trans. by Ch'oe Sŏkgi (Seoul: Han'gilsa, 1999).

concurred with his view. According to Cai, the Six Classics are the proper foundation (正宗) for Confucian studies; the Four Books are legitimate inheritors (嫡傳); and the four Song masters are a true faction (眞派).[112] In this context, Yi suggested that, in learning Confucian texts, students should start from the true faction's writings and, in the wake of the legitimate inheritors, arrive at the right foundation. Yi deplored the fact that, in those times, students in Chosŏn focused on Cheng-Zhu's theories merely for the civil service examination and stopped before the halfway point in the course of study.[113] Therefore, we can understand that Yi Ik did not disregard the Song masters' works, but his ultimate aim for Confucian understanding was the classical texts.[114]

As seen in Hŏ Mok, Yi's intellectual orientation to classical Confucianism forced him to weigh practical usefulness as a value of Confucian texts. Indeed, in the essay "*Yuhak*" (Confucianism) in *Sŏngho sasŏl*, he criticised the current academic situation in Chosŏn, in which scholars were interested in philosophical concepts while neglecting the practice of what they learnt, which, according to him, ran counter to Confucius' teaching.[115] Indeed, here and there, Yi lamented the current situation in Chosŏn, where studying Confucian texts was disconnected from the current affairs of the state. This would be the reason why he emphasised practicality in *Sŏngho sasŏl* using words such as *sil* (實), *silyong* (實用), and

---

[112] The four Song scholars are Zhou Dunyi (周敦頤), Zhang Zai (張載), Cheng Yi (程頤), and Zhu Xi (朱熹).

[113] "Chinp'a chŏkjŏn" (**眞波嫡傳**) in *Sŏngho sasŏl*, 190–1.

[114] In the afterword to his *Chungyong chilsŏ* (中庸疾書, Hurriedly Written Writing on *Zhongyong*), Yi clarified that what he aimed for was to go back to the original ideas of Confucius. ("**其意都只爲探討蹊徑 務歸於夫子之本旨**.") "Chungyong chilsŏ husŏl" (**中庸疾書 後**說) in *Kukyŏk Sŏngho chilsŏ*, 355–8.

[115] In another essay, Yi stated definitively that the aim of the investigation of Confucian texts was to make use of them for a practical purpose. ("**窮經將以致用也**.") "T'ongsi" (**誦詩**) in *Sŏngho sasŏl*, 387–8.

sildŭk (實得). Therefore, Yi's emphasis on the practical use of Confucian learning, as well as his interest in a variety of academic disciplines beyond the traditional studies of Chosŏn Confucians, were closely associated with his return to classical texts.

The practical and open-minded attitude is also characteristic of Chŏng Yakyong's scholarship. In Chŏng's case, his encounter with Yi Ik's works seems to have had a critical role in deciding his academic characteristics. Having read Yi Ik's works, he confessed: "I woke up from a big dream while I personally learnt from Sŏngho [Yi Ik]."[116] Given the context, this "big dream" seems to indicate Zhu Xi's philosophy-centred Chosŏn academism. Chŏng's view on Confucian texts is clearly shown in his account of Thirteen Chinese Classics, in which he answered a series of academic questions from King Chŏngjo. In the answers, he did not hide his regret about current scholars, who appreciated only the Corpus of Seven Books [七書大全], but were ignorant of the existence of the Exegeses of Thirteen Classics [十三經注疏].[117] For him, the problem of Chosŏn scholars' study was that their coverage of Confucian texts was too narrow. Here we can see that Hŏ Mok and Yi Ik's Six Classics-centred understanding of Confucian classics was extended to Thirteen Classics for

---

[116] After reading Yi Ik's works through acquaintances of his seniors in the same faction, such as Kwŏn Ch'ŏlsin, Yi Kahwan, Yi Kiyang, and Yi Sŭnghun, Chŏng also confessed that "That we came to know of the bigness of the world and the brightness of the Sun and Moon all resulted from the capacity of this elderly person" (自念吾輩能識天下之大 日月之明 皆此翁之力). (Recited from Chŏng Ilkyun, *Tasan sasŏ kyŏnghak yŏngu* [Studies of Chŏng Yakyong's Investigation of Four Books] (Seoul: Iljisa, 2000) p. 39.) In the poem entitled "*Pakhak*" (博學), Chŏng expressed his deep respect for Yi, remarking on the width and depth of his scholarship. In the poem, he treated Yi as his master. "Pakhak" (博學) in *Kukyŏk Tasan simunjip* (國譯 茶山詩文集) vol. 1, trans. and ed. by Minjok munhwa ch'ujinhoe (Seoul: Sol, 1996), p. 212.

[117] The Thirteen Classics are: *Shijing* (**詩經**), *Shujing* (**書經**), *Yijing* (**易經**), *Zhouli* (**周禮**), *Liji* (禮記), *Yili* (**儀禮**), *Chunqiu zuoshizhuan* (**春秋左氏傳**), *Chunqiu qongyangzhuan* (**春秋公羊傳**), *Chunqiu guliangzhuan* (**春秋穀梁傳**), *Lunyu* (論語), *Xiaojing* (**孝經**), *Erya* (**爾雅**), *Mengzi* (**孟子**). Chŏng Yakyong, "Sipsamgyŏng ch'aek" (**十三經策**) in *Kukyŏk Tasan simunjip* (**國譯 茶山詩文集**), trans. and ed. by Minjok munhwa ch'ujinhoe, vol. 4 (Seoul: Sol, 1996), pp. 37–9.

Chŏng. Indeed, in interpreting core Confucian texts, Chŏng cited many classical texts and a number of previous scholars' exegeses beyond Zhu Xi's ones. This implies that, for Chŏng, Zhu Xi's interpretations were only a part of the grand intellectual currents of Confucianism.

This return to the Thirteen Classics was the core momentum that determined Chŏng's scholastic character and marked his reinterpretation of Confucian texts suggesting alternative views from Zhu Xi's ones. We will discuss Chŏng's reinterpretation of Confucian texts in Section Three of this chapter. Needless to say, Chŏng's emphasis on practicality and his interest in a variety of academic fields are consistent with the cases of Hŏ Mok and Yi Ik.

2. The Development of a Scientific View of the World

If the return to classical texts and recovering the practicality of Confucian understanding was one internal factor that shaped *Sirhak*, the introduction of the Western scientific system and its adoption was another factor. This section aims to examine *Sirhak* scholars' adoption of Western scientific knowledge and its effects on their more scientific and empirical way of seeing the physical and natural world. Previous studies have already examined the scientific knowledge adopted by Chosŏn scholars and its effects. However, their main focus was on whether or not the new scientific system contributed to the scholars' shift to a *modern* understanding of the world. For example, studies conducted by historians have emphasised the advanced nature of Western scientific and geographical knowledge and its effects on *Sirhak* scholars' modernistic and nationalistic (or post-China-centred) understanding of the world.[118] On the other hand, more recent studies by historians of science saw that Western

[118] Among early researchers, Hong Isŏp and Kang Chaeŏn and, more recently, Ku Man'ok have taken this perspective. See Hong Isŏp, "Chosŏn kwahaksa" [The History of Science in Chosŏn] in *Hong*

sciences did not replace the traditional science system, but rather that the new knowledge was incorporated into the traditional understanding of the physical and natural world and enriched East Asian or Korean scientific discourses.[119] These two groups of researchers differ in their emphases: the former has focused on the aspect of *change*, whereas the latter has stressed *continuity*, covering wider cases of scholars adopting Western sciences. However, our aim here is not to examine comprehensively the relationship between the traditional and the Western science system. Rather, what I am interested in is the *Sirhak* scholars' attitudes (or way of thinking) towards the physical and natural world. Here, I will examine the cases of Yi Ik, Hong Daeyong, and Chŏng Yakyong.

Before we discuss these individual *Sirhak* scholars, we should first examine briefly the context in which the Western scientific system was introduced into Chosŏn. The Western sciences were transmitted through China from the early seventeenth century, as Jesuit missionaries composed and translated books on sciences and technology as a strategy for the evangelisation of China. They needed to mitigate the alertness of the Ming court about the new religious teaching and had to prove their practical usefulness for China. Thus, in the period between the early seventeenth and the late eighteenth century, the missionaries

---

Isŏp chŏnjip 1 (Seoul: Yŏnse taehakkyo ch'ulp'anbu, 1994), p. 259; Kang Chaeŏn, *Han'guk ŭi kaehwa sasang* [The Reform Ideas in Modern Korea], trans. by Chŏng Ch'angnyŏl (Seoul: Pibong ch'ulp'ansa, 1981), p. 148; Ku Man'ok, "Chosŏn hugi 'chayŏn' insik ŭi pyŏnhwa wa 'sirhak'" [The Shift of the Understanding of Nature and *Sirhak* in Late Chosŏn] in *Tasi, sirhak iran muŏt inga* (Seoul: P'urŭn yŏksa, 2007), pp. 169–201; _____, "Chosŏn hugi sirhak chŏk chayŏn insik ŭi taedu wa chŏn'gae" [The Emergence and Development of the Understanding of Nature in *Sirhak* in Late Chosŏn] in *Han'guk sirhak sasang yŏn'gu* 4 (Seoul: Hye'an, 2005), pp. 101–70.

