

Korean Confucianism

Tradition and Modernity

The Understanding Korea Series (UKS) ③

Korean Confucianism: Tradition and Modernity

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THE ACADEMY OF KOREAN STUDIES PRESS 



Foreword

Korea achieved extraordinary economic development today by overcoming historical crises and hardships with wisdom and intelligence. The foundation for such development is the result of South Korea's harmonious integration of various characteristics like traditional culture, social structure, emphasis on education and politics. Accordingly, it is indeed a timely required task to broaden our understanding of South Korea by re-examining the engine of its miraculous development including its rich cultural heritage and economic achievements and by sharing new findings with the world.

Since its establishment in 1978, the Academy of Korean Studies has striven to develop and creatively preserve Korean culture. In doing so, the Academy of Korean Studies not only published many specialized academic books in Korean studies but also provided overseas scholastic support by training and producing Korean studies experts. Today, the Academy of Korean Studies faces a new opportunity to move forward in elevating the importance of Korean Studies in the world on the occasion of the rise of the Korean wave and professionalism in the field.

In this regard, I am delighted to see the publication of *Korean Confucianism*, the third book in the Understanding Korea Series. I hope that this book will contribute to deepening the international understanding of Korea and stimulate more interest in the creativity and authenticity of Korean culture. Finally, I would like to thank research members of the Center for International Affairs who made this publication possible.

February 2015

LEE Bae Yong, Ph.D.

President of the Academy of Korean Studies



Acknowledgments I

The Center for International Affairs (CEFIA) at the Academy of Korean Studies (AKS) undertakes the task of promoting a better understanding of Korean history and culture and Korea's contemporary development among the young people around the world.

This book is the third book in the Understanding of Korea Series (UKS) covering Korea's world-class cultural heritage. Our UKS endeavors to publish books on Korea that provide in-depth understandings of Korean culture and society.

As a beginner's introduction this book explains various traditional and contemporary aspects of Korean neo-Confucianism that are related to philosophy, education, family, social ethics, politics, national identity, spiritual culture, and the practice of rituals. Although the book is a scholarly work, it is written for a wide range of readers from experts to general readers who are interested in Korean Confucianism. It will also be a valuable reference to those studying Korean Confucianism.

Many people have contributed to the publication of this book. I am grateful to all of them. I would like to thank the author,

Professor Edward Y. J. Chung. My thanks also go to the Bank of Korea (Mr. Hyeoncho LEE Yu-tae and Mr. Woljeong Chang Woo-seong), Ojukheon & Museum in Gangneung (Mr. Idang Kim Eun-ho), Korean Tourism Organization, Sŏnggyun'gwan, Tosan Academy, Yeonhap News, and Mr. Son Sung-hoon for generously permitting the use of their photos.

I sincerely hope that this book will contribute to the better global understanding of Korean culture by inspiring the international community's interest in Korea.

February 2015

KIM Hyeon, Ph.D.

Director of the Center for International Affairs



Acknowledgments II

I wish to express my gratitude and thanks to those institutions and people who have assisted my book project from May 2013 to February 2015. Most of all, I would like to thank the national Academy of Korean Studies (AKS), South Korea for initiating this project; I am honored to acknowledge that this book was supported by the Academy. I am grateful to the AKS President and the Center for International Affairs (CEFIA) at the Academy for giving me such an opportunity to write a new introductory book about Korean Confucianism. It was the invitation from the Center's Division of Understanding Korea Project that motivated me to consider this interesting project. Frankly, I initially hesitated a little bit after going over several possible examples of topic coverage because I quickly thought how challenging this work will be for any scholar in Confucianism and Korean Studies to handle in terms of tradition and modernity pertaining to its various aspects such as history, philosophy, spirituality, education, family, society, political culture, national identity, and so on. This basic issue was complicated also by the breadth and depth of research, interpretation, and writing one might have to do. I ultimately felt

honored to accept the invitation after realizing the distinctiveness and significance of Korean Confucianism not only as a relevant living tradition regionally and globally but also for the Center's academic mission "to promote a better understanding of Korea to the world" and "to improve Korea's image while promoting mutual understanding and friendship." I hope to contribute to the better global understanding of Korean Confucianism by writing this book.

My warm thanks also go to my institution, the University of Prince Edward Island (Charlottetown, PEI, Canada) for granting me a full-year sabbatical, July 2011-July 2012 (together with an internal research grant), during which time I was able to visit Korea and the University of Toronto for research and consultation on several aspects of Korean Confucianism. Furthermore, my writing also draws upon my previous scholarly works on these topics, most of which were funded by research grants and conference travel grants which I had received from UPEI from 1992 to 2011. Without this research support by my university, my work on this book would have been a difficult and less fruitful project.

On a related note, I am also pleased to acknowledge that several chapters in this book are facilitated by research and writing I did for my previous publications and conference papers. I therefore thank the following publishers and scholarly associations. Chapter 3 partly grew out of the substantially re-

written, combined, and updated version of my two previous works: some sections of the Historical Background chapter in my book, *The Korean Neo-Confucianism of Yi T'oegye and Yi Yulgok: A Reappraisal of the Four-Seven Thesis and Its Implications for Self-Cultivation* (SUNY Press, 1995), and “Yi Yulgok’s Practical Learning and Its Influence on the Sirhak School in Korea,” *Korean Studies in Canada* (University of Toronto), vol. 3 (1995). Chapter 5 is generally based on the integrated and revised version of my journal article, “Confucian Ethics in Contemporary Korea: A Common National Discourse,” *Korean Culture* 16 (1995), and my conference paper, “Confucian Influence on the Korean Language: Some Reflections on the Dynamics of Confucian Humanism and Cultural Transformation,” presented at the International Conference on “Translation and Cultural Transformation in Korea,” York University, Toronto, 1994. Chapter 7 draws upon my two conference papers: “Tradition and Globalization: Comparative Reflections on Confucian Values,” presented at the Biannual Meeting of the Canadian Asian Studies Association (CASA) at the University of Montreal, 2003, and “Globalization and Cultural Identity: Conflict or Assimilation in Korea,” presented the 25th Anniversary of CASA Conference, Marriott Château Champlain, Montréal, 2005. I prepared Chapter 8 by substantially shortening, combining, revising, and updating my journal article, “Confucianism and

Women in Modern Korea: Continuity, Change and Conflict,” in Arvind Sharma and K. Young, eds. *The Annual Review of Women in World Religions*, 3 (1994), and my conference paper, “Modernity and Traditional Values in South Korea: Confucian and Comparative Reflections on Moral-Cultural Identity and Perplexity,” presented at the Fourth Pacific Asian Conference on Korean Studies, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, 1998. Chapter 9 partly comes from the shortened and re-written version of my two conference papers: “Confucian *Li* (Ritual) and Family Spirituality: Reflections on Ancestral Rites in Contemporary Korea,” presented at the 2006 Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion, Washington, DC, and “Confucian Ancestral Rites and Christian Inculturation in Modern Korea: Toward a Confucian-Catholic Spirituality,” presented at the 1999 Annual Meeting of AAR, Boston. Finally, I prepared Chapter 10 by assimilating, shortening, and updating my two conference papers: “Confucianism and Cultural Integration: Reflections on the Korean-Canadian Experience,” presented at the Conference on Canadian-Korean Relations, UBC, Vancouver, 2003, and “Educating Non-English Speaking Immigrant Newcomers (Koreans) In PEI, Canada: Facts, Challenges, and Opportunities,” presented for a special panel, Academic Services for Newcomers to Canada: High Schools and Universities Adjust, at the 35th Conference of Atlantic Association of Registrars and Admissions Officers/

Interchange Conference, UPEI, Charlottetown, 2009.

For some scholarly advice I received for my research on Korean Confucianism while visiting South Korea a few times since 1998, I sincerely thank my senior colleagues at the Department of Religious Studies, Seoul National University, Korea, especially Professor Emeritus Jangtae Keum, a leading eminent scholar in the study of Korean Confucianism.

Lastly, I am also grateful to those people at the AKS for their great work in dealing with administrative work and publication information for this book project. In particular, I would like to thank Dr. Hyeon Kim, CEFIA Director; I am also grateful to So-young Park and Jae-Yun Jeong, researchers and administrative assistants in the Center's Division of Understanding Korea Project, who have communicated effectively with me for about two years. Finally, my warm thanks go to Dr. Philip G. Davis, my senior department colleague at the University of PEI, Canada, who kindly assisted me in copyediting the manuscript for English style.

Edward Y. J. Chung
Charlottetown, Canada



Note on the Citation and Transliteration Style

Korean terms, names, and titles are Romanized according to the standard McCune-Reischauer system, my ongoing preference, and Chinese counterparts according to the more popular Pinyin system. In Romanizing the Korean given names and pen names, I also follow the accepted style of excluding a hyphen between the two characters (syllables) of one's name: for example, Yi T'oegye (not T'oe-gye; a famous Korean Neo-Confucian); Yi Pyŏngdo (not Pyŏng-do; a modern historian of Korean Confucianism); and so on. Likewise, the Chinese counterparts are done by following the standard Pinyin style of having no hyphen between those two syllables: e.g., Wang Yangming (leading Ming Neo-Confucian); Tu Weiming (contemporary Chinese scholar); and so on.

For the primary and secondary Korean sources cited, only the Korean titles are given, as it is the standard style. To avoid confusion, the titles of the early Chinese classics and those Neo-Confucian sources are mainly given in Chinese only. Since the focus is on Korean Confucianism, most of

the romanized philosophical terms—which are often given in parentheses—indicate the Korean pronunciation first and then the Chinese with a slash between them: for example, *in/jen* (human-heartedness or benevolence); *ye/li* (propriety or ritual); *i/li* (principle); and so on. Nonetheless, there are some exceptions especially in Chapters 1 and 4, where I have indicated only the Chinese pronunciation when appropriate in discussing the key Chinese thinkers and texts. Overall, I have maintained this style consistently in all chapters and the notes.

My references to various sources are usually cited in the notes. Some of these notes are necessarily detailed but include substantial annotated comments which are provided for further discussion. This is partly why I prefer to use the endnote format, so I encourage the reader to consider some of these comments and additional points for his/her further reflection beyond my writing. When appropriate, certain quotations are given and documented directly within the text for the sake of the reader's convenience; in other words, I use both in-text and endnote citation styles in all chapters. I maintain the same styles with convenience and consistency in presenting not only modern Korean sources but also relevant Western translations and studies (e.g., Chan, Lau, de Bary, Tu, Ching, etc.), which will also assist the reader by indicating both the efficiency and reliability of these sources.

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1 Confucianism: Great Teachers and Teachings

1. Great Confucians

Confucianism originated in China during a golden age of Chinese thought, several centuries before the beginning of the Christian era. It is a common, living tradition in East Asia including Korea as well as among international East Asian communities around the world. Acknowledged as one of the so-called Three Teachings (*samgyo/sanjiao*) of China, together with Daoism and Buddhism, it has shaped many elements of culture over centuries in China as well as in Korea.

Is Confucianism a religion, a philosophy, a system of family values, a social ethics, or something else? Various scholars have applied different approaches to the study of Confucianism.¹ It is a unique tradition that puts primary emphasis on learning, self-cultivation, practical wisdom, and human relations. But we also need to study it as a religious tradition; in fact, Confucianism embodies an ancient religious foundation and its spiritual ideals.



From a comparative perspective, Confucianism has been considered as a “diffused religion”: an unorganized set of beliefs and values diffused throughout family, morality, social ethics, and public rites. As a kind of “lay spirituality” or humanistic religion (Ching 1993), it offers a set of values and spiritual teachings which are open to other forms of religion. Some scholars have looked at it in terms of its contribution to East Asia’s economic development as well.

This tradition developed from the teaching of Confucius (551-479 BCE), a reformer and educator from the state of Lu in modern Shandong province in northeastern China. So the word “Confucianism” is associated with the name Confucius, which is the Latinized form of his Chinese title Kong Fuzi (Master Kong), best pronounced as “Confucius” by the sixteenth-century Jesuits and other European missionaries in China. It centered around a moral, educational and spiritual project that sought to promote the “cultivated self,” “great community,” and universal peace through a unique set of scriptures and teachings.

Confucius did not view himself as the founder of a new philosophy or religion, but rather preferred to be called a “transmitter of ancient wisdom.” He was also a spiritual thinker whose teaching inspired a great



following about two centuries later when it was elaborated by Mencius (Mengzi, Master Meng; 372-289 BCE) and others. Mencius, second only to Confucius, offered a vision of idealism in terms of original human goodness. The teachings of Confucius and Mencius represented state orthodoxy from early Han China in 202 BCE to the end of China's imperial period in 1911, as well as in Korea until 1910, the end of the Yi Chosŏn Dynasty.

The tradition eventually culminated in Neo-Confucianism, the revival of Confucianism in Song China (960-1279) during the eleventh and twelfth centuries, which resulted in a creative interpretation of the earlier and existing teachings. The famous thinker Zhu Xi (1130-1200) provided a comprehensive system of Neo-Confucian learning, metaphysics, ethics, and spirituality. Three centuries later in the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), Wang Yangming (1472-1529) was the chief exponent of Neo-Confucianism who emphasized the unity of knowledge and action and the way to practice it morally in daily life. Zhu's and Wang's schools of Neo-Confucianism were gradually introduced to Korea and Japan, although the former generally became the orthodox school.

The Confucian tradition of Chosŏn Korea (1392-1910) produced many outstanding scholars such as Yi T'oegye (1501-1570) and Yi Yulgok (1536-1584). Chapter 3 in



this book discusses seven eminent Confucian scholars in Korea including T'oegye and Yulgok.

2. Confucian Classics

The sacred books of Confucianism are nine Chinese scriptures divided into two groups: the Five Classics (*Wujing*) and the Four Books (*Sishu*). All of the major teachings are preserved in these works, which greatly contributed to shaping the cultural identity and philosophical-religious traditions of East Asia as a whole. Confucius was believed to have spent his last years editing and completing certain portions of the Five Classics.