[119] For the newer perspective, see Mun Chungyang, "Chŏnt'ong chŏk chayŏn insik ch'egye ŭi sajŏk pyŏnhwa" [The Historical Shift of the Traditional System of Nature Consciousness] in *Han'guk sirhak sasang yŏn'gu* 4 (Seoul: Hye'an, 2005), pp. 47–99; Yim Chongt'ae, "Chigu, sangsik, Chunghwa chuŭi: Yi Ik kwa Hong Daeyong ŭi sayu rŭl t'onghaesŏ pon sŏyang chiri haksŏl kwa Chosŏn hugi sirhak ŭi segyegwan" [The Earth, Common Sense, and China-Centralism: Western Geographical Theories and Late Chosŏn's *Sirhak* with Reference to Yi Ik and Hong Daeyong] in *Han'guk sirhak sasang yŏn'gu* 4 (Seoul: Hye'an, 2005), pp. 171–219.

published hundreds of volumes on sciences and technology as well as on Christianity, with the help of Chinese scholars.[120] The missionaries in China were also keen to spread their religious teachings into Chosŏn. They bestowed books on sciences and Christianity to Chosŏn's diplomatic missions in Beijing for the first time in 1631, in late Ming. And in early Qing, they formed a close acquaintanceship with the crown prince Sohyŏn (1612–1645), who was held in Beijing as a hostage, and gave him a number of books and mechanical gadgets. Thus, knowledge of Western sciences was delivered to Chosŏn as early as the 1630s. The seventeenth century in Chosŏn, however, was the era in which the dogmatic Zhu Xi philosophy and *hwaigwan* reached a peak so that the new knowledge made little impact on Chosŏn's literati. It was in the eighteenth century, specifically during King Chŏngjo's reign, that Chosŏn scholars came to have an interest in the new books from Qing and discovered their values.[121]

---

[120] The Jesuit missionary, Matteo Ricci (利瑪竇, 1552–1610), arrived in Beijing in 1601. He and his Jesuit colleagues' main strategy for evangelism there was to use their knowledge of sciences and technology and to teach Roman Catholicism as a supplementary theory to Confucianism (補儒論), not as an alternative to it. (On the introduction of generic Western Studies and its historical background, see Kang Chaeŏn, *Chosŏn ŭi sŏhaksa* [The History of Western Studies in Chosŏn] (Seoul: Min'ŭmsa, 1990); Roh Dae-hwan, "Chosŏn hugi ŭi sŏhak yuip kwa sŏki suyongron" [The Penetration of Western Studies and the Adoption of Western Technology in Late Chosŏn] *Chindan hakbo* 83 (1997), pp. 121–54.) According to a Chinese scholar's (熊月之) survey, during the period 1601–1773, in total 437 volumes were published by Western missionaries. Among these, 251 volumes addressed religion; 131 treated natural sciences; and 55 humanities. Cited in Roh Dae-hwan, "Chosŏn hugi ŭi sŏhak yuip," p. 134 (note 49).

[121] The value of the generic "Western studies" (西學) to Chosŏn Confucians lay in Western sciences, not in Western religion. Both Chinese and Korean Confucians were critical of Roman Catholicism. Their interests were largely in the new knowledge on astronomy, almanacs, and mathematics, and these books spread widely among intellectuals. According to Roh Dae-hwan, among early Korean Christians, about 20 per cent were led to accept Catholicism after they became aware of the advanced Western sciences, medicine, and agricultural technology. In Chosŏn, it was with the 1801 persecution of Christians that Western sciences as well as Western religion became a taboo and Confucians avoided investigating the sciences. Roh Dae-hwan, "Chosŏn hugi sŏyang kwahak kisul ŭi suyong kwa kŭ nolli" [The Adoption of Western Science and Technology and Its Rationales in Late Chosŏn] in *Han'guk sirhak sasang yŏn'gu* 4 (Seoul: Hye'an, 2005), p. 243.

Let us now see how Western scientific knowledge affected Yi Ik. Yi Ik was one of the first scholars who widely accepted Western sciences. His great interest in scientific knowledge is shown in a number of essays in the first three books (卷) of *Sŏngho sasŏl*, entitled *Ch'ŏnjimun* (天地門, Gate of Heaven and Earth).[122] What is distinctive in his treatment of science is his empirical and rational explanation of natural phenomena and, as a result, the separation between the physical/natural world and the human (or moral) world.

While suggesting an opposite view from the majority outlook that Western sciences were modern in character, Yim Chongt'ae has claimed that, although Yi Ik adopted the Western sciences, he did not abandon traditional views on astronomy and natural phenomena.[123] When surveying Yi Ik's entire output of articles of science, Yim's view is pertinent. Yet there were reasons why Yi did not discard traditional views. Firstly, in astronomy, the Western astronomical system that he encountered was based on Ptolemy's model, which was not much different from the traditional East Asian paradigm. So, while the idea that the Earth was round (rather than rectangular) was new to Yi Ik, the Earth-centred explanation of the solar system and the revolution of the heavens around the Earth were preserved. Secondly, Yi maintained that extraordinary natural phenomena such as eclipses occurred when heaven warns rulers about coming disasters caused by their misdeeds. However, interestingly, Yi understood that solar and lunar eclipses take place owing to the orbital movement of the sun, moon, and Earth. Therefore, concerning this issue, a reasonable

[122] Out of 186 short essays, around half dealt with scientific subjects; his main references were the science books from Qing, as well as old Chinese texts treating the movement of the universe and Earth.

[123] Yim Chongt'ae, "Chigu, sangsik, chunghwa chuŭi," 185–200.

explanation is that Yi hesitated to abandon this traditional view because he thought that the old view had some beneficial effects for contemporary Chosŏn.[124]

Let us move on to the distinctiveness of Yi Ik's method. In many explanations of natural phenomena, Yi's approach is based on empiricism and rationality. For example, when explaining the causes of rain, he largely refers to his empirical observations, such as the condensation of dew in a round ceramic container in which grains are fermented, and the formation of frost on the walls of a room on a cold day. He concluded that rain, like the principle of the formation of dew and frost, is created when cold air and hot air collide.[125] In the same way, in describing heavy rain, he referred to a dragon, signifying *yang* or hot energy that causes rain when it flies into cloud that has cold *yin* energy. Therefore, while Yi Ik seems to maintain traditional views on some natural phenomena, his ideas were rational and scientifically acceptable. Interestingly, his empiricism and rationality led him to deny Zhu Xi's views on natural phenomena. In understanding the natural world, Zhu Xi largely took on traditionally held views without casting doubts on them. He thus believed that a rainbow absorbs water vapour and that the hexagonal shape of snow crystals was caused by the fragmenting of snow blocks by the wind.[126] On these issues, Yi put forth rational explanations based on his empirical observation. Therefore, we can say that, through his contact with Western scientific sources, Yi Ik came to equip himself with an empirical and rational attitude towards the physical and natural world. In this regard, in an essay entitled

---

[124] Yi Ik, "Ch'ŏnbyŏn" (天變) and "Ilsik" (日蝕) in *Sŏngho sasŏl* vol.1 (Seoul: Minjok munhwa ch'ujinhoe, 1985), pp. 142–44, 146–48.

[125] It is unclear whether Yi Ik had already learned of the principle of the creation of rain through a Western science book, but in his article on "rain" he did not make any reference to one. Yi Ik, "Wu" (雨) in *Sŏngho sasŏl* 1, 169–70.

[126] "Hong'ye ŭmsu" (虹蜺飮水) in *Sŏngho sasŏl* 1, 158; "Sŏlhwa" (雪花) in *Sŏngho sasŏl* 1, 180–1.

Yŏksang (曆象), he made a meaningful remark that separated the logic of the physical/natural world from that of the human (or moral) world, stating: "In general, instruments and mathematics are more delicate, the later they were created. [In these areas] even sages' wisdom is limited. If later generations make more efforts to improve them, the instruments and mathematics will become more enduring and more delicate."[127] Thus, for Yi Ik, the method of the natural world was independent from the traditional human imagination and the moral curbs on it.

Chosŏn scholars' adoption of Western sciences and consequent scientific attitude are witnessed more clearly in the work of Hong Daeyong (1731–1783). Hong's time was the prime days of *Sirhak*, so his study was more inclined to practical matters, as seen from a letter of his written when young.[128] The crucial moment that made Hong Daeyong a thinker was his visit to Beijing. In 1776, he had an opportunity to visit Qing's capital as part of the entourage of a diplomatic mission, and realised the backwardness of Chosŏn in both material and intellectual dimensions. His main works on science and mathematics were written after his visit to Beijing, and his famous book, *Ŭisan mundap*, was written in this period. Here, our aim is to uncover Hong's scientific and rational view of the world and its effects on his reconstruction of the China-centred East Asian world through his main work, *Ŭisan mundap*.

A remarkably challenging book, *Ŭisan mundap* was intended to refute the traditional view of the physical world and to envision the world based on scientific rationality. As clearly shown in the name of the two main characters, Hŏja (虛子, Mr. Empty) and Sirong

---

[127] "**凡器數之法 後出者工 雖聖智有所未盡而 後人因以增修 宜其愈久而愈精也**." "Yŏksang" (曆象) in *Sŏngho sasŏl* 1, 188–9.

[128] In the letter Hong stated that in civilisation (開物成務) the matters of the almanac, mathematics, money and grain (錢穀), and the military are important. "Yŏinsŏ yisu" (**與人書二首**" (內集卷三)), *Kukyŏk Tamhŏnsŏ* vol. 1, p. 357.

(實翁, Old Mr. Substantial), Hong confronted the scientifically constructed, real world with the traditional or insubstantial world upon which Chosŏn Confucians built their study. The two opposing characters talking at Yiwulu Mountain thus represent the two different worlds.[129] The dialogue between the two consists of Hŏja's questions and Sirong's answers, and the main content of the dialogue concerns the principles of the operation of the solar system and Earth. In terms of the dimension of scientific knowledge, Hong appears to be superior to Yi Ik. For instance, unlike Yi Ik, Hong was aware of the actual way the Earth rotates and its globe shape. He also understood the real mechanism that caused the lunar eclipse, as well as the existence of gravity, although he did not use the terms *chungnyŏk* (重力) or *illyŏk* (引力). However, owing to the influence of the old space model introduced firstly to Chosŏn, he still believed that the Earth was the centre of the solar system and the sun and moon revolved around it. He could not free himself completely from traditional conceptions and incorrect reasoning, so he clung to the ambiguous term *qi* (氣) when indicating air, water vapour, and other matters in context, and maintained that the shapes of mountains and valleys on the surface of the moon were reflections of the Earth's surface. Nonetheless, Hong's understanding of scientific knowledge was indisputably deep.

Now, let us see how his scientific proclivity affected his way of seeing the world. The distinction is that Hong decisively rejected the traditional conceptions of natural phenomena and tried to see the physical world on the basis of *scientific rationality*. For him, the division between logic in the natural world and that in the human (or moral) world was getting

[129] Yiwulu Mountain (醫巫閭山) is located on the north-eastern side of China, which formed the border dividing civilised China from Eastern barbarians. Yim Chongt'ae has pointed out that, by setting the location at Yiwulu, Hong intended to blur the old division between civilisation and barbarism. The point is that the very moment that caused that reflection is a scientific worldview. Yim Chongt'ae, "Chigu, sangsik, chunghwa chuŭi," 214.

stronger. For example, he saw that the movement of stars in the universe had nothing to do with human affairs. According to him, the old custom of finding omens through the movement of stars was no different from attempting to grasp the insubstantial shadows of the heaven. It was simply the opinions of astrologists, he asserted. He thus removed irrational remnants from the traditional way of thinking. Another example is his treatment of the old concept of *yinyang*. Instead of upholding its traditional idea as the origin of all creatures and the cause of the shift of nature, he deconstructed it by describing the change of the four seasons scientifically in terms of the closeness or distance of the sun from the Earth and of the angle of sunshine hitting the surface of the Earth. And he simply degraded *yinyang* as a theory of the ancients based on their observation of the regular shift of day and night.[130] In this regard, his rational worldview drove him to discredit the ancient text *Yijing* (易經) for its use for fortune-telling by means of the symbols (象數) in the book. Therefore, in Hong's thought, it is clearly shown that the physical/natural world was obtaining its independence from its old curbs of humans' irrational or arbitrary use of it for their convenience.

Hong's scientific rationality also forced him to abandon the old China-centred world model in East Asia. For a long time, China as the central state and its neighbouring small ethnic peoples were the normal way of seeing the geographical world. The new knowledge of the world informed from new atlases, however, drove Hong to abandon the old view and take on the idea that China represented no more than one tenth or so of the entire size of the globe. Moreover, from the new geographical understanding, China was no longer the central state (中國), just as Chosŏn was not an eastern country (東國). As evidence of that view, he argued that directions on the globe, specifically the east and west, could be differentiated

[130] Given that Chŏng Yakyong had a similar view of *yinyang*, this novel view must have been prevalent among progressive scholars in the late eighteenth century.

according to a place set as the criterion. Similarly, any place, if it be the criterion, can become the centre of the world.[131] He thus denounced the worldview based on the ancient text *Chunqiu* (春秋), in which China was described as the "Inside" (or civilised) and the foreign ethnic peoples as the "Outside" (or barbaric). Hence, his scientific approach to the physical world imprinted Hong with a relativist view of the world and, by doing so, forced him to dismiss the traditional China-centred worldview.

Now let us move on to Chŏng Yakyong's (1762–1836) case. Compared with Hong Daeyong, Chŏng's academic coverage is wider, but, as with Hong, his scientific and rational view of the world was a distinctive element in building his thought. Here my aim is to show that Chŏng's adoption of Western sciences and consequent rational understanding of the world operated as a cornerstone of his thought system, which has scarcely been highlighted in previous studies. Comprehensively examining Chŏng's understanding of science, Kim Yŏngsik contended that Chŏng's treatment of scientific knowledge was not deep and that his interest in science was basically pragmatic, not purely grounded in scientific purpose. Moreover, he added that the element of Western studies that most influenced him was Roman Catholicism, not Western science.[132] This view corresponds to the majority of previous studies that have paid attention to Chŏng's idiosyncratic interpretation of core Confucian texts, which was said to be influenced by his understanding of Catholicism.[133] Overall,

---

[131] Later, Chŏng Yakyong also used this reasoning in order to refute the China-centred world model.

[132] Kim Yŏngsik, "Chŏng Yakyong sasang kwa hakmun ŭi siryong chuŭi chŏk sŏng'kyŏk" [A Pragmatic Character of the Thoughts and Studies of Chŏng Yakyong], *Tasanhak* 21 (2012, 12), pp. 65–116; _____, "Kidogkyo wa sŏyang kwahak e taehan Chŏng Yakyong ŭi t'aedo chae'gŏmt'o" [The Attitude of Chŏng Yakyong toward Christianity and Western Science Revisited], *Tasanhak* 20 (2012, 6), pp. 255–305.

[133] Paying attention to the effects of Catholicism on his philosophy, Paek Minjung took this perspective. Paek Minjung, *Chŏng Yakyong ŭi ch'ŏlhak* [The Philosophy of Chŏng Yakyong] (Seoul: Yihaksa, 2007).

Chŏng did not leave many works on science, and his depth of scientific knowledge did not go beyond Hong Daeyong's. Yet what is important is that, in terms of the way of seeing the world, his *scientific rationality* pierced his works; this rationality not only freed the physical/natural world from its previous curbs but also penetrated Chŏng's understanding of the human world.

Let us first review briefly the scientific topics that Chŏng treated in his works. Like many scholars of his time, he was interested in the solar system and earth science. In one essay, he testified that the Earth was globe-shaped, not rectangular, yet he did not address the Earth's rotation. In another essay, Chŏng expounded the scientific reason why the northern county in Chosŏn, Onsŏng (穩城), located at a higher latitude, had a longer daytime in summer than Tamla (耽羅), located at a lower latitude. In another essay, he illuminated the generation of sea tides and the reason for the flood and neap tides with the movement of the moon and sun, although he did not mention the existence of gravity. In addition, in one essay he described in detail why a convex lens collecting light can make fire. All in all, compared with Hong Daeyong's understanding of science, Chŏng's discussions of scientific themes are more sophisticated. Most distinctively, he uses graphic diagrams to support his argument for each theme. Considering that the diagrams are quite delicately drawn, we can surmise that he borrowed them from Western science books. Nevertheless, Chŏng's use of diagrams in explaining scientific phenomena was unprecedented. Moreover, he does not use conventional terms, such as *yinyang* and *qi*, at all to explain natural phenomena or scientific principles. Instead, his argument is based on logical causality and is largely rigorous and concrete. Thus,

while his level of scientific knowledge was still limited, his method of the investigation of the natural world was very scientific.[134]

Chŏng's scientific and rational view drove him to take a very critical attitude towards scientifically unproven social customs in contemporary Chosŏn. Firstly, he was critical of traditional para-science. For instance, in an essay entitled *Maekron* (脈論), he sceptically viewed the traditional medicinal method of detecting illnesses by checking the vibration of the passage of blood through the wrist only with fingers, and called this method "a lie."[135] He also censured the old belief that a person's face shape (相) determined his destiny. Repudiating this prejudiced, irrational view, Chŏng asserted that a person's face shape is rather the product of his life circumstances and changes continuously according to the environment.[136] Neither did Chŏng hide his dislike of the irrational *feng shui* theory, which was deeply entrenched within Koreans' mind-set at the time. Refuting this theory point by point, he denounced it as follows: "It is a dream out of dreaming and a deception out of

[134] Like Hong Daeyong, Chŏng never associated the natural world with human affairs. In this regard, his clear separation between the matter of technology and that of moral teachings is meaningful. In his essay entitled *Kiyeron* (技藝論), Chŏng argued that moral teachings such as "filial piety and fraternal love" (孝悌) had already been clarified by the sages and what remained was to practise them, but the matter of technology was different. According to him, technology develops as time progresses, and even a sage cannot generate all technology, nor is a sage's wisdom better than that of several people. Therefore, Chŏng clearly understood that the principles of the natural or scientific world were not the same as those of the moral world. "Kiyeron" (**技藝論** 一二三) in *Kukyŏk Tasan simunjip* vol. 5, pp. 97–100. This point was emphasised by previous studies. See Kim Yŏngho, "Chŏng Tasan ŭi kwahak kisul sasang" [The Ideas of Science and Technology of Chŏng Yakyong], *Tongyanghak* 19 (1989), pp. 277–300; Ku Man'ok, "Tasan Chŏng Yakyong ŭi ch'ŏnmun yŏkbŏp ron" [The Ideas of the Astrology and Almanac of Chŏng Yakyong], *Tasanhak* 10 (2007), pp. 55–103.

[135] "Maekron" (**脈論**) in *Kukyŏk Tasan simunjip* vol. 5, pp. 100–3.

[136] "Sangron" (**相論**) in *Kukyŏk Tasan simunjip* vol. 5, pp. 103–5.

deceiving."[137] This kind of comprehensive reflection on social customs stemmed from Chŏng's deeply entrenched scientific and rational view of the world.

Chŏng's scientific understanding of the world also forced him to reject the old China-centred view of the world, as we have seen in the case of Hong Daeyong. In taking the relativist view of China, Chŏng largely repeated the reasoning that Hong had employed previously. Upon the basis of the globe-shaped Earth and more precise world atlases, he argued that if one started a journey heading eastward from Japan, which was thought to be at the easternmost side in the traditional Chinese view, one would arrive at the western coast of Taejin (大秦, the Eastern Roman Empire), which, from a Chinese viewpoint, was located on the west side. From the Japanese point of view, however, Taejin is located on the east side, not the west side.[138] This essential relativity in geographical understanding forced Chŏng to take the perspective that any place on the globe, if its morning time and afternoon time are similar and if it is located between two poles, is a centre of the world. He thus asked why Chosŏn, a centre on the globe, should be called an eastern country.[139] As scientific geographical knowledge was adopted, the old China-centric view of the world could no longer be sustained.

Lastly, we should examine the effect of Chŏng's scientific and rational worldview on his interpretation of Confucian texts. One important feature in Chŏng's interpretation is that he often reduces philosophical ideas to empirical matters. In this case, he also suggests the reference to classical texts as evidence. His famous reestablishment of human nature (性,

---

[137] "此夢之中又夢 罔之中又罔也." "P'ungsuron sam" (風水論三) in *Kukyŏk Tasan simunjip* vol. 5, p. 143.

[138] "Kap'ŭlron" (甲乙論) in *Kukyŏk Tasan simunjip* vol. 5, pp. 135–41.