The Five Classics consist of the *Book of Changes* (*Yijing*), *Book of History* (*Shujing*), *Book of Poetry* (*Shijing*), *Book of Rites* (*Liji*), and *Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chunqiu*), most of which had existed prior to the time of Confucius. The *Yijing* is a manual of divination, probably compiled before the eleventh century BCE; its supplementary philosophical portion is collected in a series of appendixes. The *Book of History* is a collection of ancient historical documents, and the *Book of Poetry* (or *Odes*) is an anthology of ancient religious songs, hymns and poems. The *Book of Rites* deals with various rituals and the corresponding principles of moral conduct,



including those for the rites of passage and public religious ceremonies. The *Spring and Autumn Annals* is the work reputedly compiled by Confucius himself, for it is a historical chronicle about his home state of Lu from the eighth century to the early fifth century BCE.

The Four Books are the *Analects* (*Lunyu*), *Great Learning* (*Daxue*), *Doctrine of the Mean* (*Zhongyong*), and *Book of Mencius* (*Mengzi*). The *Analects* is the most reliable text about Confucius' life and teachings and his conversations with disciples. The *Great Learning*, attributed to Confucius, is a brief essay dealing with the practical dimension of Confucian life, including education, self-cultivation, family regulation, and political order. The *Doctrine of the Mean*, another brief text, contains some of Confucius' teaching organized with comments by others. It deals with the inner, spiritual dimension of self-cultivation with respect to "the oneness of Heaven and human nature." The *Book of Mencius* is a longer book written by Mencius himself and contains his idealistic philosophy of human nature and its implications for self-cultivation and benevolent government. The famous Neo-Confucian Zhu Xi called these texts "the Four Books," and emphasized them as containing the central ideas of Confucian thought, for which reason he wrote an immense amount of commentaries on them.



Scholars and students in China, Korea, and (to a lesser extent) Japan commonly studied the Five Classics, Four Books, and Zhu Xi's commentaries because they were the subjects of civil service examinations for over many centuries until the late nineteenth century.

3. Basic Confucian Teachings

The core Confucian doctrine is about “learning to be human,” and its ultimate goal is sagehood (self-perfection). It presents a unifying commitment to promoting peace, order, and prosperity through the transformation of the individual. It is basically concerned with the ultimate meaning of humanity and the best way of maintaining our ethical and social roles.

Confucianism therefore emphasizes human-heartedness (*in/ren*) and other virtues. *Ren* is variously translated as benevolence, love, compassion, or human goodness as the supreme, universal virtue, representing the source of all other virtues. It is the key to the way of wisdom, representing human qualities at their best. Confucius said: “*Ren* is to love all human beings” (*Analects*, 12:22). It is best expressed in the Confucian golden rule: “Do not do to others what you do not want done to yourself” (4:15 and 12:2). The proper cultivation



of *ren* embodies the Way (*Do/Dao*), which is meant to be extended to family, society, government, and beyond.

Another key teaching is propriety or ritual (*ye/li*). The tradition takes it beyond the formal religious ceremonies by including moral human relationships and a customary code of social propriety. Confucius taught it not as sacrifices asking for divine grace (blessing) or theistic salvation, but rather as appropriate actions and ceremonies. It governs the basic means by which *ren* is cultivated: ritual acts may enrich one's moral and spiritual growth. Confucius said: "To master oneself and return to ritual propriety is human-heartedness" (*Analects*, 12:1). This also means the so-called four-fold prohibition which Confucius emphasized for practicing propriety in daily life:

To master oneself and return to propriety (*ye/li*) is humanity (*in/ren*).... Do not look at what is contrary to propriety, do not listen to what is contrary to propriety, do not speak what is contrary to propriety, and do not make any movement which is contrary to propriety. (*Analects*, 12:1; Chan 1963:38-39; cf. Lau 1979:112)

Chapter 4 in this book discusses human-heartedness and propriety as the essential basis of the Confucian way of self-cultivation.



Besides formal daily manners, *ye/li* ritual may be as complex as the funeral and memorial rites for a deceased parent, so it implies the moral-religious dimension of the tradition. Chapter 9 in this book will discuss its implication for the Korean tradition of Confucian ancestral rites and family spirituality which will point to Confucianism as a living tradition in today's Korea.

Furthermore, righteousness is necessary for developing *ren*; one follows this virtue according to propriety (*ye/li*). It is also a natural moral feeling to do good. Mencius, in particular, developed a doctrine of righteousness with respect to personal cultivation, sagehood, and government. Mencius formulated an explicit theory of “the original goodness of human nature.”

Filial piety is another important virtue, which Confucius and others regarded as basic to family and social ethics. Also understood as family love, it enables children to grow up with filial respect for parents and a sense of propriety in social relationships.

One who follows these key virtues is called a noble or cultivated person (*kunja/junzi*). Confucius and others discussed this role model as “the human way,” and affirmed it as a necessary path to the ultimate attainment of sagehood in unity with “the Heavenly Dao.” Centuries



later, Neo-Confucian thinkers in China, Korea, and Japan generally interpreted these teachings in the similar ways, while compiling a large number of discourses, essays, commentaries, and anthologies.

Confucianism emphasized the so-called Five Relationships, maintained by the two principles of reciprocity and mutual obligation. They are not just biological or social relationships but are also based on moral-philosophical principles, revealing a fundamental belief in human dignity and equality. So the proper roles and virtues are emphasized: affection between parents and children; righteousness between ruler and subjects; distinction and harmony between husband and wife; order (and respect) among older and younger siblings; and trust among friends (*Mencius*, 3A:4). As Confucius said,

If the names and duties are not rectified, the language will not accord with truth; if the language is not in accordance with the truth, things cannot be accomplished (properly). (*Analects*, 13:3)

These ideals of human relationships are meant to be “reciprocal” and be practiced in various circles of society. Chapter 5 will discuss this topic in terms of modern Korean ethics of human relationships inter-connecting the



self, family, society, government, nation, and beyond.

The *Great Learning*, one of the Four Books of Confucianism, presents its famous teaching on the ultimate goal of learning: an integrated path to self-cultivation, family regulation, socio-political order, and then universal peace and harmony. As the first chapter articulates, “The Way of learning to be great consists of illuminating the virtue, renovating the people, and maintaining the highest good....” And this well-known passage also states:

The ancients who wished to manifest their clear character to the world would first bring order to their states. Those who wished to bring order to their states would first regulate their families. Those who wished to regulate their families would first cultivate their personal lives. Those who wished to cultivate their personal lives would first rectify their minds. Those who wished to rectify their minds would first make their wills sincere. Those who wished to make their wills sincere would first extend their knowledge. The extension of knowledge consists in the investigation of things. (Chan 1963:86)

Korean Neo-Confucians such as Yi T’oegyŏ and Yi



Yulgok frequently discussed this core teaching, which may be called the 8-step Confucian way of perfecting the self and the world. It begins from “the investigation of things” and continues through “self-cultivation” and “governing the state.” This teaching also has a cosmological and spiritual basis, as indicated in the *Doctrine of the Mean* (chap. 1): “What Heaven (*tian*) imparts to human beings is called human nature; to follow our nature is called the Way (Dao). Cultivating the Way is called learning.” It is to take human knowledge, action and experience seriously as the arena of moral-spiritual fulfillment. For this reason, Chapter 4 will discuss the Confucian way of self-cultivation as “learning to be human.”

The idealist inner dimension of Confucianism embodies a spiritual nature with respect to the Way and the oneness of Heaven and humanity. It is uniquely about the Confucian notion of transcendence: to perfect the self and the society, as bestowed by the Dao. Here we can see its spiritual teaching of sagehood.

In medieval China, the leading Neo-Confucian Zhu Xi wrote numerous commentaries and essays in order to strengthen and enrich the entire Confucian tradition by developing a comprehensive system of metaphysics, ethics, and spiritual practice in terms of *i/li* (metaphysical



principle) and *ki/qi* (physical energy or material force), human nature and emotions, good and evil, self-cultivation, and so on.² Overall, Zhu's interpretation emphasized the transcendent, virtuous reality of *i/li* over the physical, emotional and material world of *ki*, thereby calling for learning and moral-spiritual self-cultivation. This is basically how Yi T'oegye articulated such a philosophy in Korea centuries later.

The Zhu Xi school in Song China became known as “the ChengZhu school”³ of orthodoxy that offered a balance of study, self-cultivation, social ethics, ritual practice, and government administration. Other Neo-Confucians in China as well as Korea developed it further until the late nineteenth century. Yi T'oegye and Yi Yulgok are the two best-known scholars in the Korean ChengZhu school; Chapter 2 will explore its history, and Chapter 3 presents its eminent scholars and thinkers including them.

As I have noted at the beginning of this chapter, Confucianism, unlike Christianity or even Buddhism, is not an organized membership religion with clergy or a set of religious creeds. Given its historical and cultural background, it did not need to develop a central church, organized priesthood or worship services (Ching 1993). For many centuries in East Asia including Korea, the



Confucian tradition developed and promoted self-cultivation, public education, family, society, government, cultural development, and so on. It is continuously influencing elite culture, moral education, family values, social harmony and ethics, political leadership, and cultural identity in modern East Asia. In Chapters 5-9 we discuss these living aspects of Korean Confucianism and their modern changes.

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2 Korean Confucianism: A Short History

1. Early Korea

Korea has a long and rich tradition of Confucianism since its early historical period. Particularly during the Chosŏn dynasty (1392-1910), it strongly influenced Korean family, education, philosophy, religion, social and political systems, and daily ways of life. It is unclear precisely when Confucianism was introduced to Korea from China. Early Korea welcomed it together with the Chinese classics sometime around 108 BCE, when Han China established its colony at Lo-lang (Korean: Nangnang), a northwestern region of the Korean peninsula; Lo-lang was a district around modern P'yŏngyang in North Korea. The first use of the Confucian classics in the Korean peninsula took place in the Lo-lang period.

In the so-called Three Kingdoms period (57 BCE-668 CE),⁴ Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism were all officially accepted by the ruling class and



later spread to the commoners. In fact, each of the three kingdoms supported Confucianism not only as an important part of Chinese learning but also as an institutional means of maintaining its aristocratic power and its socio-political order. In addition, Confucian ritualism was important in official court ceremonies, including the veneration of deceased kings and other leaders. The people of Silla, for example, learned Confucian values and put them into practice in their daily life. Its impact on Silla society indicates that even some leading Buddhist monks tried to incorporate certain Confucian moral teachings.⁵ The Silla people had the custom of a three-year mourning for the death of parents, one that originates from the Confucian rite system.⁶ Another good example of Confucian influence is Silla's Hwarangdo (way of the flower youth), a quasi-religious and military academy for aristocratic sons that promoted the Confucian way of learning and self-cultivation.⁷ This academy was particularly important in welding Silla Korean society together, and the Confucian teaching of loyalty, its cohesive force, facilitated Silla not only to maintain the authority of the throne but also to unify two neighboring kingdoms.

In the Unified Silla period (668-935), Confucianism



began to rival Buddhism. In the eighth and ninth centuries, many Korean students went to Tang China and studied Confucianism at its national academy. Still, Confucianism was studied mainly in Buddhist temples and monasteries, the academic and religious centers of Unified Silla Korea. Meanwhile, Confucian scholars promoted it as an alternative system of learning and political ideology for building a bureaucratic state in which they and their followers could prosper under state patronage. The establishment of the state examination system clearly reflects Unified Silla's decision to do so as the basis of selecting government officials.

2. The Rise of Neo-Confucianism in the Koryŏ Period

On the whole, Confucianism was not important to everyone in the Three Kingdoms and Unified Silla periods. It played a subordinate role to the traditional ideas maintained by noble families and hereditary aristocrats, as well as by the Buddhist tradition. Not until the rise of Neo-Confucianism in the late thirteenth century, did the Confucian tradition begin to exert more and stronger impact on Korean thought, religion, socio-political systems, and ways of life.



In the Koryŏ dynasty (918-1392), King Kwangjong (949-975), for example, imitated Tang China in order to appoint many Confucian scholars as officials. The civil service examination system consisted of three major groups of examinations: composition, classics, and miscellaneous. During the Unified Silla period the criteria for selecting government officials tended to privilege the members of hereditary aristocratic families. However, the Koryŏ people of local elite groups had their opportunities to advance into the central bureaucracy. It was therefore possible for more young men to become government officials in Koryŏ Korea.

Meanwhile, Confucian scholars became interested in capturing the political power of the central government by urging that Confucianism be fully established as the state ideology. King Sŏngjong organized the national Confucian academy (Kukchagam) which quickly led to establishing Koryŏ's educational system on the basis of Confucian learning. He also sent Confucian scholars to the countryside in order to establish regional schools known as Hyanggyo and to teach students in local areas.⁸ Such an educational system, despite its high cost, expanded to produce a new elite class of scholar-officials. Many of the Koryŏ scholars also travelled to Song China



and studied the new form of Confucianism known as the ChengZhu school.⁹ This brought Song Neo-Confucianism to Korea from the late thirteenth century.

From the late Koryŏ period onward, the ChengZhu school in Korea began to receive strong support from the new class of scholar-officials. In the late fourteenth century, Neo-Confucian scholar-officials, especially Chŏng Mongju (1337-1392) and others, began to institute the state education system at the Sŏnggyun'gwan while attacking the Buddhist institutions. They strongly supported the Sŏnggyun'gwan as the national center for Confucian education.¹⁰ In the Chosŏn dynasty, it produced many eminent Neo-Confucians, including Yi T'oegye (1501-1570) and Yi Yulgok (1536-1584),



photo 1a Sŏnggyun'gwan Confucian Academy in Korea: Taesŭngjŏn Grand Confucian Shrine ©Sŏnggyun'gwan



photo 1b Sŏnggyun'gwan Confucian Academy in Korea: Taesŭngjŏn Grand Confucian Shrine - inside enshrining and honoring Confucius' and other ancestral tablets ©Sŏnggyun'gwan



photo 1c Sŏnggyun'gwan Confucian Academy in Korea: Myŏngnyundang Grand Lecture Hall ©Sŏnggyun'gwan



and continued to serve as the most important center for education, scholarship, and political influence in Korea up until 1910.

3. Neo-Confucianism in the Early Chosŏn Dynasty

Instead of his duty to fight the Ming Chinese forces in 1388, General Yi Sŏnggye withdrew his army from the Yalu River and marched toward the Koryŏ capital to seize political power. This led to the beginning of the Yi Chosŏn dynasty (1392-1910). Liberal scholar-officials, such as Chŏng Tojŏn (1342-1398)¹¹ and Kwŏn Kŭn (1352-1409), supported Yi's claims of the legitimacy of the new dynasty.