[139] "Song Hankyoli sayŏnsŏ" (送韓校理使燕序) in *Kukyŏk Tasan simunjip* vol. 5, pp. 69–70.

xing) as *taste* (嗜好), an empirical term, is the representative case. Not only did he research the use of the word *xing* in classical texts, but also he observed human nature itself from an empirical attitude. As we will see in the next section, his empiricism contributed to the deconstruction of the philosophical system of the Neo-Confucianism. This means that Chŏng's scientific rationality pierces his understanding of philosophical themes. His preference for rigorous, evidence-based demonstration also relates to his reception of scientific methods. Even more, Chŏng's conscious efforts to build a systematic theory of his own, despite the structural limits of exegetical works, would be connected with the logic of science.[140]

3. Independent Interpretations of Confucian Texts

Sirhak as a grand intellectual current embraces a number of intellectual changes in late Chosŏn, including scholars' practical concerns with national problems and aesthetic emancipation from ethical curbs.[141] Here, I will focus on *Sirhak* scholars' independent interpretation of core Confucian texts in order to see the shift in their worldview. In this section, I aim to show *Sirhak* scholars' intellectual orientation, especially their methodological approaches based on rationality, positivism, and empiricism. Previous studies have mainly focused on whether or not the *Sirhak* scholars' interpretations can be described

[140] In her recent study, Paek Minjŏng has mainly focused on the effects of Roman Catholicism and the Western philosophical worldview on Chŏng's philosophy, but she has put little focus on the impacts of Western sciences on him. Paek Minjung, *Chŏng Yakyong ŭi ch'ŏlhak*.

[141] In the field of arts, both intellectuals and commoners began to express their emotions frankly without being hindered by ethical curbs. On this change, see Yŏnse taehakgyo kukhak yŏn'guwŏn (ed.), *Han'guk sirhak sasang yŏn'gu* 3 [The Studies of *Sirhak* Thoughts in Korea] (Seoul: Hye'an, 2012).

as an "anti-" or "post-" interpretation of Zhu Xi's predominant view. Early studies have argued that the scholars' reinterpretation had an apparent anti-Zhu Xi inclination.[142] A number of recent studies, however, have cast a negative view on this, while arguing that the seventeenth-century scholars Yun Hyu and Pak Sedang's interpretations cannot be seen as showing an anti-Zhu Xi proclivity, because their difference from Zhu Xi is not based on core themes of Zhu Xi's philosophy but is rather based on their disapproval of some subtle points of Zhu Xi's interpretation.[143] This controversy is in fact a matter of how to properly conceptualise the change in late Chosŏn. Here I will name the change a 'relativisation' of Zhu Xi's philosophy, not anti- or post-Zhu Xi studies.[144] I will argue that the relativisation began

---

[142] Early researchers such as Hyŏn Sangyun and Yi Pyŏngdo have contended that Yun Hyu, Pak Sedang, and Chŏng Yakyong's interpretations are based on anti-Zhu Xi philosophy. This view has been echoed by Yi Ŭlho, Yun Sasun, and Kŭm Changt'ae, albeit in a slightly altered way. For example, Kŭm has used the framework of *Tohak* (道學 or Zhu Xi studies) vs. *Sirhak* for late Chosŏn's academic constellation. This perspective reflects the modernity-centred academic environment in Korea in the twentieth century. See Hyŏn Sangyun, *Chosŏn yuhaksa*; Yi Pyŏngdo, "Pak sŏgye wa pan chujahak chŏk sasang" [Pak Sedang and Anti-Zhu Xi Thoughts], *Taedong munhwa yŏngu* 3 (1966); _____, "Chaju chŏk sasang ŭi t'aedong" [The Advent of Autonomous Thoughts] in *Han'guk yuhaksa* (Seoul: Asea munhwasa, 1987); Kŭm Changt'ae, "Paekho Yunhyu ŭi sŏnglisŏl kwa kyŏnghak" [Yun Hyu's Neo-Confucian Thoughts and Interpretations of Confucian Texts], *Yinmun nonch'ong* 39 (1998), pp. 231–57.

[143] On the interpretation of Yun Hyu, Miura Kunio, Ch'oe Sŏkgi, and Kang Ji-eun have raised an objection. And on Pak Sedang, Oh Yong-won, Kang Ji-eun, and Joo Young-ah have criticised the previous view. See Miura Kunio (三浦國雄), "17 segi Chosŏn e itsŏsŏŭi chŏngt'ong kwa idan: Song Siyŏl kwa Yun Hyu" [Orthodoxy and Heresy in 17th-Century Chosŏn], *Minjok munhwa* 8 (1982), pp. 162–201; Ch'oe Sŏkgi, "Paekho Yun Hyu ŭi kyŏnghak kwan" [The Characteristics of the Interpretation of Confucian Texts of Yun Hyu], *Nammyŏnghak yŏngu* 8 (1998), pp. 151–80; Kang Ji-eun (Kang Jiŭn), "Yun Hyu ŭi <Toksŏgi> wa Pak Sedang ŭi <Sabyŏnrok> i chujahak pip'an ŭl wihae chŏsul toeŏtdanŭn chujang ŭi t'adangsŏng gŏmt'o (1)" [The View that Yun Hyu's *Toksŏgi* (讀書記) and Pak Sedang's *Sabyŏnrok* (思辨錄) were Composed to Criticise Zhu Xi's Philosophy Revisited], *Hanguk sirhak yŏn'gu* 22 (2011), pp. 167–200. On the new interpretation of Pak Sedang, see Oh Yong-won (O Yongwŏn), "Pak Sedang ŭi non'ŏ sabyŏnrok yŏn'gu" [A Study of Pak Sedang's *Non'ŏ sabyŏnrok* (論語思辨錄)], *Taedong munhwa yŏn'gu* 47 (2004), pp. 329–59; Kang Ji-eun, "Sŏkye Pak Sedang ŭi <Taehak sabyŏnrok> e taehan chaegŏmt'o" [Pak Sedang's *Taehak sapyŏnlok* (大學思辨錄) Revisted], *Han'guk sirhak yŏn'gu* 13 (2007), pp. 303–31; Joo Young-ah (Chu Yŏng'a), "Pak Sedang ŭi kaebang chŏk hakmungwan yŏn'gu" [A Study of Pak Sedang's Open-minded Scholarly Attitude], *Tongbanghak* 20 (2011), pp. 7–53.

with Yun Hyu and Pak Sedang and, via Yi Ik, reached an acme in Chŏng Yakyong.

Let us first examine Yun Hyu's (1617–1680) characteristics of the interpretation of core Confucian texts.[145] When we see his interpretations, what is most salient is his reordering of the main bodies of the texts and his re-focus on the texts that had been set aside for a long time. In Yun's age, Zhu Xi's authority was becoming dogmatic and his edited versions of core texts, specifically those of *Daxue* and *Zhongyong*, were accepted as the correct texts. Moreover, Zhu Xi's interpretations of those texts were seen as the orthodox way of reaching the essence of the texts. In this environment, impairing Zhu Xi's edition and creating a new edition was a great challenge to Zhu Xi. Yun Hyu reconfigured the main body of *Zhongyong*, the core text of Zhu Xi's philosophy, by reformulating it into ten chapters (twenty-eight sections), while abandoning Zhu Xi's established edition of thirty-three chapters. Moreover, in interpreting *Daxue*, in a repudiation of Zhu Xi's edition, Yun Hyu rediscovered the value of the original edition of *Daxue* (古本大學) as a truly orthodox text, and annotated it by dividing the body of the text into four parts. On the other hand, in understanding *ye*, he did not follow Zhu Xi's teachings in *Zhuzi jiali* (朱子家禮). Yun Hyu aimed to build his own system of *ye* and focused on ancient texts of *ye*, such as *Xiaojing* (孝經), *Zhouli* (周禮), and *Neize* (內則) (in *Liji* (禮記)), and annotated them. All these actions can be seen as a significant defiance of Zhu Xi's orthodoxy and Chosŏn's Confucians

---

[144] This term was first used by Miura Kunio when he interpreted Yun Hyu's exegeses of Confucian texts.

[145] According to An Pyŏng'gŏl, there were some scholars who interpreted Confucian texts on their own before Yun Hyu, but their interpretations were not full and independent. In the history of Confucian studies in Chosŏn, Yun Hyu was the first independent interpreter. An Pyŏng'gŏl, "Paekho Yun Hyu ŭi silch'ŏn chŏk kyŏnghak kwa gŭŭi sahoe chŏngch'igwan" [Yun Hyu's Practical Understanding of Confucian Texts and His View of Chosŏn Society and Politics] in *Chosŏn hugi kyŏnghak ŭi chŏn'gae wa gŭ sŏngkyŏk*, by An Pyŏng'gŏl, Kim Kyobin, Ch'oe Sŏkgi, et al. (Seoul: Sŏngkyunkwan taehak'kyo ch'ulp'anbu, 1998), p. 12.

who followed this orthodoxy rigorously. Unsurprisingly, Yun Hyu was stigmatised as an enemy of Confucianism (*samun nanjŏk*) by his senior opponent, Song Siyŏl.[146]

Now, let us turn to the intellectual orientation of Yun Hyu's interpretation of core Confucian texts. It is difficult to say whether Yun Hyu had any particular proclivity in his interpretations. His opposition to Zhu Xi's interpretation was expressed in a very allusive way, and, as he himself mentioned, he aimed to "supplement" Zhu Xi's orthodox view.[147] He largely followed Zhu Xi's method of interpreting texts. However, in interpreting *Daxue* and *Zhongyong*, Yun Hyu showed a propensity for deviating from Zhu Xi's interpretation. Specifically, in *Daxue*, in opposition to Zhu Xi's interpretation, he put forth his own interpretation. Here let us see his interpretation of *kyŏkmul ch'iji* (格物致知) in *Daxue*, because it succinctly exhibits Yun's orientation.

In interpreting *kyŏkmul* (格物 Ch.: *gewu*) in *Daxue*, Zhu Xi saw it reaching (至) the nature of things and affairs (物) by investigation. The use of the word *kyŏk* (格) in Zhu Xi, argued Yun, was mainly employed in terms of *cognitive* reaching out to understanding.[148] Instead, Yun emphasised that *kyŏk* is rather close to "making meanings delicate, and thus

---

[146] Concerning the general characteristics of Yun Hyu's interpretation of Confucian texts, see An Pyŏng'gŏl, "Paekho Yun Hyu ŭi silch'ŏn chŏk kyŏnghak kwa gŭŭi sahoe chŏngch'i kwan"; Ch'oe Sŏkgi, "Paekho Yun Hyu ŭi kyŏnghak kwan." Concerning the controversy of *samunnanjŏk*, see Miura Kunio, "17 segi Chosŏn e itsŏsŏŭi chŏngt'ong kwa idan."

[147] What he intended to do is shown in his remarks in interpreting *Zhongyong*: "**蓋天下之義理無窮而聖賢之言 旨意淵深 前人**既創通大義 **後之人又演繹之 因其所已言 而益發其所未言 此文武之道**不墜在人而道之所以益明也." "Chungyong chuja changgu porok" (**中庸朱子章句補錄**) (**雜著**) in *Kukyŏk Paekho chŏnsŏ* vol. 8, p. 20.

[148] Zhu Xi's view of *kyŏkmul ch'iji* is quite similar to Kant's view of understanding in his epistemology, for Zhu Xi thought that reaching out knowledge involved a confluence between principles (理) within oneself and the principles of things and affairs existing outside. He explained two aspects of cognitive understanding, that is, both ontological/factual and moral aspects. For Zhu Xi's theory of *kyŏkmul ch'iji*, see Chŏng Sangbong, "Chu hi ŭi kyŏkmul ch'iji wa kyŏng gongbu" [Zhu Xi's Theory of *Kyŏkmul ch'iji* and His Study through Mental Sincerity (敬)], *Ch'ŏlhak* 61 (1999), pp. 5–25.

sympathising and piercing (精意感通) the things and affairs to the heart." According to him, it was just like the sincere attitude that one has when he conducts a memorial rite to his ancestor spirits (*chesa*). He exemplified the same usages of the word *kyŏk* from ancient texts. For Yun, thus, *kyŏk* is not merely reaching knowledge through cognitive acts such as learning, questioning, thinking, and discerning (學問思辨), but also maintaining a sincere attitude (居敬, 存誠) towards things and affairs. And he put his emphasis on the latter. Therefore, the attitude of *kyŏkmul* should accompany a man's ethical cultivation and practice at all levels. This interpretation accords with Yun's emphasis on the concept of *sŏngŭi* (誠意 (Ch.: *chengyi*)) in *Daxue*, one's sincere attitude towards self-cultivation, which is different from Zhu Xi's stress on *kyŏkmul ch'iji* and its cognitive character. The reason why Yun Hyu interpreted *kyŏkmul* in this way was also related to the fact that there was no concrete explanation of *kyŏkmul ch'iji* in the original text of *Daxue*. Zhu Xi thought that the original text itself had some parts omitted, so he created that omitted part himself. Yun Hyu, however, saw that there was no omission in the original text and that, because *kyŏkmul* as an attitude pierces all other stages of learning and practicing, the addition of a separate explanation of *kyŏkmul* was unnecessary. This is the context in which he re-illuminated the original version of *Daxue* (古本大學) and took it to be the right text.[149] Therefore, Yun tried to interpret Confucian classics on his own, which was in line with his aim at re-building the entire structure of Confucianism independently.[150]

---

[149] For Yun Hyu's reinterpretation of *Daxue*, see Kim Yugon, "Yun Hyu ŭi taehak i'hae e nata'nan wihak kwan" [Zhu Xi's Understanding of Learning Shown in *Daxue*], *Han'guk sasang sahak* 41 (2012), pp. 201–223; Kang Ji-eun, "Yun Hyu ŭi <Toksŏgi> wa Pak Sedang ŭi <Sabyŏnrok> i chujahak pip'an ŭl wihae chŏsul toeŏtdanŭn chujang".

[150] According to Ch'oe Sŏkgi, through his works of exegeses, Yun Hyu divided Confucianism into two categories: *sach'inhak* (事親學) and *sach'ŏnhak* (事天學). The former is about practical familial

Pak Sedang (1629–1703) was another scholar who interpreted core Confucian texts on his own. Pak's exegeses differed from Yun Hyu's in that Pak confronted Zhu Xi directly with core assertions of Zhu Xi's interpretations. In the method of his exegeses, Pak first put forth his own interpretation on the verses of a Confucian text, and then compared it with Zhu Xi's interpretation and refuted it. This means that, in interpreting texts, Pak was conscious of his difference from Zhu Xi. As Yun Hyu did in interpreting *Zhongyong*, Pak also reconfigured the main body of the text, reframing it into twenty chapters from Zhu Xi's edition of thirty-three chapters. In *Daxue* and *Zhongyong*, Pak even moved a number of sentences and chapters from their places in Zhu Xi's edition, in order, according to him, to make their meaning clearer.[151] Therefore, Pak Sedang's opposition to Zhu Xi was unprecedented in the Confucian history in Chosŏn. Song Siyŏl's naming Pak as an enemy of Confucianism (*samun nanjŏk*) is unsurprising in this context.

Let us now see what Pak aimed for with his own interpretations. In the introduction of *Sabyŏnrok* (思辨錄, Accounts of What was Thought of and Discerned), a collection of his exegeses, he cited the following phrase from *Zhongyong* in order to express his intention in

---

ethics, which he found in *Xiaojing* (孝經) and *Neize* (內則), while the latter is about respecting heaven, which is based on his interpretation of *Zhongyong*. Concerning Yun's emphasis on heaven (天), it is evident that his understanding of Confucianism is based on classical texts. In this respect, Yun's view is related to that of Chŏng Yakyong, who stressed heaven too, instead of the concept like *li* emphasised by Song masters. See Ch'oe Sŏkgi, "Paekho Yun Hyu ŭi kyŏnghak kwan."

[151] In the case of *Zhongyong*, there are eight places where Pak changed the order of chapters and sentences from Zhu Xi's edited version. He did so because, as he stated in his questions on Zhu Xi's edited version of *Daxue*, he wished to keep the sentences and chapters in order, so that there would not be any difficulty in interpretation. (Pak Sedang, "Taehak changgu chiūi" (**大學章句**識疑) in *Kukyŏk Sabyŏnrok* (國譯 思辨錄) (Seoul: Minjok munhwa ch'ujinhoe, 1982), p. 84.) According to An Pyŏng'gŏl, in interpreting *Zhongyong*, Pak criticised Zhu Xi's exegeses with 38 points. See An Pyŏng'gŏl, "Sŏgye Pak Sedang ŭi tokja chŏk kyŏngjŏn haesŏk kwa gŭŭi hyŏnsil insik" [Pak Sedang's Independent Interpretations of Confucian Texts and His Understanding of the Current Chosŏn] in *Chosŏn hugi kyŏnkhak ŭi chŏn'gae wa gŭ song'kyŏk*, p. 28.

the book: “If one wants to go far, he/she must start from a close place” (行遠必自邇).[152] He, then, allusively chastised the current scholarly atmosphere in Chosŏn in which scholars wished to reach the far and high without holding the close and low. This metaphorical expression had a goal: to criticise those who pursued high and speculative discourses without tackling low or practical matters of their time. This criticism was also levelled at Zhu Xi, for it was Zhu Xi himself who interpreted the Confucian texts as a metaphysical science, not a practical study. This attitude of Pak Sedang is exhibited in his interpretation of *kyŏkmul ch’iji* in *Daxue*. According to Pak, Zhu Xi basically saw *kyŏkmul* as “reaching by investigation (至/窮至) things and affairs (事物),” yet he interpreted it too far to the dimension in which one reaches the highest point of understanding by realising both the nature of things (物) and one’s mind and heart (心). The problem raised here was that, in *Daxue*, *kyŏkmul* was placed at the initial stage of learning, which was supposed to lead to further stages such as *sŏngŭi chŏngsim* (誠意正心) and *susin chega* (修身齊家). Pak interpreted *kyŏkmul* as “the laws (則) of things,” in accordance with a commonly recognisable meaning of it, after which other, more sophisticated, ways of moral learning and practicing can be pursued.[153] He thus removed the far and high (or metaphysical) interpretation that Zhu Xi made with *kyŏkmul ch’iji*.

Another point with which Pak Sedang opposed Zhu Xi was the rejection of irrationality. In a number of places, Pak pointed out Zhu Xi’s irrationalities, especially in the logical flow of meaning. In the case of *kyŏkmul ch’iji* discussed above, apart from too high

---

[152] In the same context, he also noted that “being equipped can be reached by starting from being terse and abridged, and being delicate from being coarse” (**所謂備者 亦可自略而推之 所謂精者亦可自粗而致之**).

[153] “Taehak” (**大學**) in *Kukyŏk Sabyŏnrok*, p. 19.

and far an interpretation of it, what Pak problematised was its lack of balance with other items of self-cultivation. That is to say, since Zhu Xi's interpretation of *kyŏkmul ch'iji* already embraced the meanings of *sŏngŭi* (誠意) and *chŏngsim* (正心), there was no need to have the further stages of self-cultivation. Pak Sedang's adherence to *logical* (or contextual) *rationality* is not limited only to the minor logical problems at the level of sentences. His adamant reconfiguration of the main body of *Daxue* and *Zhongyong* was made by this problem of logical rationality. Indeed, in his critical review of Zhu Xi's edition of *Daxue*, Pak revealed the reason for his own reconfiguration as follows: "[I] hope that sentences follow the same group and phrases do not lose their order so that there is not any part that is difficult to construe and thus cannot be interpreted."[154] Likewise, in the last paragraph of his exegesis of *Daxue*, Pak stated in the same context that: "As a rule, what one states is intended to disclose reasons and show meanings, so that after the statements are put in order, the reasons are clearer and then the meanings can be shown, and only after that, the flavour of the statements will come out fully."[155] Hence, at the heart of Pak's critical review of Zhu Xi's interpretation lay the question of logical rationality as well as the criticism of a metaphysical reading. As in Yun Hyu, we can see a growing relativisation of Zhu Xi's works in Pak Sedang's interpretation of Confucian texts.[156]

---

[154] "或冀文從其類 語不失次 無難曉不通之患." "Taehak janggu jiŭi" (大學章句識疑) in *Kukyŏk Sabyŏnrok*, p. 84.