In a period of dynastic and ideological transition, Neo-Confucianism enabled General Yi to begin the Chosŏn dynasty as King T'aejo (r. 1392-1398), thereby enabling Korean Neo-Confucians to establish Song Neo-Confucianism as the new state religion and ideology in Korea. The new ChengZhu school from China offered them enough hope of creating a new political order out of the corrupt old society but also an ethical and religious system of thought that provided a refreshing set of goals and methods in order to legitimize the new dynasty. Among Yi's leading supporters was Chŏng Tojŏn who assisted his ascent to power. For the new elite class,



this meant a renewed commitment to the Confucian tradition which was considered to be the new intellectual and spiritual guide for scholar-officials to sustain a bureaucratic state.

4. Neo-Confucian Education and State Examination System

With the establishment and spread of Neo-Confucianism, the state examination system— which was put into effect in Koryŏ as a way of recruiting government officials—took on a more central role in the Chosŏn dynasty. The Neo-Confucian literati devised a system of administrative law infused with the moral and political ideals of Confucianism. They constituted the *yangban* gentry class representing the two privileged orders of civil and military officials.¹² Social classes of literati and commoners were separated according to birth and lineage. The elite class enjoyed their educational, social and political privileges as means of becoming government officials through the civil-service examination system or by the merit of their ancestors to the state. By the eighteenth century, almost all levels of the whole society became transformed into what Kim Haboush calls a Confucian normative society.¹³ Many elite families



and Confucian bureaucrats began to compete in power struggle. Indeed, Neo-Confucianism may have played a powerful role in generating an elite gentry society and a highly bureaucratic tradition; this has been the most popular area in current scholarship on traditional Korean history, society, and politics, one that need not be rehearsed here.¹⁴

From the early fifteenth century, Confucian education thus became a primary gateway to personal and family success. The literary licentiate examination system¹⁵ was based on skills in composing Chinese literary works such as poetry, documentary prose, and problem essays. The texts used in the examinations included the Five Classics, Four Books, Neo-Confucian commentaries, histories, etc. Hence, the government concentrated its efforts on developing its public academies, which was significant for scholar-officials in establishing a thoroughly Confucian society on the basis of the state examination and education systems. In Chapters 5 and 6 we shall explore the influence of this tradition on today's Korea.

These academies also served as the important local centers for Confucian scholarship through which many retired scholars were able to make a significant progress in the development of Neo-Confucianism from the middle of the sixteenth century on. During this period, the most



glorious period in the history of Korean Confucianism, many eminent thinkers emerged, including Yi T'oegye and Yi Yulgok. The following section briefly goes over this historical period.

5. The Golden Age of Sōngnihak in Sixteenth-Century Korea

So Kyōngdōk (pen name, Hwadam; 1489-1546), Yi Hwang (pen name, T'oegye), and Yi I (pen name, Yulgok) are known as the “Three Masters” of Korean Neo-Confucianism, who determined the unique patterns of its “philosophy of human nature and principle” (*sōngnihak*).¹⁶ Hwadam dedicated himself to the study of Song Chinese Neo-Confucianism and became the first Korean scholar to have formulated a philosophy of material force (*kihak*). Yi Hwang is commonly known by his literary (pen) name, T'oegye. He developed a highly sophisticated system of metaphysics, ethics and spirituality in many significant works he compiled during his fifties and sixties.¹⁷ Yi T'oegye and Yi Yulgok are often mentioned together as the two greatest minds of Chosōn Korea. Yulgok was a great scholar as well as a distinguished politician and reformer.¹⁸ He advocated Confucian principles to improve the contemporary political, economic, social, and military



institutions of the Chosŏn dynasty.

Followers of the Yŏngnam school became associated with T'oegye's "school of the primacy of principle" (*churip'a*), whereas Yulgok's disciples and their followers established "the school of the primacy of *ki*" (*chugip'a*). Beginning in the late sixteenth century, these two schools of thought emerged within the Korean Sŏngnihak, and they eventually began to criticize each other. Each school underwent further development for three more centuries in the hands of successive thinkers. Chapter 3 discusses Hwadam, T'oegye, Yulgok, and others in detail.

6. Practical Learning and Reform Confucianism in the 18th and 19th Centuries

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Practical Learning (*sirhak*) was a leading Confucian school in Korea. It is complex in origin but an important and influential school of thought. Sirhak scholars extended their inquiries to various practical areas such as government administration, economics, history, mathematics, geography, agriculture, literature, and Western religion and science.¹⁹ In general, however, they shared a common, reformist nature: the Confucian vision of how an orderly and prosperous society based on an ideal government could



be achieved and maintained successfully.

The Korean scholar Yi Ŭlho suggested that it is not wrong to call the Sirhak school a kind of “reform Confucianism,” for it reaffirmed the fundamental Confucian teaching of self-cultivation and good government. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, most Sirhak thinkers criticized the orthodox Sŏngnihak as an “abstract,” “impractical,” “non-reformist” learning. Yi Ik (pen name, Sŏngho; 1681-1763) and his later follower, Chŏng Yagyong (pen name, Tasan; 1762-1836), argued that the Korean Sŏngnihak failed to comprehend the fundamental Confucian ideas and values concerned with socio-political and economic matters. Defining the term *sirhak* in the context of promoting the daily lives of people, they made a clear-cut distinction between traditional Neo-Confucianism and themselves.

Undoubtedly, the Sirhak school was influenced by various existing ideas, approaches and concerns. In a historically dynamic and pluralistic setting, it tried to synthesize them, and its reformist, egalitarian and utilitarian spirit was different from the orthodox Sŏngnihak school. But it did not have a purely original foundation outside the Confucian tradition because its philosophical and ethical unfolding was essentially related to the study of Confucian classics, Neo-Confucian



thought, and practical aspects. The Sirhak school began as “learning for governing the country,” insofar as its essence pertains to the Confucian tradition of learning, self-cultivation, and government administration. Chapter 3 discusses its greatest scholar, Chǒng Tasan, in detail.

7. Early Twentieth-Century Reformers

In addressing social and political problems in the early twentieth century, Korean reformers charged that the collapse of the nation was due to the dominance of the orthodox Sǒngnihak school which was suited for “empty” theoretical study only. For them, it was therefore necessary to renovate Confucianism by promoting the Wang Yangming school, a rival Neo-Confucian tradition that developed in Ming China, by criticizing the ChengZhu school. Wang’s emphasis on actual moral practice was said to be far more important than Zhu Xi’s teaching of rational knowledge. When the Yi Chosǒn dynasty was about to collapse and become a colony of Japan, some leading reformers also preached the doctrine “the innate ability to do good,” the slogan of “practical action,” and reformist progress in the spirit of Wang Yangming’s teaching.²⁰

The spirit of Wang’s philosophy had a profound



impact on a new group of Korean modernists such as like Pak Ŭnsik (1859-1926) who advocated national independence when the penetration of Japanese and Western influence began to threaten Korea's sovereignty. Pak was also a famous historian who emphasized a sense of patriotic pride and respect. In his major historical works,²¹ he attacked Japanese policies of aggression and also provided a kind of spiritual support for the independence movement. For him, the collapse of the nation was due to the Sŏngnihak school's failure to reform itself. In his essay on "saving and renovating Confucianism," Pak argued that to make people happy again, Korea should promote only the Wang Yangming school as "people's Confucianism" in order to preserve happiness and peace in the world. He maintained that any knowledge one may acquire through the Sŏngnihak school is "without practical usefulness" in daily life. As I discussed elsewhere (Chung 1992a), although the Wang Yangming school did not enjoy full development in the Chosŏn dynasty, it played an important role in Korea's modern intellectual history by exerting a strong influence on the development of the new Sirhak school and the rise of modern Korean reformers in the early twentieth century.

To conclude this chapter, we need to note that for



many centuries in Korea, Confucianism has been an intellectual discourse, a code of family values, and a system of social ethics, as well as a political ideology. It has also developed and preserved its spiritual teaching and ritual tradition. And yet, it differs from other religious or philosophical traditions because it continues to integrate these aspects of Confucian culture in today's Korea, including learning, moral education, family values and ancestral rites, social hierarchy and harmony, political leadership, and cultural identity. In Chapters 5-9, we discuss these aspects of Korean Confucianism and their modern changes.



3 Eminent Korean Thinkers and Scholars

From the late fourteenth century, Korea began to produce numerous great Confucian scholars, many of whom also served as famous government officials. The names of these people include Chǒng Mongju (1337-1392), Chǒng Tojǒn (1342-1398), his colleague Kwǒn Kūn (1352-1409), Sǒ Hwadam (1489-1546), Yi T'oegye (1501-1570), Yi Yulgok (1536-1584), and Chǒng Tasan (1762-1836). This chapter presents a general overview of their contributions to Korean Confucianism and briefly covers each thinker's life, scholarship, and philosophy.²²

1. Chǒng Mongju: Neo-Confucian Learning and Morality

Chǒng Mongju (pen name, Poŭn) and others began to institute the state education system at the Sǒnggyun'gwan Confucian royal college in the late Koryǒ period. They



strongly supported the Sōnggyun'gwan as the national center for education. As a result, it eventually taught such outstanding students as Chōng Tojōn, Kwōn Kūn, Yi T'oegye, Yi Yulgok, and others, all of whom became influential Neo-Confucian scholars in Korea from the late fourteenth century.

Chōng Mongju was an influential scholar-official and also served as an instructor at the Sōnggyun'gwan. He was well versed in the Five Classics, Four Books, and Zhu Xi's commentaries.²³ His study of Song Chinese Neo-Confucianism was praised highly by others. He was even called the “founder of the school of principle (*ihak/li-hsüeh*) in Korea”; the term *ihak* is one of the common terms used in referring to the ChengZhu school associated with Song Chinese Neo-Confucianism. His contemporaries praised him as the first Korean who elevated the Korean tradition to the level of philosophical thinking and moral self-cultivation.

When General Yi Sōnggye claimed for the legitimacy of his new Yi dynasty through a military *coup d'état*, Chōng strongly opposed Yi's rulership by maintaining that it was an improper, immoral and unjustified act. As a result, he was murdered by one of Yi's sons, as the Koryō Dynasty fell. He is still highly admired by modern Koreans not only because he suffered martyrdom



to defend his faith, but also as an everlasting Korean paradigm of the Confucian virtues of loyalty and righteousness.

2. Chǒng Tojǒn: The Establishment of Neo-Confucianism as the New State Ideology

By taking advantage of Yi Sǒnggye's rise to power, scholar-officials began to establish Song Neo-Confucianism as the new state ideology and religion in Korea. Among Yi's close supporters was his leading scholar-official, Chǒng Tojǒn (pen name, Sambong; 1342-1398) who assisted his ascent to supreme power.²⁴ His first approach to reform was a revision of the legal code according to Neo-Confucian ethical and political ideals. As the principal architect of the new dynasty, he compiled major political writings such as the *Chosǒn Korea's codes for Governing the country* (*Chosǒn kyǒngguk chǒn*) and *Historical Mirror for Managing the World and Saving the People* (*Kyǒngje mu'gam*); these works provided a general framework for the polity and social order of the new dynasty, becoming the basis of his *Great Codes for Governing the Country* (*Kyǒngguk taejǒn*), the new dynasty's political canon.

At the same time, Sambong launched a serious



attack against Buddhism. He was the first Korean Neo-Confucian to formulate a systematic philosophical criticism of Buddhist doctrines, as indicated in his major essay, “Arguments against the Buddha” (*Pulssi chapp’yŏn*).²⁵ His conclusion was that the Confucian learning is much more valuable than Buddhist and Daoist teachings because of its emphasis on the objective reality of learning, self-cultivation, and socio-political actions.

3. Kwŏn Kŭn: Neo-Confucian Scholarship and Political Contribution

Kwŏn Kŭn (pen name, Yangch’ŏn; 1352-1409) was another important scholar-teacher who was a former dean of the national Sŏnggyun’gwan royal academy. He helped the new government in establishing Neo-Confucianism as the basis of its state religion and ideology. He did so by preparing influential scholarly works; e.g., the first Korean commentaries on Confucian rituals and ceremonies. These texts facilitated the promotion of the state rituals of the Chosŏn dynasty during its first century.

Like Sambong, he used Neo-Confucian doctrines to criticize Buddhism by emphasizing the unity of knowledge and action in Confucian learning. His most famous work is the *Diagrammatic Treatise for the Commencement of*



Learning (Iphak tosöl), the first major interpretation of Neo-Confucian thought in Korea. It was published fifty five times in both Korea and Japan. It consists of twenty-six diagrams, and the first diagram is especially significant because it summarizes the essentials of Neo-Confucian metaphysics and ethics.²⁶ Through Sambong's and Yangch'on's writings, Neo-Confucianism was presented as the new intellectual, ethical, and political guide for scholar-officials to sustain a centralized, bureaucratic Confucian state in Korea. Even economic issues were to be addressed in the Confucian context of administrating a political economy. These practical ideas and concerns were the focus of their statecraft school, which helped the Korean scholar-officials to develop Neo-Confucianism from the middle of the sixteenth century on. Indeed, this period was the golden age in the history of Korean Confucianism when many eminent thinkers emerged, including those discussed in the following section.

Eminent Thinker-Scholars from the Sixteenth-Century

4. Sö Hwadam: A Philosophy of Ki

Sö Hwadam (1489-1546), T'oegyö, and Yulgok are



known as the “Three Masters” (*samja*) of Korean Neo-Confucianism who determined its unique patterns. After turning his back on the political world of the Chosŏn dynasty, Hwadam dedicated himself to the study of Neo-Confucianism and became the first Korean thinker to have formulated a philosophy of material force (*ki/qi*; physical energy). In his short philosophical treatises, he articulated the role of *ki* in the process of all cosmic transformation. His whole philosophy emphasizes the idea of *ki* as the “fundamental substance” of the universe: *ki* is the formless and unlimited force and therefore creates and transforms all phenomena. Hwadam explained that life and death are due to the fusing and intermingling activities of *ki*, and the operation of everything is founded on this dynamic role of *ki*. Yi T’oegye later criticized Hwadam for misinterpreting Zhu Xi’s metaphysics of *i* and *ki*; by contrast, Yi Yulgok praised Hwadam’s originality.