[155] "夫言者 所以明理而見意 故其言之有序而後 理明 理明而後 意見 意見而後 味足." "Taehak" (大學) in *Kukyŏk Sabyŏnrok*, p. 71. In his letter to Nam Kuman (南九萬, 1629–1711), his brother-in-law and a high official at the time, Pak stated the need to understand texts in the order of *kang* (綱) and *mok* (目) and spoke of possible problems when the order was violated. This was probably the method that he employed in interpreting the texts. "Tap Nam Unro sŏ" (答南雲路書) in *Kukyŏk Sŏgyejip* vol. 2, p. 99.

[156] Recent studies by Joo Young-ah, Kang Ji-eun, and Oh Yong-won have emphasised that Pak Sedang cannot be interpreted as an "anti"-Zhu Xi or "post"-Zhu Xi thinker. It is acknowledged that Pak did not aim to oppose the core framework of Zhu Xi's philosophy, but the studies have not

In the eighteenth century, the relativisation of Zhu Xi's works became much more apparent, especially in Chŏng Yakyong. The eighteenth century was also the period during which the new academic trend *Kaozhengxue* was introduced into Chosŏn and scholars began to take a more analytical approach to Confucian texts.[157] This inclination is shown in Yi Ik, who formed a novel perspective on the texts. Before we discuss Chŏng's characteristic interpretations, let us first briefly examine Yi Ik's attitude towards the texts, since Yi's method was largely inherited by Chŏng. Yi's distinctiveness lies in his positivist and rational approach to the texts. The salient point of his series of exegeses of core Confucian texts, entitled *Chilsŏ* (疾書, Hurriedly Written Writings), is that he focused on the right and wrong use of particular words or expressions and their correct interpretations.[158] This linguistic and philological turn is also exhibited in *Sŏngho sasŏl*. In some essays in that book, Yi Ik pointed out the problems of the flow of meaning (文勢) in some core Confucian texts and asked why no scholar before him had mentioned misplaced words and sentences. He claimed that this was due to the academic environment of Chosŏn, in which not even a letter in Zhu Xi's

---

considered Pak's works within the temporal context of the seventeenth century. Pak, like Yun Hyu, had to confront Zhu Xi within Zhu Xi's framework, upon which Chosŏn's Confucianism was established. Therefore, both Yun and Pak, instead of criticising the core themes of Zhu Xi's philosophy, relativised some points of Zhu Xi's interpretations of core texts, which itself, I believe, was a big challenge to Zhu Xi. See Joo Young-ah, "Pak Sedang ŭi kaebang jŏk hakmungwan yŏn'gu"; Kang Ji-eun, "Sŏgye Pak Sedang ŭi <Taehak sabyŏnrok> e taehan chaegŏmt'o"; Oh Yong-won, "Pak Sedang ŭi non'ŏ sabyŏnrok yŏn'gu."

[157] Kim Munsik has argued that after encountering *Kaozhengxue*, or Han Studies, a number of scholars realised the need to combine Song Confucianism with Han Studies, and that this eclectic approach to texts formed an academic trend in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Chosŏn. Kim Munsik, *Chosŏn hugi kyŏnghak sasang yŏn'gu*.

[158] Previous studies that have addressed *Chilsŏ* testify to this point. Kim Yugon et al., "Sŏngho Yi Ik ŭi taehak i'hae ŭi t'ŭkjing" [The Characteristics of Yi Ik's Interpretation of *Daxue*], *Yu'gyo sasang munhwa yŏn'gu* 56 (2014), pp. 327–44; Yi Yŏngho, "Sŏngho Yi Ik ŭi non'ŏ hak ŭl t'onghae pon sirhakp'a kyŏnghak ŭi t'ŭkjing" [The Characteristics of *Sirhak* Scholars' Interpretation of Confucian Texts Seen from Yi Ik's Understanding of *Lunyu*], *Yangmyŏnghak* 34 (2013), pp. 201–313; Kwŏn Munbong, "Sŏngho ŭi chungyong chusŏk il goch'al" [A Study of Yi Ik's Exegeses of *Zhongyong*], *Hanmun kyoyuk yŏn'gu* 14 (2000), pp. 265–79.

works could be questioned, not to mention that of the classical texts.[159] Besides the linguistic analytical approach, Yi used a comparative philological approach to resolve academic questions that had long been left unsettled.[160] With these methods, Yi aimed to find out the *original ideas* of Confucius. In this regard, it is meaningful that Yi regarded a critical deficiency in Song Confucianism-based Chosŏn's academic tradition as the lack of casting "doubts" (懷疑) on the texts themselves, as he stated in part of his *Chilsŏ*.[161]

The methods that Yi used involved finding more rational explanations of the texts. In other words, his linguistic and philological approach was accompanied by his more rational view of the world. In fact, taking a rational approach to the texts, he paved the way for the peak of *namin Sirhak* that reached its acme in Chŏng Yakyong. A paradigmatic case that shows Yi Ik's rationality is his view of history. Chosŏn's orthodox way of understanding

---

[159] "**但曰 一字致疑 則妄也 考校參互 則罪也 朱子之文** 尙如此 **況古經乎**." ("Yu'mun kŭmmang" (**儒門禁網**) in *Sŏngho sasŏl*, 400.) In an essay, Yi argued that the sentence in *Lunyu* (論語), "In cultivating fields, there is starvation in it, and in learning, there is a stipend in it" (耕也餒在其中矣 學也 祿在其中矣), is inappropriate in the flow of meaning. He thus replaced the word *noe* (餒, starve) with *wi* (餧, feed) and reinterpreted it as "Once one studies, one can obtain a stipend. This is the same as one can get eating, once one cultivates a field." And he added that what Confucius intended was to warn against scholars pursuing a government job and stipend without studying hard. See "Noejae kijung" (餒在其中) in *Sŏngho sasŏl*, 380–1.

[160] The short essay *Maengja suŏp* (孟子受業) registers the kind of approach Yi took to the texts. For a long time, the course of the inheritance of Confucian teachings from Confucius to Mencius was a moot point. Scholars guessed that Zisi (子思), the grandson of Confucius, composed *Zhongyong* and then taught it to Mencius. However, the relationship between the two persons was confused as several texts depicted their lifetimes incorrectly. Examining this question, Yi used a comparative philological approach and drew out the reasonable conclusion that the two persons' age gap was about a hundred years, so it was impossible for Zisi to have taught Mencius directly. With this investigation, Yi clarified that Zhengzi's (程子) view and Zhuzi's (朱子) early view on that inheritance were groundless. ("Maengja suŏp" (**孟子受業**) in *Sŏngho sasŏl*, 353–5.) This kind of redressing through positivist analysis is found in several parts of *Sŏngho sasŏl*. For example, see "Yahap" (野合), 370–1.

[161] Concerning the importance of casting doubt as a method, see "Chungyong chilsŏ husŏl" (**中庸疾書 後**說) in *Kukyŏk Sŏngho chilsŏ* (國譯 星湖疾書), trans by An Pyŏnghak, Yi Naejong, Yi Ut'ae, et al. (Seoul: Hallym taehakgyo t'aedong kojŏn yŏn'guso, 1998).

history was grounded by Zhu Xi's *Zizhitongjian gangmu* (資治通鑑綱目, Outlines and Details of Comprehensive Mirror to Aid in Government), a book that tailored history with ethical scissors. History was a mirror to learn moral lessons from. Yi applied his "doubts" to history books and frankly remarked that one's good or bad behaviours and his benevolence (仁) or not in history books cannot be trusted as they are written. Then Yi insisted that "occasions in the world are subject to luck at the rate of eight or nine out of ten."[162] In this context, for him the traditional axiom that those who do evil deeds are punished could not be applied to reality.[163] Yi Ik thought that history was a complex entity and that most historical events were decided outside of humans' good will. Therefore, for Yi Ik, a more rational and reality-based view of history was replacing the traditional ethical view of history. This shift in the view of history in fact represented the grand intellectual change taking place in Chosŏn at the time, when the dominant ethical view of the world was giving way to a more rational interpretation of the world.

This intellectual transformation is most obviously displayed in Chŏng Yakyong's interpretation of Confucian texts. Chŏng strengthened Yi's methods, putting his imagination in them. Here let us examine Chŏng's reconstruction of Confucianism in three ways: firstly, his criticism of *Xinglixue* or Song Confucianism; secondly, his reconstruction of Confucian ideas replacing Zhu Xi's views; and lastly, his major methods. First of all, let us start with Chŏng's critical view of *Xinglixue*, the orthodox Neo-Confucianism in Chosŏn. The core of Chŏng's criticism was its dogmatism and its metaphysical, not practical, proclivity. When we compare Chŏng Yakyong and Yi Ik, a major difference between them lies in the intensity

---

[162] "**天下事 大抵八九是幸會也**." "Tok saryo sŏngp'ae" (**讀史料成敗**) in *Sŏngho sasŏl*, 379–80. For a similar view on history, see "Kosa sŏn'ak" (古史善惡) in *Sŏngho sasŏl*, 376–8.