5. Yi T’oegye: The Korean Philosophy of Principle: Neo-Confucian Ethics and Spirituality

Yi Hwang (1501-1570)²⁷ is better known by his pen name T’oegye, and is often referred to as the Master Zhu Xi of Korea. Prof. Tu Weiming of Harvard University and





photo 2a Eminent Confucian scholar: Yi T'ogye's portrait in color ©Bank of Korea in Seoul/ Mr. (Hyncho) LEE, Yu Tae





photo 2b Eminent Confucian scholar: Yi T'oege's portrait - Korean paper money, 1000 won

Beijing University called T'oege “a major source of inspiration for creative scholarship on Confucian philosophy and its modern scholarship” (Tu 1978:467).

The contemporary Japanese scholar Abe Yoshio (1977:9) considered T'oege as “the greatest scholar of the ChengZhu school in Korea.” T'oege's thought exerted a good deal of influence on the development of Neo-Confucianism in Tokugawa Japan as well. The Japanese scholars learned Neo-Confucianism partly through reading T'oege's editions of the Chinese writings.

T'oege was a quiet and introspective man, who always liked reading and study. Even in the early years of his life, he practiced quiet-sitting and self-reflection over what he learned from books, especially when his mind recovered its serenity at night. He also composed over 2,000 poems of various types.²⁸ In fact, the poetic and intuitive aspects of life influenced T'oege's philosophy, which emphasizes an inner-directed and contemplative way of life as well as his practice of self-cultivation. He served in a total of twenty-nine official positions, in which he utilized his scholarly and literary talents. But he always wanted to retire because he never had any political

ambition. Obviously, T'oegye's longing for an opportunity to devote himself to study corresponds to his strong dissatisfaction with the political problems of his time. He always wished to return to his home town in the beautiful countryside, so that he could fully devote himself to Confucian learning and self-cultivation. Furthermore, he was also busy with teaching and writing.

T'oegye compiled many famous works in his sixties. Among them is his greatest writing, *Sŏnghak sipto* (Ten diagrams on sage learning), a concise summation and commentary on the whole framework of ChengZhu Neo-Confucianism.²⁹ It covers the essentials of Neo-Confucian metaphysics, ethics and spirituality, together with T'oegye's diagrams and annotated comments.

For seven years from early 1559 to late 1566, T'oegye carried on his famous Four-Seven correspondence with Ki Taesŭng (pen name, Kobong; 1529-1592).³⁰ It was in this debate that he formulated a highly sophisticated moral philosophy and psychology of human nature and feelings, as well as their implication for self-cultivation in relation to the Neo-Confucian metaphysics and ethics of good and evil. In short, T'oegye emphasized the transcendent and virtuous reality of principle (*i*) over the immanent, physical and emotional world of material force, (*ki*), thereby calling for moral and spiritual self-cultivation.





photo 3a Eminent Confucian scholar: Yi Yulgok's portrait in color ©Ojukheon & Museum in Gangneung/ Mr. (I-dang) Kim, Eun-ho



photo 3b Eminent Confucian scholar: Yi Yulgok's portrait - Korean paper money 5000 won

His Four-Seven letters are an excellent source for understanding not only the ethical and spiritual dimensions of his Neo-Confucianism but also his wisdom, scholarship, and

mentorship. He emphasized the ultimate truth of human nature (as discussed in Chapters 1 and 4), thereby calling for a sagely learning that integrates intellectual insight, moral effort, and spiritual cultivation. T'oegye's entire thought centers around such a philosophy that greatly enhanced the moral and spiritual dimension of Korean Neo-Confucianism.

6. Yi Yulgok: Learning, Self-Cultivation, and Socio-Political Actions

Yi T'oegye and Yi Yulgok³¹ are often mentioned together as the two greatest minds of Chosŏn Korea. Modern Koreans respect Yulgok not only as a brilliant Neo-Confucian thinker-scholar but also as a distinguished politician and reformer who advocated Confucian principles to improve the political, economic, social, and military institutions of the Chosŏn dynasty. He had



many remarkable accomplishments during his short life of forty-nine years. No other Korean Neo-Confucians can match his far-reaching vision of history, practical learning, public service, and political reform.

At age five Yulgok began to commit himself seriously to mastering literary Chinese and basic Confucian classics, under the guidance of his mother. His beloved mother's early death in 1551, when Yulgok was only fifteen years old, gave him a deep sorrow about life. He built a small hut near his mother's grave, and there he mourned her for three years. His official career began when he was twenty-three years old; after that, his scholarly and official life was a busy and influential one.

Yulgok compiled many important philosophical, political and educational works. Among those presented to the king include the following: "Tongho Questions and Answers" (*Tongho mundap*), a famous political memorial consisting of eleven critical articles of political reform, and "A Model for Academy" (*Hakkyo mobŏm*), a major essay covering the Confucian goals and methods of educating youth. These works articulate the practical aspects of his thought dealing with government, economy, social reform, and education. For example, Yulgok presented an urgent call to abolish political corruption maintained by the traditional rules of government and



to establish new programs and strategies to bring about an economic and social progress.³² He also urged the liberation of talented slaves and advocated a reform measure that sons of secondary wives of the gentry class should be appointed to both civil and military government offices.

The *Sŏnghak chipyo* (Essentials of the learning of sagehood) is Yulgok's most famous philosophical work, which contains the fundamentals of Neo-Confucian metaphysics, ethics, self-cultivation, and statecraft. Furthermore, his famous "Four-Seven Debate Letters" articulated the crucial topic T'oegye had discussed a decade before. Yulgok gave a detailed and systematic interpretation of the Confucian philosophy of mind, human nature, and feelings and its implication for self-cultivation and practical learning.³³ In comparison to T'oegye who had no interest in politics, Yulgok was an active statesman who utilized Confucian principles and ideals in order to formulate his political thought concerning reform and progress. Yulgok emphasized the philosophical idea of *ki* (material force or physical energy) with respect to learning and self-cultivation,³⁴ which has its rational and moral grounds in the ChengZhu school of Neo-Confucianism.³⁵ Overall, his thought tends to emphasize a realistic and practical philosophy of *ki* that



eventually shaped his philosophy of practical learning and political reform.

7. Chŏng Tasan: Practical Learning (Sirhak) and Reform Confucianism

Chŏng Tasan (1762-1836)³⁶ systematized a major philosophy of practical learning (*sirhak*). Tasan, originally a student of the ChengZhu school in Korea, became the greatest name among the Korean Sirhak scholars. He also incorporated Western Learning (*sŏhak*; Catholicism and Western science)³⁷ in addition to studying not only Neo-Confucian writings but also compiling many commentaries on classical Confucian texts. For example, his *Complete Works* contains forty-eight volumes of his commentaries on the classics, thirty-nine volumes of political thought, twenty-four volumes of his commentaries on Confucian rites, and eight volumes of geographical studies.³⁸ Particularly using the Ching Chinese method of “classical learning” and “evidential learning,” Tasan challenged the authority of ChengZhu thought and Korean Sŏngnihak.

In his commentaries on the Four Books (including Confucius’ *Analects* and the *Mencius*), he charged that Chinese Neo-Confucianism and Korean Sŏngnihak





photo 4 Eminent Confucian scholar: Chong Tasan's portrait in color ©Bank of Korea in Seoul/ Mr. (Woljeong) Chang, Woo Seong



did not follow the original classics in the philological or philosophical context. Human nature is a dynamic entity that integrates intellectual faculty, moral virtue, and emotional behaviour. So Tasan emphasized virtue as something that actually engages in the practice of daily actions.³⁹ Self-cultivation depends on the sphere of practical ethics. Tasan therefore regarded Confucian learning as the way of self-cultivation and governing the people. This dual ideal frequently appears in his various essays and commentaries. Tasan also criticized his fellow Korean scholars for wasting their time and energy in an endless series of debates on metaphysical ideas and theoretical doctrines. In his famous political essays—such as *Design for Governing the Country* (*Kyŏngse yup'yo*) and *Essay on Leading the People* (*Mongmin simsŏ*)—Tasan presented an innovative set of specific political, social, and economic strategies for the Confucian framework of Chosŏn institutions. The latter essay reveals his disapproval of the ineffectiveness and corruption of government administration, as well as his sympathy for the difficult economic and social situations of the local peasantry. As Tasan pointed out, Confucian learning must combine “self-cultivation” and “leading the people.” By emphasizing the “people-based” principle, he therefore advocated two other norms: “loving the people” and



“protecting the people.”

Overall, Tasan attempted to reform government administration and improve the social and economic situation of the people. This certainly points to a prototype of modern democracy that addresses the basic ideology of social welfare and economic prosperity on behalf of the common people. In this regard, Tasan continues to receive a good deal of respect from today’s Korean intellectuals who have recently paid more attention to his life and thought.



4 Self-Cultivation: The Way of “Learning to be Human”

Confucian learning begins with the self because it “reflects on things near at hand.” The key phrase, “human nature endowed by Heaven,” is frequently quoted by eminent Confucian scholar-educators such as Zhu Xi in China and Yi T’oegye and Yi Yulgok in Korea. As the opening paragraph in the *Doctrine of the Mean* (one of the Four Books of Confucianism) states,

What Heaven imparts to human beings is human nature. To follow our nature is called the Way (Dao). Cultivating the Way is called education. The Way cannot be separated from us for a moment. What can be separated from us is not the Way. (cf. Chan 1963:98)

Indeed, this subtle passage was articulated cosmologically, morally, and educationally in order to emphasize that the human way of learning is mandated by the Dao. In his study of Confucianism and the *Doctrine of*



the Mean, Professor Tu (Harvard University and Beijing University) pointed out that the intellectual and spiritual heart of Confucianism represents what he called the “human aspiration for self-transformation” through its learning to be human (Tu 1985, 1989).

As we saw in Chapter 1 (Confucianism), Confucian learning is therefore a way of self-cultivation. This is eloquently articulated by the opening key passage of the first chapter in the *Great Learning* as well:

The ancient who wished to manifest their clear character to the world would first bring order to their states. Those who wished to bring order to their states would first regulate their families. Those who wished to regulate their families would first *cultivate their personal lives*. Those who wished to cultivate their personal lives would first rectify their minds. Those who wished to rectify their minds would first make their wills sincere. Those who wished to make their wills sincere would first extend their knowledge. The extension of knowledge consists in the investigation of things. (Chan 1963:86; my emphasis)

The eminent Neo-Confucians such as Zhu Xi in China and Yi T’oegye in Korea often discussed this



core teaching; we may call it the eight-step Confucian way of perfecting oneself and the world. It begins from “the investigation of things” and continues through “the rectification of the mind,” “self-cultivation,” and then “governing the state.” This is also supported by the *Doctrine of the Mean*, chapter 1, according to which:

...The Way cannot be separated from us for a moment. What can be separated from us is not the Way. Therefore the superior man [self-cultivated person] is cautious over what he does not see and apprehensive over what he does not hear. (Chan 1963:98)

A related teaching by Confucius is the so-called three-fold reflection. Zhu Xi and Yi T’oegy, for example, emphasized it as a way of *self-reflection* in the process of personal cultivation. This teaching is what Zengzi (Confucius’ disciple) learned from his master as follows:

Tseng Tzu [Zengzi in Pinyin] said, “Everyday I reflect on myself in three ways: first, whether in working for others I have not been loyal; second, whether in dealing with friends I have not been faithful; and third, whether I have not studied the transmitted teaching.” (*Analects*, 1:4; cf. Chan 1963:20 or Lau 1979:63).



As cited by Zhu Xi and T'oegye, Confucius also taught the “three-fold treasuring” as follows:

There are three things from which the self-cultivated person treasures most: first, to stay far away from fierceness and snobbishness; second, to be trusted closely when correcting an expression on his face properly; and third, to avoid meanness and contradiction when talking or making sounds. (*Analects*, 8:4; cf. Lau 1979:92-93)

Regarding daily moral cultivation, Confucius also emphasized the “four-fold prohibition” directly pertaining to the virtue of propriety as follows:

Confucius said, “To master oneself and return to propriety (*li*) is humanity (*ren*). . . . Yen Yüan [Yan Yuan in Pinyin; Confucius’ disciple] said, “May I ask for the detailed items?” Confucius said, “Do not look at what is contrary to propriety, do not listen to what is contrary to propriety, do not speak what is contrary to propriety, and do not make any movement which is contrary to propriety. (*Analects*, 12:1; Chan 1963:38-39)



The essence of self-cultivation is to extend human-heartedness (*in/ren*) to others through applying propriety (*ye/li*) to daily life. In fact, Confucius praised his disciple Yan Yuan for not breaking it “for three months” (*Analects*, 6:5). Zhu Xi in China and T’oegye in Korea often praised Yan Yuan as a great role-model for Confucian self-cultivation.

Mencius justified and strengthened the Confucian teaching by developing an idealistic moral philosophy of human nature. In addressing “the original goodness of human nature” (*Mencius*, 2A:6 and 6A:6), he emphasized our “innate ability” to do good. He specifically referred to the “the Four Beginnings [of virtue]” as the foundation of original human goodness as follows:

The mind-and-heart (*sim/xin*) of commiseration is the beginning of benevolence; the mind-and-heart of shame and dislike is the beginning of righteousness; the mind-and-heart of courtesy and modesty is the beginning of propriety; and the mind-and-heart of [moral discernment of] right and wrong is the beginning of wisdom. All human beings have these Four Beginnings (of virtue) just as they have their four limbs. (*Mencius*, 2A:6; cf. Lau 1970:82-83)



For Mencius, our moral mind-and-hearts (feelings) of commiseration, shame and dislike, and so on are naturally rooted in human nature, so they are the innate moral seeds of self-cultivation. This therefore confirms the Mencian doctrine that the original goodness of “human nature” is inherent in our mind-and-heart (6A:6; Lau 1970:163),⁴⁰ for which reason self-cultivation is said to be the universal path to perfection (sagehood).

According to the Neo-Confucian interpretation, learning starts from the “low level” of cultivating oneself in interaction with daily phenomena while “reflecting on things near at hand.” It begins with this moral and intellectual objective, and one must sincerely maintain patience and dedication because the Confucian way self-cultivation is never a fast track. In other words, one should overcome “the common defect of learning” such as “seeking quick success” or “taking a shortcut.” As Confucius said, make real effort with single-minded dedication for a long period of time.

Neo-Confucians such as Zhu Xi and T’oegye articulated this teaching also by emphasizing the classical teaching as follows: “Be orderly and dignified and be solemn and austere.” Self-cultivation needs to be done consistently and diligently, so that the mind-and-heart does not go wrong and moral principles become clear.



The teaching of “single-minded concentration” means controlling the body and the mind in self-cultivation. As Confucius said, “Hold onto it (the mind-heart) and it will remain, let go of it and it will disappear...” (*Mencius*, 6A:8; Chan 1963:63). So Mencius’ doctrine of “preserving the mind” confirms Confucian belief in “the original goodness of human nature.” For this reason, the Mencian teaching was frequently cited by Korean Neo-Confucians such as T’oegye.

They taught that it is important to integrate study and moral practice to the extent that students can develop the virtue of reverential seriousness as “the master of the self” in personal cultivation. T’oegye, like Zhu Xi, basically meant mind cultivation with reverential attitudes toward Heaven and Earth and other human beings. This teaching is essential to the Confucian way of wisdom; in short, the moral and spiritual core of Confucianism centers around this idea. As I discussed elsewhere (Chung 1995a, 2004), this is arguably a major development within the Korean school, attributed especially to Yi T’oegye, one that enriched the inner Confucian doctrine of sagehood and self-cultivation.⁴¹

In ordinary language, wisdom requires knowledge and ethical action through a self-reflective learning that respects oneself and others. This also reminds us in the



modern world about the broader meaning of Confucian self-cultivation, insofar as its global implication is relevant to our ways of virtuous life as well.

In traditional Korea, not only was moral education closely associated with the system of learning and self-cultivation, Confucian academies also maintained and promoted it at the heart of teaching and learning. In today's Korea, it still remains an essential component in the public school curriculum system. Consider the contemporary Korean word *kyoyuk* (education): it combines two single terms *kyo* (teaching) and *yuk* (nurturing), both of which originate from the Confucian tradition. This is generally common to Confucian-influenced countries including Korea and Japan. In other words, the Korean notion of education involves not just the North American context of study and intellectual growth, but also moral teaching, learning, and practice. This is also why the Sino-Korean word *sōngin*—which literally means a “mature person”—demands an accomplished moral-spiritual stage, not just a physical or academic growth. The public view is that Korean children should be taught to understand that the notion of a “good person” involves moral principles and proper manners (*yeŭi*; literally, propriety and rightness).

In the modern West, moral education was taken away



from the churches and other religious institutes with the creation of secular state schools under the influence of liberal education. In today's Korea, however, moral education continues to be essential to the Korean school curriculum system. Look at the ethics textbooks that are uniformly used in Korean and other East Asian schools: many of the core Confucian values (e.g., filial piety, respect, righteousness, propriety, etc.) are actually taught there. There is considerable attention to the inseparability of morality, society, and politics and the harmony of the self, family, and community; current scholarship on Confucianism and modern East Asia (e.g., Elman et al. 2002; Tu 1996, Smith 1991, Rozman 1991) has articulated this important point from various perspectives.

The educational implication of self-cultivation has been an important factor in maintaining personal discipline within the whole enterprise of moral education, society, and cultural identity in modern Korea, as I pointed out elsewhere (Chung 1994a, 1995b). To conclude, interpersonal relationships and social manners are usually expressed in close connection to Confucian values often under other labels, which helps to reinforce the public view that the proper understanding of these traditional values is a relevant part of educational curriculum there. In fact, this has contributed to promoting personal



cultivation, family solidarity, and social well-being. Chapters 5-7 will explore this and related topics about modern Korea.

Supplementary Readings:

Consult the following books, in addition to the short list provided at the end of Chapter 1:

- Ching, Julia. 2000. *The Religious Thought of Chu Hsi*. Toronto and Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Chung, Edward, Y.J. 2004. "Confucian Spirituality in Yi T'oegye: A Korean Interpretation and Its Implications for Comparative Religion." In Tu Weiming and Mary Evelyn Tucker, eds., *Confucian Spirituality*, vol. 2B, pp. 204-225.
- _____. 1995b. "Confucian Ethics in Contemporary Korea: A Common National Discourse." *Korean Culture* 16: 12-20.
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- De Bary, William. T. 1981. *Neo-Confucian Orthodoxy and the Learning of the Mind-and-Heart*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Gardner, Daniel K. 1986. *Chu Hsi and the Ta-hsüeh: Neo-*



- Confucian Reflection on the Confucian Canon*. Cambridge, Mass.: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University.
- Ivanhoe, Philip J. 2000. *Confucian Moral Self Cultivation*, 2nd ed. Indianapolis: Hackett Publication.
- Robinson, Michael E. 1991. "Perceptions of Confucianism in Twentieth-Century Korea." In G. Rozman, ed., *The East Asian Region: Confucian Heritage and Its Modern Adaptation*.
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- Taylor, Rodney. 1991. *Religious Dimensions of Neo-Confucianism*. Albany: SUNY Press.
- Tu, Weiming. 1989. *Centrality and Commonality: An Essay on Confucian Religiousness* [A revised and enlarged edition of *Centrality and Commonality: An Essay on Chung-yung*]. Albany: SUNY Press.
- Tu, Weiming, ed. 1996. *Confucian Traditions in East Asian Modernity: Moral Education and Economic Culture in Japan and the Four Mini-Dragons*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.



5 The Ethics of Human Relationships: Confucian Influence on Korean Family, Society, and Language

After visiting South Korea many times since the mid-1980s, I have come to the realization that Confucian culture exists at many integrated levels of South Korean society. As we have explored in Chapters 2 and 3, particularly in the Chosŏn dynasty (1393-1910) Confucianism affected Korean thought, ethics, social structure, political system, and ways of life. Current scholarship articulates its historical and socio-political patterns in Chosŏn Korea,⁴² as well as its philosophical and religious traditions.⁴³ By the early eighteenth century, almost all sectors of Korea accepted Confucianism, as the whole society had transformed into “a Confucian normative society.”⁴⁴ This chapter discusses the way in which Confucian values influence today’s Koreans. Our main goal is to understand why South Korea is fundamentally a Confucian-influenced society, at least in terms of its moral system and cultural identity.



1. Human Relationships

Central to Confucian ethics is a profound belief in the so-called Five Relationships (*oryun*): parent-child, husband-wife, sibling-sibling, friend-friend, and ruler-subject relationships.⁴⁵ According to Confucianism, socio-political order must begin in the family. As we have seen in the preceding chapter, these mutual relationships require self-cultivation as the universal basis for maintaining an orderly and harmonious society. It is to be regulated by the two principles of reciprocity and role specialization that are expressed in terms of moral virtues such as benevolence, propriety, righteousness, and so on.

The Confucian literature emphasizes the Five Human Relationships as the proper human way of life and culture, one that is taught by the sages according to the “mandate of Heaven.” These relationships are not simply biological and/or social, but also are founded on moral and philosophical principles. In a sense, Confucian ethics requires the continuous harmony of the moral, social, and political orders.

In Korea the human relationships were respected as part of the daily value system. Those who occupy the “prior” social positions were rulers, parents, husbands, older siblings and friends, and senior colleagues; those



who hold the “posterior” positions were subjects, children, wives, younger siblings and friends, and junior colleagues. Most Koreans believed that the former must show benevolence and protection in a virtuous manner, while the latter should demonstrate respect and collaboration in a trustworthy way.

There seem to be two basic trends of maintaining this value system: one toward hierarchy and order, and the other toward complementarity and harmony. Julia Ching, a leading scholar in Confucianism and comparative thought, said that Confucian ethics “served to strengthen a basic belief in human equality” (Küng and Ching 1989:89). Hierarchical distinctions basically meant role specialization, leadership, or age, rather than dominance and submission in any intellectual and ethical terms. In today’s Korea, proper human relationships cultivated within the Confucian-influenced family are therefore said to be essential for moral order and social harmony.

These Confucian values have been adjusting to the economic and institutional changes that have been introduced rapidly since the late 1980s. Koreans tend to think and behave as members of groups more than as individuals with absolute self-autonomy. From a Korean perspective, North America emphasizes too strongly



individual freedom, individual choice, individual right, and so on. At Korean home, school, or work place, any extreme expression of these ideas may be discouraged by the strength of cumulative values. In practical reality, an ordinary Korean person usually assumes a particular normative identity in the context of integrated settings.⁴⁶

These patterns do not mean that there is neither change nor conflict. One growing trend, especially among young men and women, is the stronger recognition of the self. However, regardless of religious affiliation, generation, occupation, and other related factors, most Koreans see reciprocity in human relationships as an indispensable daily value. With awareness of new social problems (including the decline of morality), Korean society has been reassessing the importance of traditional values. In Chapter 7 we will discuss this topic further in relation to globalization.

2. Korean Identity and Public Moral Discourses

Confucian ethics emphasizes moral and social values in terms of mutual reciprocity and responsibility. It calls for a unique sense of identity in the holistic network of the proper roles of the self, family, society, and government. In South Korea, it is essentially the value system that



still serves as the common, national discourse of Korean identity. In other words, interpersonal relationships and values are expressed in Confucian-related terms. For elementary, middle and high school students, textbooks on ethics or society also involve basic Confucian norms. The ethical education of children remains a family and societal responsibility.

In particular, filial piety (*hyo* or *hyodo*) is one of the most important values for Koreans regardless of their religious identities. It is the reverential virtue of children toward parents. What does this mean to North Americans? Children are expected to respect parents; reverence, loyalty, and compliance to parents are the trinity of filial piety. The significance of family morality and spirituality is clear from the Korean notion of ancestors as well.⁴⁷ Family continuity, solidarity, and harmony are emphasized. For this reason, the regular observance of ancestral (memorial) rites (*ch'arye* or *chesa*) at home or grave sites exemplifies Confucianism as a living tradition in South Korea.⁴⁸ Chapter 9 will discuss this topic in detail.

Undoubtedly, the family model influences other collective norms in schools, local communities, work places, and the entire nation. The extension of filial piety entails moral obligation to treat elders and superiors



with proper manners (*yeŭi*) and reverence and respect (*chon'gyŏng*). Loyalty (*chung*) remains vital in the spirit of patriotism and national identity. The practice of self-reflection is an important part of personal cultivation. Parents and teachers emphasize other Confucian-influenced values such as sincerity and seriousness for bringing about personal success and social prosperity.

Furthermore, the virtuous realm of human life is expressed in terms of what Koreans call *inchŏng* (human feelings), *insim* (human mind-heart), and *ŭri* (mutual trust; principle of righteousness), all of which are based on Confucian principles. The *inchŏng* is a moving feeling of sympathy or commiseration considered as the fundamental basis of all human relations; the *insim* refers to humaneness or mutual understanding; and the *ŭri* emphasizes mutual obligation to behave in a proper way toward another person or between members of any social group. Koreans may basically share these values as the essential part of daily moral culture, group identity, and interpersonal relationships, even though they do not necessarily identify themselves as Confucians religiously or do not make specific references to ancient Confucian sages, Neo-Confucian thinkers like Yi T'oegye, or their doctrines.



3. Influence on Korean Language and Society

As mentioned in the preceding section, the Korean language of morality and manners is often informed by the Confucian teachings. The Korean pattern of speech, gesture, and etiquette reflects Confucian-related values with the manifold levels of expressing propriety and politeness. For example, a fundamental characteristic of the Korean language is *kyongǒ* (or *chondaetmal*; honorific language); it signifies one's strong sensitivity to age difference, social status, occupation, degree of intimacy, and nature of previous interaction between the speaker, the listener, and any third-party referent. Each speaker needs to make a choice before uttering a proper pronoun, noun, verb, and verb ending; he or she usually bases the level of speech on combination of these factors. Because of the complexity of the *chondaetmal*, it is quite difficult for Westerners to master spoken Korean. As I explained elsewhere, this linguistic and social complexity is closely linked to Confucian-oriented group norms in South Korea.⁴⁹

Koreans often maintained this tendency of preferring family-related words and collective terms over self-centered, individualistic terms (signifying exclusive personal relationships) used in North America. Even if



we call this tendency a subordination of the individual to the group, it does not arise from a lack of basic human freedom and rights. To put it in another way, both Korean men and women consider themselves socially accepted and psychologically secure in a network of groups such as family, school, work place, and so on.

The public often emphasizes self-cultivation as the basis of maintaining the nation's socio-political order. Democratic government and economic growth may not be accomplished successfully without maintaining this. These public discourses remind us of the moral-social tradition of Confucianism, which can be effective in a country like Korea where the Confucian value system remains a common, national discourse. In fact, the public understanding of two modern Korean words, *kyŏngje* (economy) and *chŏngch'i* (politics), is closely connected to that language. The latter originates from two Confucian words: "to rectify the national affairs" and "to rule the country." The *kyŏngje* can be traced back to three other Confucian ideas: "to govern the nation," "to save the people," and "to regulate the family." These traditional ideas served as the core of the Neo-Confucian statecraft tradition in Chosŏn Korea.



4. Confucian Influence on Political Culture

The inseparability of morality and politics was emphasized in the entire Confucian tradition of East Asia. We need to understand it on its own terms relevant to South Korea. Commenting on Confucianism in modern East Asia, Tu Weiming correctly pointed out that: “The vital energy inherent in human relationships offers a way to transform society and to establish a particular political structure. For that reason, a dominant theme in Confucian political ideology is ethics, not power....Throughout East Asia, the state is seen as a mechanism for exerting social control and establishing and maintaining moral order” (Tu et al. 1992:10-11).

The Confucian idea of political order and social stability is important in Korea; the central government is still considered to order society, control the educational system, and so on. Of course, the close link between Confucian values, human relationships, social norms, and cultural identity occupies a major position in Korean attitudes toward politics and good government.

In South Korea democracy is already elevated to the status of an official ideology in many public institutions and organizations. Most people (including intellectuals) talk about not just democratic ideas and institutions,



but also the social and ethical-political obligation of the state in the traditional context of maintaining a benevolent and righteous government. We may argue that Confucian values and democratic ideas are integrated at the collective level. From a cross-cultural and interdisciplinary perspective, this is a fascinating phenomenon with certain implications for Western societies such as the United States, where democratic systems and processes do not necessarily involve moral values and norms. Mature Korean people maintain a nationwide tendency of considering morality, society, politics, and economy as inseparable. Is this tendency not in continuity with Confucian values, suggesting another sign of the living influence of Confucianism in contemporary Korean society?