[163] "Kunja chonsim" (**君子存心**) in *Sŏngho sasŏl*, 331–2.

with which they confronted Zhu Xi. While Yi's exegeses largely aimed at complementing Zhu Xi, Chŏng's exegeses had a number of points that fundamentally challenged and offered alternatives to Zhu Xi's core ideas. Chŏng had already put forward an untraditional view on Confucian texts when he was a government official before his long exile.[164] This attitude of Chŏng's is apparent in his writing on thirteen classical texts. In the essay, Chŏng stated that, as Zhu Xi's theory was highly revered (while other theories were set aside), the academic atmosphere could be corrected into a right way, but the excessive preoccupation with Zhu Xi studies yielded a blind adherence to Zhu Xi's view. Thus, scholars came to be ignorant of the existence of other views and even different editions of the texts. As a result, according to him, there was no age like the contemporary one in which Confucian scholarship was so degraded and dispirited.[165] Chŏng's remarks were made in the context of the development of Confucianism in China, especially the situation of Ming China. However, it would be accepted that the case of Chosŏn was not much different and it is possible to interpret that Chŏng implicitly meant the circumstances of Chosŏn. By way of correction, he suggested a liberalisation of academic investigation. Concretely, he stated that scholars should be given the freedom to review all theories, including those of the Chin and Han eras, and compare them with one another, and that they should be able to choose between different viewpoints

[164] After the sudden death of King Chŏngjo in 1800, Chŏng Yakyong and his colleagues in the *namin* faction were persecuted for their adherence to Catholicism. Chŏng was sent into exile to Kangjin, Chŏlla province, and lived there for 18 years. Although conditions were not ideal, especially in terms of his career as a government official, he could devote all his energy and time to scholarly investigation and made great academic achievements. See "Chach'an myojimyŏng" (自撰墓誌銘) in *Kukyŏk Tasan simunjip* vol. 7.

[165] "Sipsamgyŏng ch'aek" (十三經策) in *Kukyŏk Tasan simunjip* vol. 4.

and to abandon them.[166] So, already when he was a young government official, Chŏng clearly recognised the problems of the Zhu Xi philosophy-dominated academic environment in both Ming China and Chosŏn.

On the other hand, in his other essay on Confucian academic strands entitled *O'hakron* (五學論, Discussions of Five Academic Strands), Chŏng levelled criticism at Song Confucianism itself for its excessively metaphysical and speculative character. In the part on *Xinglixue* (性理學), Chŏng censured the scholars of his time for their upholding of the philosophical concepts as their main concerns, such as *liqi* (理氣, principle and material force), *xingqing* (性情, the nature and feelings), *tiyong* (體用, essence and function), *benran qizhi* (本然氣質, the inherent moral nature and temperaments), and the like. He thought that they concentrated on too minute analyses of those concepts and subsequently generated a number of impractical strands of theory. According to him, these scholars had made arguments against one another for generations and then formed factions among those of similar views, but they did not know about practical matters of the state – such as concrete rituals and music (禮樂) and legal affairs and governing (刑政) – and simply wished to be treated as high and lofty scholars.[167] In another essay on Confucianism entitled *Sokhakron* (俗學論, Discussions of Vulgar Studies), Chŏng called these scholars "vulgar Confucians" (俗儒) and delineated true Confucians' studies as existing "for the sake of governing the state, making people comfortable, routing barbarians, enriching national finance, and making both the words and the sword equipped, so that their studies are of nothing impertinent and

[166] In this context, he advised King Chŏngjo to revise the current civil service examination, specifically the one examining the level of understanding of Confucian texts (明經科), because the current system failed to enhance scholars' general level of knowledge. Ibid., 57–8.

[167] "O'hakron" (**五學論**) in *Kukyŏk Tasan simunjip* vol. 5, 115–9.

unnecessary." [168] Hence, we can say that Chŏng's criticism of speculative Song Confucianism was based on his practical concerns; that is, its failure to enrich academic discourse and to tackle national problems. Considering his overall academic characteristics, Chŏng's essential academic momentum seems to have come out of this concern. As is revealed in a letter to his pupil Chŏng Such'il (丁修七), he thought that: "Being bound by sentences and phrases, calling oneself a reclusive, lofty scholar, and being unpleased with making efforts to practical accomplishments, all are not the teachings of Confucius."[169] A wealth of Chŏng's scholarship was built upon this principle of *practical usefulness*. His disapproval of Zhu Xi's philosophy and his interest in varied practical studies including technology and medicine (not to mention state institutions) stemmed from this context.

Second of all, let us turn to the core ideas in Chŏng's interpretation of Confucian texts, especially the Four Books. The basic notions in Chŏng's reconstruction of Confucianism were rationality and practicality. Chŏng's exegeses of the Four Books are famous for the novel viewpoints that challenge Zhu Xi's views. Contrary to Zhu Xi's metaphysical and cognitive inclination, Chŏng's interpretation largely retrieves the question of humans' moral practice. Among a number of new interpretations, the most salient and essential is likely to be his theory of human nature (性), which is very different from Zhu Xi's. Zhu Xi understood human nature in a two-fold way. In his theory, *li* (理) and *qi* (氣), the two fundamental components creating the cosmos, are naturally given to humankind, so that human nature is comprised of two aspects: one side of the nature is affected by *li* (本然之性), which is purely

---

[168] "**眞儒之學 本欲治國安民 攘夷狄裕財用 能文能武 無所不當**." "Sok'yuron" (**俗儒論**) in *Kukyŏk Tasan simunjip* vol. 5, 172.

[169] "**凡繳繞章句 自稱隱逸 不肯於事功上著力者 皆非孔子之道也**." "Wi pansan Chŏng Such'il chŭng'ŏn" (**爲盤山丁修七贈言**) in *Kukyŏk Tasan simunjip* vol. 7, 296.

good and moral and common to all humankind, and the other side is affected by *qi* (氣質之性), which is different from person to person and is good and moral in some situations but in others might work in bad and immoral ways. Humans' evil side is supposed to come out of the latter, specifically when that loses the mean (中). Hence, humans need to maintain their purely good nature and, at the same time, cultivate the other nature affected by *qi* through moral education.

Chŏng did not accept this theory, especially *li* as the fundamental principle generating the cosmos. Instead, he reconstructed his own theory in a monistic way, on the basis that in classical texts the term *li* was rarely used in the way that Zhu Xi employed it.[170] Chŏng's basic idea is that human nature is rather "taste" (嗜好), which he elicited by analysing nature (性) itself both textually and empirically.[171] He understood 'human nature as taste' primarily as humans' diverse preferences for sense, and extended this idea to moral preference.[172] Therefore, people's liking of moral acts was supposed not to be given naturally by the moral nature of humanity (*li*), but rather to come from people's preference for, or taste for them. When understanding human nature in the matters of good and bad (or morality), however, Chŏng could not entirely abandon Zhu Xi's dual structure. He thus admitted that humans are granted both a good nature from heaven (道義) (owing to this, humans' inborn taste prefers

---

[170] See Chŏng Ilkyun, *Tasan sasŏ kyŏnghak yŏn'gu*, 286–8.

[171] I have borrowed the term "taste" as the translation of *kiho* (嗜好) from David Hume. In his aesthetic theory, Hume regarded the human sentiment of pleasure or pain in response to an object – that is, *taste* – as the essence of humans' sense of beauty and deformity. This view basically stemmed from his epistemic empiricism, from which Chŏng also took the term *kiho*. For Hume's aesthetic theory, I have referred to Theodore Gracyk, "Hume's Aesthetics", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2016 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2016/entries/hume-aesthetics/>.

[172] In grasping the core themes of Chŏng Yakyong's reinterpretation of the Four Books, I have referred to Chŏng Ilkyun's *Tasan sasŏ kyŏnghak yŏn'gu*.

the good and rejects the bad) and individual temperament affected by *qi* (氣質), but his point was that these two sides are united into one and fight against each other within one's self. This marks a difference from Zhu Xi, who thought that the two sides are clearly separated within one's self. In the same context, Chŏng opposed Zhu Xi's idea of an inborn division of people based on the nature affected by *qi*. According to Zhu Xi, due to diverse *qi* given to all creatures, divisions between humans, animals, and plants emerge. On the other hand, since nature affected by *li* was given to all creatures equally, creatures in the world are assumed to have that nature in common. In the case of humans, because of the difference of *qi*, sages are born with a perfect nature, while average people are born with diverse characters and levels of wisdom. Chŏng negated this view and put forward his own idea that the nature of humankind is qualitatively different from animals' and that animals do not have an inborn moral nature. As far as the good and bad of individual humans is concerned, Chŏng argued that the difference between humans is not directly related to the nature affected by *qi*, but is rather caused by the environment and education after birth. He thus weakened the *a priori* notions of *li* and *qi* and the dualistic structure of human nature, so that humans' good and bad acts could now be ascribed to humans themselves. While Chŏng did not entirely abandon Zhu Xi's deontological framework, his theory went toward a more rationally and empirically acceptable version.

Chŏng's rational reinterpretation and imputation of human behaviours to humans' own responsibility are also shown in his theory of benevolence or *ren* (仁). Zhu Xi saw *ren* as the most essential virtue that exists *a priori* within humans' purely good nature like the notion *li*. This kind of *a priori* character of *ren*, however, owing to its metaphysical feature, yielded the problem of how to concretely practise it in everyday life. Chŏng's reply to this

problem is that *ren* does not lie in humans' nature, but in humans' relationships to one another and in concrete moral practices. That is to say, by practising benevolent deeds in human relationships, those behaviours can be called "benevolence." He thus repudiated the *a priori* understanding of *ren*.[173]

Chŏng's attention to humans' practice also led him to the reinterpretation of heaven or *tian* (天), which Zhu Xi construed as *li* (理). Opposing Zhu Xi's view, Chŏng restored the old term *shangdi* (上帝, Heavenly God) found in ancient texts – which had been discarded by Song masters – and equated *tian* with *shangdi*.[174] He paid attention to the notion *shangdi* because, as is suggested in his exegeses in *Zhongyong*, he thought that *shangdi* would help people to be moral by overseeing people even when they are alone. According to him, only *shangdi* and ghosts (鬼神) can know of people's evil acts when committed clandestinely.[175] S*hangdi* was thus recalled in need of people's sincere *moral practice* in their daily lives. Chŏng recognised the weak basis of morality in the Confucian idea of voluntary ethical cultivation. And in this instance, the Catholic influence on him seems obvious. The point is

---

[173] Chŏng Yakyong's redefinition of *ren* as a practical concept has well been illuminated by Ham Yŏngdae. Ham highlighted Chŏng's conception of *ren* in the history of the notion itself and in comparison with both Chinese and Japanese scholars' views. See Ham Yŏngdae, "Tasan Chŏng Yakyong ŭi "In (仁)"ja haesŏk" [Chŏng Yakyong's Interpretation of the Notion *ren*], *Tasankwa hyŏndae* 3 (2003), pp. 333–63.