5. Conclusion

On the whole, the Confucian value system remains the backbone of Korean society, and the family is the vital core of Confucian ethics. An average person has a collective sense of Korean identity; ideally he or she is expected to think and act according to social norms and interests. Even with the massive economic, social, and political changes since the 1980s, this pattern continues



to be important, although it is definitely becoming weaker and has gone through a process of transformation and assimilation. Chapters 7 and 8 will address this topic in detail.

The Confucian system can serve as a common discourse of Korean identity, and one's religious faith is usually not hampered by it. For example, a good Korean Buddhist or Christian would not worry about his/her own religious identity when he/she participates in interpersonal values and manners.⁵⁰ As far as the daily value system of family and society is concerned, most Koreans are naturally connected to the network of Confucian cultural heritage.⁵¹

To be “Korean” is identified not just biologically and regionally but also in terms of culture including language, family, ethos, and customs. It means much more than to be born of Korean parents and to learn Korean. It basically locates one within of the Korean social and cultural system. An average Korean person is concerned with what it means to be an individual *within* a family, group, and society. In other words, there is this public awareness of maintaining these social norms in South Korea, a nation influenced by Confucian values.



6 Education, Confucian Values, and Economic Development in Twentieth-Century Korea

This chapter presents the interplay between Confucian values and economic development in Korea from a broad and integrated standpoint of several qualitative factors involving cultural identity, education, social values, political economy, and so on. The focus of this chapter is to discuss the question of how Confucian values contributed to South Korea's recent economic success.

1. Western Views on “Confucian Capitalism”

It has been pointed out that the West had dwelt a lot on concrete economic ideas and facts such as trade, stock market, technology, inflation, political issues, and so on, but too little on the educational, social and ethical ones. It is now very sophisticated to talk about the global phenomenon of economy because its language of



capitalism, wealth and power is conditioned by different cultural factors and norms.

What unites Japan and the four little dragons (South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore) for their economic success over the past several decades? Since the early 1980s, the West has studied this topic in terms of Confucianism and education. Several interpretations include such common phrases as “industrial Confucianism” and “Confucian capitalism,” pertaining these countries. There is general agreement that Confucian values indeed made a significant contribution by offering favorable cultural factors. For example, Vogel (1991; *The Four Little Dragons...*), a sociologist at Harvard, explained the economic success of the Four Little Dragons in terms of “industrial Neo-Confucianism,” referring to Confucian contribution to education and industry. Tai’s *Confucianism and Economic Development: An Oriental Alternative* (1989) is another relevant work on a similar topic. Peter Berger (1988; *An East Asian Development Model*), a leading comparative sociologist of religion, addressed the Confucian culture of political economy and capitalism in East Asia. In addition, Rozman’s edited *The East Asian Region: Confucian Heritage and Its Modern Adaptation* (1991) was a comparative study of modernization comparatively



in China, Japan, and Korea.⁵² We also have some other works on education and Confucian culture, such as Smith's edited *The Confucian Continuum: Educational Modernization in Taiwan* (1991).

2. Education, Social Competition, and Economic Success in South Korea:

Commenting on South Korea's social economy in the 1960s and 1970s, Edward Mason pointed out that an emphasis on academic education was "a major Confucian influence on the character of the modern blue- and white-collar work force" (1980:378). Addressing Confucianism in twenty-century Korea as a system of "political and social values," Robinson (1991), a historian of Korea, pointed out that Confucian ideas made a contribution to the promotion of higher education, social order and political authoritarianism in South Korea. Palais (2002), a specialist in the study of Chosŏn Korean politics and policies, has similar perspectives about "Confucianism and economic development in South Korea." However, this subject matter is not only about education and the socio-political order, but also pertains to other factors as well.

On the whole, the binding network of self-discipline,



moral education, family culture, social competition, group productivity, political economy, and national identity played a crucial role in the process of economic development in South Korea. The strength of these *cumulative* values, which is associated with the Confucian self and community, played a major role in South Korea's economic success. As I articulated elsewhere (1994a and 1995b), it contributed to the management of human relations and norms and the promotion of group harmony and productivity in workplaces. In South Korea, those values associated with Confucian principles are experienced in a holistic setting. We may call them social genes in almost every Korean person. For example, the five human relationships and their changing implications represent a cultural system based on the continuous harmony of moral, social and political orders, thereby carrying certain economic implications.

As we have seen in Chapter 4, ethical education was included in the Confucian way of self-cultivation, and this continues to be essential in South Korea's curriculum system. Its role has been a crucial factor in giving a personal-ethical discipline to the whole enterprise of education and public life.

Furthermore, the intensive entrance examination system in South Korea reflects a social realm



characterized by academic authority: those who succeed view themselves, and are viewed by others, as a meritocratic elite. This also made a positive contribution to the nation's educational and social competition which was grounded in Confucian values; in the long run, it facilitated economic growth on both personal and collective levels. The public view is that education should promote not just intellectual learning but also moral education and its implication for the interplay between values, social competition, and economy.

3. The Mother's Role and Contribution

Another central aspect of Confucian culture raises the question of family culture, the mother's role, and economic success in East Asia. I pointed out elsewhere (1994a and 1995b) that the family remains a moral educational unit that consistently maintains Confucian-influenced values in South Korea.

We have to address the topic of how women working at home contributed educationally and economically. Recent studies and statistical results on the school systems of East Asia and North America indicate an interesting comparative fact. It is said that North American schools teach students how to think and study



creatively and critically. However, on any objective scale of international tests, the Korean, Chinese, and Japanese students always do better in the key subjects including math, science, and writing. There can be various reasons for this success in East Asia: elite culture, competitive entrance examinations, more school days, tougher school discipline, prep schools and private tutors, and so on. These factors are basically influenced by the elite Confucian mentality that emphasized academic excellence, personal development, and social success.

And yet, the most important contributor is arguably the Korean mother's role at home. Among Koreans and other East Asians, the real intellectual and cultural transmitter in the early lives of young children is overwhelmingly the mother. In a detailed article on Confucianism and women in modern Korea, I discussed a similar topic in terms of continuity, change and synthesis. On the whole, the relationship between Confucian values and the mother's role is an important topic that needs to be studied further.

4. Confucian Values and Political Economy

As mentioned in Chapter 5, the Confucian tradition is intertwined with an agricultural and political economy



within a family-centered social structure, a hierarchical central bureaucracy, and an authority-based national polity. This is partly why Pye (1985) emphasized Confucian culture as an essential part of the idea of political authority in East Asia. The authoritarian political legacy is also said to have facilitated a rapid economic development in South Korea, for instance.

However, this topic is related to other factors as well. In South Korea, the modern Confucian notion of political leadership still plays a vital role in economic development. Tu Weiming (1992), a leading scholar in Confucian Studies, recently articulated Confucian influence on political order, the state, and economic development in modern East Asia: The public generally expects the central government to impose strong leadership in many areas. Accordingly, the economy is expected to be directly under some authority of the state in ruling the nation. The state therefore leads or promotes commercial and industrial developments.

Regarding the South Korean case, it is generally believed that the best government ought to engage with many levels of society; this is expressed not only in the political and economic context, but also in ethical, educational and social terms. On the whole, the South Korean economy has been under full state control under



rigid regulations; this was indeed productive at least until the 1990s. In recent years, however, it has generated a major problem, as the economy has become very complex. The problem is usually addressed in terms of financial-political collusion and corruption involving the so-called *chebŏl* entrepreneurs and groups. In a capitalistic Western sense, this may be a major political weakness of South Korean economy.

5. Conclusion

The diffused nature of academic competition, group loyalty, and group productivity is incorporated into the national discourse on capitalistic economy and national development in South Korea, which seems to reveal something like an integrated Confucian mode of educational-social-and-economic thinking. To conclude, we need to recognize the influence of Confucian categories on the structure and operation of specific economic, political, and educational institutions in modern Korea



7 Confucianism and Globalization: National Identity and Cultural Assimilation

This chapter explores the interplay between tradition and globalization in South Korea by focusing on the situation and role of Confucian values. There are some fascinating things about this topic. Can globalization do away with national identity and cultural values? The notion of “globalization” in South Korea seems to be understood by addressing certain cultural factors. What is the future of Confucian values in Korea? Is there any fruitful interaction between tradition and globalization?

1. Confucian Values and National Identity

There is some ambiguity about the “religious identity” of Confucianism, as I pointed out in Chapter 1.⁵³ This is usually because East Asians generally do not acknowledge Confucianism religiously as explicitly



as organized religions like Christianity and Buddhism. As we explored in Chapters 5 and 6, Confucianism is a living tradition in South Korea, a religiously pluralistic and competitive country, where the Confucian mode of thinking influences various levels of society. Confucianism exists as a diffused tradition ethically and culturally, and its basic patterns are recently reported in scholarly Korean works and public surveys.⁵⁴ Koreans are Confucians at least in the cultural context of maintaining these traditional values to varying degrees.

Family Values and Rites

Family culture in South Korea is a key example of influence by the Confucian tradition. Confucianism places primary emphasis on proper human relations and the cultivation of virtue, so as to enrich human nature, family, and society. Family values remain the backbone of changing Korean society. In the traditional context, family is believed to be not just a biological-social unit, but also a living educational-ethical center for human relationships. The moral-spiritual foundation of the Confucian tradition remains the family, whose broader implications naturally expand to education, work ethic, work places, group dependency, etc. This is also said to have contributed to South Korea's rapid economic development in the past



three decades, as we have learned in Chapter 6.

Core family values are generally Confucian in today's Korea. It is reasonable to point out that many Christians and Buddhists assimilate these values. As mentioned in Chapter 10, we can easily see a similar pattern of the family tradition among Korean or other East Asian communities in the large multicultural cities in North America such as Toronto, Vancouver, New York, Los Angeles, etc. Chapter 5 also discussed how family morality is essentially Confucian in nature: in particular, parental benevolence, filial piety (*hyo*), and mutual obligations are emphasized for family love and solidarity. In this regard, the family in today's Korea maintains an essential life of its own on its own terms; this is central to Korean identity and Confucian cultural moral heritage. For this reason, many Korean families continue to observe their ancestral memorial rites at home or grave sites on special national holidays. These family rites continuously influence South Korea with the modernized Confucian style of ritual propriety. Chapter 9 will discuss this topic further in terms of ancestral rites and family moral spirituality.

Social Ethics and Korean identity

Family values associated with Confucianism help



promoting moral education, social binding, and Korean identity. Confucian social ethics is based on the so-called Five Relationships, which are intended to be regulated by the two principles of status reciprocity and mutual obligation. So it emphasized a fundamental belief in human dignity, moral equality, and social harmony, which leads Koreans to consider themselves socially engaged and psychologically accepted in a network of groups. Proper human relationships are usually seen as a desirable part of maintaining group life; as I pointed out in the preceding chapter, this is actually taught in school textbooks on ethics and society. So people are aware of a hierarchical social structure, have a sense of group belonging, and maintain collective formalism and norms. The ethical part of daily Korean conversations is often reminiscent of the basic Confucian discourse: i.e., higher learning and personal cultivation are ideal for successful career, family reputation, social competition, and cultural prosperity.

It is also worthwhile to note that the integrated strength of these values played a major role in competitive education, group dependency, and productivity in workplaces, most of which contributed to South Korea's rapid economic success during the past three decades. As we have explored in Chapter 6, Confucian ideals, often



under other names, guided the nation in the direction of economic development.⁵⁵

Political Culture and Moral Ideals

Traditionally Confucian ethics emphasizes benevolent government (sage-ruler) over despotic government (tyrant ruler), together with the virtues of humanity, righteousness, and wisdom. It is worthwhile to note Confucian influence on political culture in East Asia.⁵⁶ Belief in the inseparability between politics and morality occupies a major position in Korean attitudes toward the central state and its exemplary leadership. The public often asserts that the best government ought integrate many public sectors of society, as is consistently echoed in the Korean press. Most people talk about not just democratic government and policies, but also the ethical and social obligations of the central state. Indeed, this kind of public awareness is often informed by the traditional values associated with Confucianism.

The basic insight is contained in the ideal of self-cultivation as the root of political leadership and social well-being. So it seems that the public utilizes an ethical language which is reminiscent of the Confucian teaching, emphasizing the unity of personal discipline, family regulation, and social-political orders. This kind of public



discourse has been effective in a country like South Korea, where the heart of political culture embodies traditional values.

2. Tradition and Globalization: Cultural Assimilation

Urbanization and industrialization have boosted the Korean people into modern standards of living. Furthermore, the modern West is something that has to be considered seriously because of its economic and political impact on South Korea and other East Asian nations. The process of “modernization” (*hyöndae hwa*) in South Korea will continue engaging some elements of “Westernization” (*söyang hwa*) as well as the growing trend of “globalization” (*kukjae hwa* in Korean). So the Confucian value system is readjusting itself to the rapid economic and social changes introduced since the 1980s. The recent statistics and surveys indicate many significant developments. In short, the younger generations’ perspectives now maintain a much stronger impact on many economic and social aspects of Korean society.

They often point to contemporary ideas, setting the new standards for self-identity. Since the beginning of this century, popular home dramas and talk shows on T.V., for example, portray them as the so-called “new generations”



(*sin sedae*), “internet generations” (*netijŭn sedae*), or “global generations” (*glllobal sedae*). Their personal and social images seem to be as contemporary and liberalized as their peers in North America, for instance.

On the whole, we certainly see enough influence of urbanization, democratization, market economy, high technology, and globalization on these social changes in South Korea. Surely, a great deal of transformation in the Korean family system and social relationships has occurred. The contemporary notion of self (and/or family) now co-exists with the Korean-Confucian tradition of values.

Certain new issues have also emerged in the nation. Since the 1990s, South Korea tried to implement several reform measures partly under the influence of global Western ideas and institutions such as political accountability, business transparency, etc. On the whole, non-egalitarian norms and unfair stereotypes are strongly challenged not just by younger generations themselves, but also by the new legal and social standards. For example, the one-sided, authoritarian legacy such as the subjugation of inferiors and juniors to superiors and seniors is highly criticized and thus being reduced. This trend of change surely pertains to the globalizing process that accommodates (if not welcomes) certain Western



ideas, as evidenced in the persuasive power of democracy, liberty, market economy, and privacy.

Nonetheless, the public is also becoming concerned with an increasing individualism, which has been criticized for “neglecting (traditional) moral values.” This neglect is said to be a side-effect of accepting Western ideas and emphasizing economic and social globalization. This is now stimulating certain intellectuals to debate the extent to which “globalization” can damage national identity and values.

The generational gap issue, which may have something to do with the Korean value system, is not as serious as the economic, employment and political problems. In fact, the public often expresses the relevance of political responsibility for economic development and social well-being in a common-sense language reminiscent of Confucian ethics. The implicit language embedded in various public discourses indicate an ethical tradition in terms of political leadership, nation-building, and cultural prosperity. In other words, it utilizes a modern moral-political language reminiscent of Confucian humanism. The nation’s value system is often mentioned in relation to social justice and the people’s well-being. South Korea not only engages global ideas and new concerns but also recognizes traditional values



and assimilates its moral tradition as a key element of Korean identity.

In other words, the idea of change—whether educational, economic, or political—is not necessarily taken to be either a conscious rejection of the past, or a total departure from the respected tradition. The Korean people’s attitudes toward traditional values also vary according to certain generational, economic, occupational, and gender-related factors. There are two basic trends: the older one requiring hierarchy, authority, and order; and the other, growing pattern toward reciprocity, harmony, and mutual duty. And our recognition of the latter trend would help us to avoid stereotyping Confucian ethics only negatively and to understand its contemporary relevance positively. In general, the notion of “Korean identity” usually engages the basic human relationships and values. In other words, there is more public desire for harmony rather than confrontation between the traditional values and the new global standards.

3. Conclusion

Confucian humanism remains in the backbone of Korean society. Its role in the interplay between



tradition, globalization, and national identity is significant from the Korean perspective of the 2000s. This shows not just different ways to debate the whole idea of globalization, but also the need for reexamining the meaning of tradition. In this regard, I note that the word “globalization” is not something fully understood if we discuss it only in terms of economic things such as capitalism, market economy, economic policies, technology, etc.

In a broader sense, the Korean understanding of globalization appears to be conditioned by certain cultural values and customs. So the actual process of globalization could take different forms depending on these cultural factors. The Korean notion certainly embodies some “Western stuff” and its globalizing trends. However, we cannot ignore the fact that some of these imported, international elements are also integrated with Korea’s traditional values and ideals.

What we find fascinating about the ongoing situation of Confucianism in South Korea is that there seems to be some mutual balance between traditional values and global mentality. And we can learn more about this trend of East-West marriage in the coming years.



8 Modern Korean Women and Confucian Values: Change and Assimilation

This chapter discusses women and Confucian values in modern Korea. The subject of Confucianism and women in the Chosŏn dynasty (1393-1910) has been studied to some extent by historians, while other works articulated Chosŏn Korea's social and political structures.⁵⁷ However, it is important to understand the interplay between women and Confucian values in modern Korea as well.⁵⁸

1. Women and Family in Confucianism

In modern times, East Asian countries have been criticized for utilizing Confucianism in their legacies of maintaining a rigid tradition of patriarchy, authority, and hierarchy. Critics often blamed it for subordinating the status of women to men not only at home but also in many social and political circles. The mainstream view



that Confucianism resulted in a “subjugation” of women stems especially from the recent feminist critiques of its historical and social repercussions. These interpretations denounce Confucian ethics for promoting a “patriarchal” and “androcentric” oppression of women in traditional East Asia.

The “patrilineal” Confucian notion of family had an immense impact on the lives of women in Korea, China, and Japan, which often involved male guidance or control over all stages of female life by father, husband, and then mature son. Marriage was considered mandatory, as women played the central role in preserving their husbands’ families and clans. Before marriage, a young woman was to train herself in the four aspects of feminine character: virtue, speech, comportment, and work (*Book of Rites*, ch. 12 and 44). Thus, education for Korean girls normally meant to prepare themselves for the married ideal of a “wise mother and good wife.” When a daughter married a man, she was immediately called “an outsider leaving (her natal) family.” In other words, she joined her husband’s family, and her domestic duties included serving him and his parents, thereby maintaining traditional customs and family reputation as well as educating children.

We need to note that Confucian humanism



emphasizes interpersonal relationships in terms of ethical values and norms. As de Bary pointed out, “the Confucians sought to reconcile the egalitarian claims of a common humanity with the need for a hierarchy of values, which they saw as a natural and essential outgrowth of...civilizing activity and also indispensable to the maintenance of any social order” (de Bary and Bloom 1979:6). Among the so-called “Five Relationships” (parent-child, husband-wife, sibling-sibling, friend-friend, and ruler-minister),⁵⁹ the parent-child, ruler-minister, and husband-wife relationships are known as the “three bonds” (*samgang* in Korean; *san-kang* in Chinese) that underscored the principle of reciprocity as the universal basis for maintaining human relationships. Ideally, the former had to show guidance and instruction in a virtuous and caring manner, while the latter was expected to demonstrate respect and compliance. As Julia Ching pointed out, Confucian ethics has “served to strengthen a basic belief in human equality” (Küng and Ching 1988:89).

Indeed, the Confucian conjugal relationship precedes all other human relationships. In analyzing various Confucian texts written for women, Kelleher pointed out that: “She [a Confucian woman] has a stake in the maintenance of the family order and thus submits to



the discipline of family relationships” (1989:147) This statement suggests that in coping with Confucian culture, Korean women’s concerns for maintaining family and social harmony were central to their practice of collective norms and roles.

Confucian ethics emphasizes the principle of reciprocity for the duality of gender in terms of *yin-yang* unity, role specialization, and harmony. Here, we need to understand the common Korean proverb that the husband-wife relationship means the “one mind-and-heart and same body.” This Sino-Korean symbol entails an awareness of biological and psychological diversity and unity between male and female; more significantly, it underscores the distinctive-yet-complementary aspects of the conjugal relationship.

2. Women and Confucian Values in Korea

In Korea, especially from the sixteenth century, Neo-Confucianism played a powerful role for both men and women in maintaining moral and social orders. But the politicized manipulation of this role has engendered an elite bureaucracy on the one hand and an authoritarian tradition on the other hand. For five centuries of Confucian feudalism in Chosŏn Korea,



family symbolism and its social structures are thought to have sustained a patriarchal tradition. Korean women were required to be serious in learning and practicing the “feminine arts”: virtues such as chastity, obedience, and modesty.⁶⁰ By the eighteenth century, the Chosŏn dynasty generally accepted this tradition, while Korean society was transforming itself into what Kim Haboush calls “a Confucian normative society” in the context of maintaining “patriarchy” as well (1991:91-103).

Furthermore, Buddhism and shamanism provided Korean women of all classes with an important way of religious life in personal local settings, for women were the special devotees of these two traditions. Post-World War II ideological confusion permitted traditional forms. Since the early 1980s, democratic ideologies have become stronger. As economic prosperity gained its full momentum in the mid-1980s, South Korea experienced more significant changes including the higher status of women and their strong roles in society. Korean women made a definite departure from the status quo, taking necessary steps to adjust to the new needs of a modern society. The traditional “ideal of womanhood” was still expressed in terms of being a “wise mother and good wife” (*hyŏnmo yangch’o*) based on Confucian values. As a contemporary bride, a married woman was expected to



fill the position of “housewife.”

The husband-wife harmony was expressed in terms of “public-domestic” and “out-in” roles. When married women meet, they usually saw each other’s social status in terms of not only her education, occupation, and even wealth, but also those of her husband and children. To put it in another way, a woman usually found herself socially “accepted” in a network of her social groups such as marriage, family, school, work place, and so on. This combination of acceptance and security was predicated on the public belief in traditional norms.

Since the 1980s, most mothers have become deeply involved in the education of their children. This is known as the phenomenon of *kyoyuk ōmma* or “educational mother,” a commonly used term for a mother actively engaged in a social mania for pushing her children upward in their education. The mother’s role at home in South Korea certainly contributed to educational and economic development. This dimension of family life and educational culture is said to be an essential part of the Confucian tradition. Much of the mother’s role focused on influencing the child’s education, school, and teachers.

Since the 1980s, new democratic ideas and alien values filtered down to the interpersonal and organizational levels quickly. As a result, there emerged



new patterns of change especially with respect to women's status and gender relationships.

3. Change and Assimilation in Today's Korea

Since the early 1980s, rapid industrialization and urbanization have advanced Korean women into the modern standards of life that challenged traditional feminine values associated with Confucianism. While traditionally viewed as the inner guardians and managers of their country's well-being, they have become the powerful architects of economic progress and social change in the past three decades. As a result of the far-reaching economic and social changes set in motion, democracy, liberty, and privacy are all elevated to the status of an official ideology in most institutions and work places in today's Korea, and egalitarian and Western values have already gained much more authority. There now exist old and new ideas, values, and ways of handling things and human relations.

In today's Korea, the younger generations' perspectives in both urban cities and rural areas are exerting a much stronger impact on all aspects of society, as indicated in recent Korean statistical surveys. The identity and roles of women have changed rapidly



according to new standards and needs. Accordingly, traditional family values are coping with this changing social reality. Some generational gaps and their ideological issues exist here and there because college students, young career women, or young husbands and wives express more individual freedom, liberty, and privacy, thereby following a number of Western and global patterns. College education for women has expanded rapidly since the early 1970s. All daughters in Korea want university education not only for intellectual maturity and good employment, but also as a basic requirement for finding a good marriage prospect in a Confucian-based society, where one's educational level is a major determinant of one's status and ability.

Korean women have now become far more active in various occupational, institutional and social arenas on the national level; the employment rate for women in the professional and managerial works strongly increased since 1980s. Several obvious reasons for this trend should be noted here: first, more job opportunities for women; second, more women seeking professional careers; and third, a much more positive attitude toward working wives or mothers, rejecting the traditional custom that "women should work at home"; and so on.

As indicated in the recent public statistics, the average



marriage ages for men and women have been increasing rapidly in the last two decades.⁶¹ This also demonstrates a new trend where more women delay marriage for few common reasons: higher education; professional career; no interest in marriage; heavy financial burden for marriage and raising children; and so on. Overall, the traditional view of daughters as “outsiders after marriage” no longer exists. This also indicates an increasing trend of conjugal intimacy and privacy for married women. Most husbands now share household duties with their wives because of changing social attitudes toward women’s roles, which no longer tolerate the traditional taboo that “no male should step into the kitchen.” Certainly, all of these changes suggest that women’s status and roles have improved substantially, and that the wife has much more decision-making power in relation to all family matters. In other words, the Confucian tradition of patriarchy and the weight of a patrilineal family system and father-son relation have weakened significantly or even no longer exist.

The average size of family has been shrinking every year. Until the mid-1980s, to have two or three children several years apart was considered most ideal, but the average “ideal number of children” on the national level has drastically dropped to 1.14 in 2003.⁶² Young married couples now prefer one child or even “no child” for certain



inevitable reasons as follows: the high cost of living and education; the difficulty of raising children; and other related reasons. These changes certainly indicate that the husband-wife relationship in a small family became much more private and intimate than that in the traditional large family.

In general, Korean women's views of traditional (or Confucian) values tend to be differentiated depending on various factors. Among many modernists, the traditional value system associated with Confucian ethics is strongly challenged or even rejected by the adoption of modern economic, social, and legal standards. Many home dramas on T.V., for example, portray teenage girls, college students, or career women as a new generation that has an independent or Western view of women's identity in terms of education, career, fashion, consumerism, romantic life, marriage, and so on. As products of the "post-industrialization" system and hi-tech "digital age," these women in today's Korea are much better educated than the older generations. They often ignore traditional role expectations and demand full freedom and opportunities, thereby setting their own standards for the family, social and institutional structures. These modernists even doubt whether marriage and motherhood rather than professional career while remaining single



would even represent an ideal path to a woman's self-fulfilment at all.

4. Conclusion

Having been influenced by Confucian values on the one hand and stimulated by economic affluence, social changes, and democratic ideas on the other, Korean women now have much more opportunity to think about their present and future status. Their increasing criticism of the traditional expectations and norms means a definite weakening of Confucian feminine values. But the patterns of gender conflict seem less intense or wide-spread in South Korea than in North America.

There are now new patterns of human-relatedness and those of gender harmony and conflict. Particularly striking is the extent to which Western values and democratic ideas have been integrated with traditional Korean identity at both individual and collective levels. The public and legal status of Korean women has improved rapidly, as much as the Korean economy has together with institutional and political changes. Women are now seeking a meaningful way of portraying a new identity. Such a challenge involves not only a variety of generational, educational and ideological gaps, but also



a great deal of other complicated issues, including the moral, legal, and social systems, which all tend to be intertwined with one another.

The current situation in South Korea appears to be a way of managing and integrating the traditional in the modern. Embedded in this situation is an inevitable process of cultural and social adjustment to new challenges and opportunities. To conclude, a major issue is to consider Korean women's new identity while addressing the gender-inclusive global culture that entails women's life outside the home, marriage or family.



9 Ancestral Rites and Family Moral Spirituality: A Living Tradition in Today's Korea

This chapter presents Confucianism as a living tradition in South Korea by discussing its ancestral rites. This topic is not clearly studied in current scholarship on Confucianism. So we explore the ongoing Korean heritage of ancestral rites as well as its modern implication for what we may call “family moral spirituality”.

1. Confucian Teaching and Ritual Practice

Ancestral rites were central to family culture over many centuries in East Asia. The essence of today's family rites in Korea is essentially Confucian according to its tradition of ritual propriety (*ye/li*). The Korean legacy of ancestral rites developed along with family moral-spiritual values especially filial piety and family love.