[174] Chŏng's retrieval of the terms of *tian* and *shangdi* is one of the critical points that distanced Chŏng from Song Confucianism. There is disagreement among scholars over where these notions stemmed from. Some scholars, including Yi Ŭlho, have argued that those terms indicate Chŏng's return to classical Confucianism, while others, such as Kŭm Changt'ae, think that they are proof of Chŏng being affected by Roman Catholicism. See Son Hŭngch'ŏl, "Tasan Chŏng Yakyong ŭi sŏngkihosŏl kwa kŭ nongŏ punsŏk" [Chŏng Yakyong's Theory of Nature as Taste and Its Reasoning], *Tasanhak* 4, 2003, p. 247.

[175] In "Chungyong chajam" (**中庸自箴**), Chŏng stated: "That a gentleman stays in a dark room and does not dare to do any evil act while being frightened is because he knows that the heavenly god stays with him" (**君子處暗室之中 戰戰**栗栗 不敢爲惡 **知其有上帝**臨女也). See "Chungyong chajam kwŏn il" (**中庸自箴 卷一**) in *Kukyŏk Yŏyudang chŏnsŏ* (國譯 與猶堂全書) vol. 1, trans. by Chŏnchu taehak'kyo honamhak yŏnguso (Seoul: Yŏgang ch'ulp'ansa, 1986), p. 203.

that Chŏng retrieved the ancient concept *shangdi* for its practical usefulness.[176] This practical concern of Chŏng corresponds to his continual focus on the notion of *shendu* (愼獨) in *Zhongyong*, as a method of self-cultivation and staying aware of god. He also treated *cheng* (誠), a sincere and pious attitude in dealing with things and affairs, as a core concept penetrating the thoughts of both *Daxue* and *Zhongyong*. Chŏng's commitment to moral practice is also shown in his interpretation of *mingde* (明德) in *Daxue*, in which Chŏng ascribed the bright virtues (*mingde*) to concrete and practicable familial values of *xiaotici* (孝弟慈), instead of Zhu Xi's view that finds it in something given from heaven mystically and is equipped within humans as a principle like *li*.[177] All these novel interpretations testify to Chŏng's serious predilection for moral practice and his rational view of the world.

Lastly, let us look into Chŏng Yakyong's distinctive methodological approaches in reinterpreting Confucian texts. The most distinctive elements in his method are his *positivist* and *empirical* attitude. In his exegeses, Chŏng mainly referred to classical texts in order to testify to the truthfulness of later scholars' interpretations. On the basis of the authority of classical texts, he corroborated or refuted existing views and suggested his own perspectives. In his works, Zhu Xi was merely one of the previous scholars, although deemed a great scholar. Zhu Xi's philosophical interpretations were backed up or refuted on positivist grounds. For example, reviewing Zhu Xi's dualistic approach to human nature, Chŏng

---

[176] Chŏng's adoption of the omniscient god can be reasonably interpreted to be affected by his encounter with Catholicism, specifically through the book *Tianzhu shiyi* (天主實義) written by the Jesuit priest Matteo Ricci. However, as Paek Minjŏng argues, Chŏng did not fully accept the view of god suggested in *Tianzhu shiyi*. While the Christian God judges man as they leave "this" world and leads good men to paradise, Chŏng's god never does this. Chŏng's *shangdi* does not have "that" world and just shows himself in the form of *tianming* (天命); *tianming* is shown as *daoxin* (道心). Thus, Chŏng's adoption of the idea of god is simply within the extent to which it is permissible within the Confucian thought system. Paek Minjŏng, *Chŏng Yakyong ŭi ch'ŏlhak*, chs. 1, 2, 3.

[177] See "Taehak kong'ŭi il" (大學公議 一) in *Kukyŏk Yŏyudang chŏnsŏ* vol. 1, pp. 19–31.

discovered that in the ancient texts the concept *xing* (性) was used in an empirical manner that was different from Zhu Xi's metaphysical approach; on that basis, he reconstructed *xing* with the concept "taste" (嗜好). This positivist and analytical attitude of Chŏng's appears to be influenced by the methods of *Kaozhengxue* and Western science. These new knowledge systems worked as methods for Chŏng to relativise the firm basis of Zhu Xi's philosophy.

Another approach that Chŏng used is empiricism, with which he reduced philosophically nuanced concepts in Confucian texts to empirical matters. He liked to analyse controversial points in the texts empirically and turned the points to a different direction. One notable case is his reinterpretation of human nature or *xing*. He brought the philosophical concept *xing* down to earth and saw that notion in the dimension of "my nature likes raw fish and grilled beef" or "my nature hates the croaking sound of frogs"; upon this basis, he reconstructed *xing* as "taste."[178] Therefore, Chŏng's view of 'human nature as taste' was derived from his observation of the actual workings of human nature. Another example is his reinterpretation of the concepts *yinyang* (陰陽) and *wuxing* (五行, five basic materials (金木水火土)), in which he raised opposition to Song scholars' metaphysical view. As we discussed in the previous section, Chŏng reinterpreted *yinyang* as both daytime and night-time created by the sun, following Hong Daeyong's view. Likewise, he cast doubt on the old view that the five principal materials (*wuxing*) comprise all creatures. He questioned this old view upon the basis of empirical observation and judged that the five materials are just five

[178] "Chungyong chajam kwŏn il" (中庸自箴 卷一) in *Kukyŏk Yŏyudang chŏnsŏ* vol. 1, p. 199.

among numerous materials.[179] Taking this empirical approach, Chŏng dismantled some core parts of Zhu Xi's philosophical system.[180]

From the discussions above, I think it is evident that there was a meaningful intellectual transformation in late Chosŏn. The most critical shift was the relativisation of the hegemonic Zhu Xi philosophy. To rephrase this in terms of worldview, the rational, practical, positivist, and empirical views were being rebalanced with the ethical worldview. From my own conceptual framework suggested in this thesis, *Sirhak* is a form of study that retrieved the ideas of political necessity. After all, *Sirhak* was a reformist strand of Confucianism, yet at the same time, it had elements that would go beyond even the Confucian boundary, as its worldview was clearly separated into two. The rational, practical, positivist, and empirical view of the world provided the intellectual resource to overcome the Confucian framework itself.

According to Yu Ponghak, *Sirhak* is, above all, an intellectual trend of the prestigious ruling *noron* families in Seoul (京華士族), which means that the practical intellectual trend

---

[179] "Chungyong kang'ŭirok kwŏnil" (**中庸講義錄 卷一**) in *Kukyŏk Yŏyudang chŏnsŏ* vol. 1, pp. 262–5.

[180] In interpreting Confucian texts, the *namin* scholars who resided in the Kyŏnggi province largely held more radical views than the majority *noron* scholars, but this does not mean that the former appropriated the relativist perspective on Zhu Xi's exegeses. Among the so-called *pukhakp'a* scholars, Hong Daeyong also unveiled a critical interpretation of Zhu Xi's views. For example, in his analysis of *Zhongyong* he thought that Zhu Xi arbitrarily divided and connected meanings, and, by doing so, made the mistake of interpreting the text too minutely (**密**) and too delicately (**巧**). Hong Daeyong, "Chungyong munŭi" (**中庸問疑**) in "Kisŏ hangsa Ŏm Ch'ŏlgyo sŏngmun yong'ŭi" (**奇書杭士嚴鐵橋誠問庸義**) in *Kukyŏk Tamhŏnsŏ* (國譯 湛軒書) vol. 1 (Seoul: Minjok munhwa ch'ujinhoe, 1974), pp. 100–110.

was not limited to a number of alienated, minority intellectuals.[181] Given that there was a diverse spectrum of scholars who relativised Zhu Xi's philosophy, we can estimate that the *namin* scholar Chŏng Yakyong was the person who went furthest, compared with the more moderate, majority scholars of his time. This means that *Sirhak* in late Chosŏn was not a minority's appropriation. Indeed, whether radical or moderate, all reformists in the 1880s hailed from Seoul's prestigious *noron* families. The radical reformist Pak Yŏnghyo (1861–1939), indeed, confessed that the *Kaehwa sasang* came out of his group's gathering at Pak Kyusu's house, where they were taught by Pak Kyusu, the grandson of Pak Chiwŏn, with the latter's works.[182] Previous studies have already examined the connection of *Sirhak* with *Kaehwa sasang* by looking into both human networks and the commonality of the two thought systems.[183] Therefore, if we can testify that the rational, practical, positivist, and empirical worldview of *Sirhak* is continuous with that of *Kaehwa sasang* of the late nineteenth century, we can find a new way to prove the intellectual continuity between the two thought systems. In the next chapter, therefore, we will examine the worldview of the reformist intellectuals of the 1880s.

---

[181] Yu Ponghak, "Chosŏn hugi kyŏnghwa sajok ŭi taedu wa sirhak" [The Emergence of the Prestigious Families in Seoul in Late Chosŏn and *Sirhak*] in *Tasi, sirhak iran muŏt inga* (Seoul: P'urŭn yŏksa, 2007), pp. 95–123.

[182] Yi Kwangsu, "Pak Yŏnghyo ssi rŭl mannan iyagi" [The Story of Meeting with Mr. Pak Yŏnghyo] in *Yi kwangsu chŏnjip* 17 (Seoul: Samjungdang, 1962), pp. 400–5.

[183] Kang Chaeŏn and Kim Yŏngho have researched the human network, and Yi Kwangnin has investigated Kang Wi's learning from Kim Chŏnghi and his close relationship with the young reformists or *Kaehwap'a*. Kim Myŏngho has confirmed that Pak Kyusu taught practical and rational ideas to the young reformists. For the reference, see note 43.