This core teaching is frequently mentioned in Chinese



classics and Neo-Confucian commentaries on ritual practice. Ancient ritual texts provided Confucianism with the basic understanding of ancestral rites and a set of instructions on family rites. The ancestral rites tradition generally indicates that ancestors and their descendants depend on each other for family solidarity and continuity. According to the *Classic of Filial Piety* (*Hyogyōng/Xiaojing*), a filial child should respect and serve his dead parents properly through ancestral rites. Confucius and Mencius taught that self-cultivation or the practice of filial piety would not be perfected without including ritual propriety. Their focus on learning and human virtue emphasized family rites and social ethics. So Confucius taught moral attitudes behind ancestral rites: self-cultivation takes filial piety as an essential virtue, which is said to be a very appropriate expression of moral and ritual propriety (*ye/li*). As he said, “When parents are alive, serve them according to ritual propriety. When they die, give them a proper funeral rite according to it, and remember them in memorial rites according to it” (*Analects* 2:5). This instruction indicates the “propriety” of filial piety with regard to the rites of passage including the funeral and ancestral rites. In other words, it means a cultivated life in harmony with proper ritual practice. As Ebrey pointed out (1991:14), the topic of family rituals is important in studying



the religious and social aspects of the Confucian tradition.

The doctrine of filial piety and ancestral rites was articulated further – philosophically and socially – by leading Neo-Confucians in medieval and pre-modern times. Chinese and Korean scholar-teachers justified ancestral rites from a moral and spiritual standpoint; for example, Zhu Xi in China and Yi T'oegye in Korea interpreted ritual as a profound source of moral self-cultivation. Their contribution was indeed a major articulation on the moral and spiritual aspects of ritual thought. Yi Yulgok (1536-83), another leading Korean Neo-Confucian, also discussed the idea of “ancestor-and-descendant encounter” through ancestral rites by emphasizing the virtue of filial piety and family respect. The moral principle of filial piety is therefore inseparable from the observance of ancestral rites. The family experience of ancestral rites shows a culturally diffused form of spirituality. This is partly why the Confucian way of self-cultivation takes “*li* (ritual) as a process of humanization,” as pointed by Tu Weiming (1989; 1985).

2. Korean Ancestral Rites

Funeral and memorial rites in South Korea basically reveal Confucian customs and manners, and other



religions have come to terms with traditional family values. Indeed, the Confucian spirit of ancestral rites became a symbol of filial piety and family love and reputation. Most Koreans who participate in their ancestral rites are familiar with this teaching; in fact, the modern meaning of *ye* propriety is actually taught in public education curriculum (in courses such as Korean morality and society). Commenting on Korean Confucianism, Ro (1985:12) correctly stated that: “Both the moral dimension and the ritual dimension of filial piety are intrinsically related to each other....well expressed in the Confucian idea of *li* (propriety and ritual).”

The contemporary Korean practice of ancestral rites is not idol worship, but rather reveals the basic Confucian teaching: to return filial gratitude to ancestors. It is an act of honoring and appreciating the affection and care one has received from parents. In other words, there seems to be a common tendency among some Western scholars to over-generalize the Korean ancestral rites incorrectly as a form of “worship” or “ancestor worship” in connection to shamanism or folk religion in modern Korea.⁶³ It is also relevant to discuss the broader implication of ancestral rites not only for a better understanding of the spiritual nature of Confucianism,⁶⁴ but also to consider the distinctive nature of Korea’s social and religious life.



Traditionally, several types of ancestral rites were commonly held in Korea, as mentioned in the Confucian handbooks.⁶⁵ Three of them are still commonly held in South Korea as follows: 1) special holiday rites (*ch'arye*); 2) death memorial rites at home (*kijesa* or *chesa*), which is traditionally done at midnight on the anniversary of the ancestor's death; and 3) memorial rites at the grave sites (now more commonly known as *sŏngmyo*). The *kijesa* death anniversary rite is done for four generations up. The *ch'arye* ancestral rites on national holidays are normally held in the early morning together with special seasonal food offerings. These seasonal rites became more popular than others on the national level since they are also blended with holiday celebration on the traditional Korean (lunar) New Year's Day (some families do this on the regular January 1) and the Ch'usŏk (or Han'gawi), the full-moon day of lunar August during the fall harvest. Many Koreans – regardless educational, generational, gender, or social differences – observe the *ch'arye* ancestral rites on these national holidays, as reported in a recent national survey.⁶⁶

3. Ritual Preparation and Procedure

A set of instructions is given in several Confucian ritual manuals; they are also explained in the modern





photo 5a Chesasang 1 (ancestral ritual table of offerings) on the Korean NYD ©Korea Tourism Organization

Korean editions.⁶⁷ There is a common set of guidelines for the ritual procedure, including the preparation of a ritual table; e.g., the proper way of arranging special dishes of food offering (including meat, fish, vegetables, and fruits), as illustrated in *photos 5a-b and 9a-b*. In general, average Koreans among the older generations (including my own father and father-in-law) – especially the first sons





and their wives – are more or less familiar with these ritual customs and etiquette. These ritual manuals explain the complete procedure for each rite in detail; some diagrammatic illustrations are also provided, in addition to explaining the moral meaning and spiritual significance of each step.⁶⁸

It is worth mentioning a few important points here. For example, the finale of an ancestral ritual is the family sharing of food, but it seems more than an ordinary meal; i.e., a kind of “ritualized food” which is said to be good for family happiness and prosperity. Furthermore, one of the ceremonial steps at the beginning is to give two full prostrations to the ancestor being honored. This is a natural extension of the popular Korean custom of expressing filial piety and family

love by giving a full prostration (*sebae* or *chŏl* in Korean) to grandparents, parents, or elders who are being thanked and honored on the Korean New Year’s Day or another special family occasion; see



photo 5b Chesasang 2 (ancestral ritual table of offerings) on the Korean (lunar) NYD ©Korea Tourism Organization



photo 6a Sebae prostration: Korean NYD greetings by a couple to their parents on ©Korea Tourism Organization



photo 6b Sebae prostration: Korean NYD greetings with foreigners ©Yonhap News

photos 6a-b for this tradition.⁶⁹

A formal ritual reading (*ch'ungmun*) is also done with the family attitudes of filial piety, gratitude, and propriety. This is the Confucian style of giving tribute to the ancestors, one that includes: each ancestor's identity and family relationship; his professional title and public service; and the identity and name of the ritual master as a "filial son." At the end, the ritual master (father) says that he and his family wish to remember the ancestor's love, care, and merit. See *photos 7a-b* for a ritual master chanting a *ch'ungmun* reading.⁷⁰

Nowadays, a growing number of urban families observe the *ch'arye* ancestral rites at home without making a long, highway traffic-jammed holiday trip to



their hometown, the place of ancestral origin. Others also enjoy the national ancestral rites on special holidays by visiting their ancestor's grave sites (*sŏngmyo*) on the Ch'usŏk and the Korean New Year's Day. For example, during the 2006 Ch'usŏk holiday (first weekend of October), Mr. Ban Ki-moon, current General Secretary of the United Nations, made a visit to his hometown in Korea. The Korean media reported him as a filial man carrying out an ancestral rite; note that Mr. Ban was wearing a typical Confucian gown at a local family shrine representing his ancestral lineage. He also did a formal rite at his parents' and ancestors' grave sites; see *photos 8a-b*. This is a common national tradition in South Korea. Other illustrations also show the modernized ancestral



photo 7a Tosan Academy's *chesa* ancestral rite for Yi T'oebye: *ch'ungmun* ritual initiation reading and group prostration ©Tosan Academy



photo 7b Tosan Academy's ancestral rite for Yi T'oebye ©Tosan Academy



photo 8a Ban Ki-moon, UN Secretary General:
Ch'usök holiday's hometown söngmyo
ancestral rite at his father's grave site
©Yonhap News

rite performed at various locations during the Ch'usök holiday in Korea; see *photos 9a-b* for the ancestral rite done by a team of famous Korean World Cup soccer players with a well-prepared ritual table of offerings at their training camp. These kinds of examples indicate the social, ethical, and religious norms of holiday ancestral rites, most of which are associated

with Korean Confucian culture.

Korean people continue to make more adjustment as the urbanites need to simplify some aspects of the ancestral rites because they are criticized for being too formal or costly. For example, instead of the traditional wooden table, the white paper ancestral tablet has been popular together with a portrait of the ancestor if



available; the portrait is usually put on the far back side of a ritual table, as illustrated in *photo 10*. In some cases, only the portrait is used by those families who are unable to prepare the paper tablet.

Another change is that many Christian families invite a priest to conduct a simpler memorial service instead of a formal ancestral rite. Among most Korean Protestants, for example, Christian prayer has replaced the Confucian rite. All Korean Protestant churches in South Korea discourage or even prohibit the observance of ancestral rites⁷¹; as a result, the Protestant style of memorial prayer and hymn-singing (*ch'umoje* or *ch'udosik*) is more popular. This also applies to overseas Korean Protestant families in North America (see Chapter 10 for details). For those Korean Catholics who want to continue their family ancestral rites,



photo 8b Ban Ki-moon, UN Secretary General: Ch'usök holiday's hometown sadang *Koyuje* ancestral rite ©Yonhap News



photo 9a Ch'usök (harvest) holiday ch'arye ancestral rite - KFA world cup soccer team
©Yonhap News



photo 9b Ch'usök (harvest) holiday ch'arye ancestral rite - KFA world cup soccer team
©Yonhap News

the Korean Catholic church basically allows some aspects of the Confucian tradition, such as the use of a paper ancestral tablet; prostration and incense-burning; food offerings; the expression of respect; and family's sharing of ritual meals. A number of Korean Catholics maintain the modified version of their ancestral rites by practicing several key Christian components especially prayer, priestly sermon, scripture readings,⁷² and hymns singing. These families usually see no serious moral or cultural conflict between Christian faith and Confucian family values.⁷³ As I said before, this is partly because Koreans, like other East Asians, usually do not acknowledge the specifically religious identity of Confucianism. So the two traditions of values could be mutually assimilated.



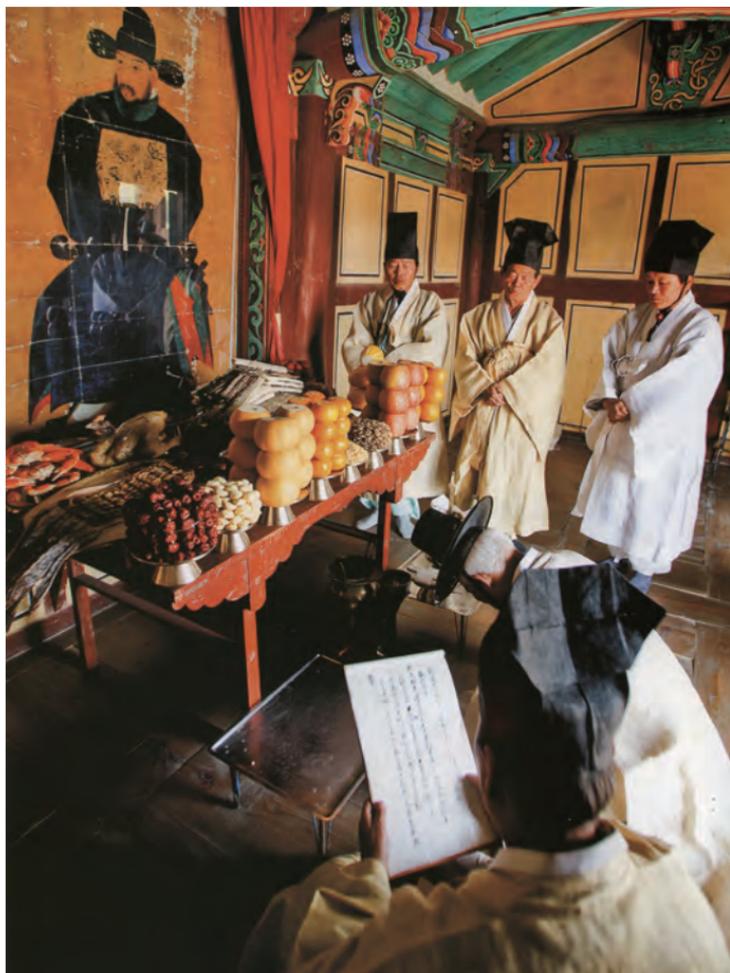


photo 10 Chesasang 3 (ancestral ritual table) with offerings and an ancestral portrait
©Mr. Son, Sung-Hoon

Overall, we need to understand the nature of Korean ancestral rites in connection to Confucian ritual and propriety (*ye*). Its national symbols have developed along the key moral teaching of filial piety and family solidarity.

4. Conclusion

Korea has preserved and refined the Confucian tradition of ritual practice faithfully and more originally and eloquently than China or Japan did in modern times. The Korean tradition of ancestral rituals has retained some of its distinctive and elegant aspects through several centuries. Its formal features also eventually filtered down into the most common ritual-social tradition there on a national level.⁷⁴ In recent years, various aspects of change and adjustment have also developed in accordance with new economic and social factors in South Korea.

The practice of ancestral rites in South Korea is a modern Confucian model of ritual propriety. Despite the growing influence of Western ideas and values, the public recognition of this national tradition is still important. Its basic logic also seems to be socially driven: a family that neglects its ritual duties for dead parents or ancestors, whether in a traditional or another style, could be viewed as “unfilial.” Similarly, a society that ignores or rejects



its ceremonial propriety will not be a harmonious or orderly one. The Korean tradition certainly embodies a moral-spiritual source of family culture. It is at the heart of family spirituality that represents Confucianism as a living tradition in South Korea. From a comparative perspective, this also concurs with Julia Ching's interpretation of Confucianism as a "lay spirituality." (2000; 1993). Its broader meaning is arguably compatible with the basic moral teachings of other religions.

Furthermore, it is also becoming more important to discuss what we may call "international Confucianism" regarding overseas Koreans and their cultural values. For example, Koreans in the West assimilate Korean identity and Confucian values socially and culturally. The following chapter discusses this topic.



10 Koreans and Confucianism in the West: Some International Reflections

This chapter briefly discusses the interplay between traditional values and cultural integration among overseas Koreans. We are interested in this topic partly because as we have explored in the preceding chapters, Confucian values remain a living tradition in today's Korea.⁷⁵ There are some interesting things about Korean communities in North America. I reflect on my teaching and experience of Confucianism, as well as on my knowledge of Koreans in Canada. We discuss the way in which Confucian values influence Korean Canadians in relation to Western ideas and lifestyles. Our crosscultural understanding of this topic is also important for the ongoing debate on multiculturalism and public policy in Canada and beyond.



1. Koreans in Canada: Some Preliminary Notes

Over the past several decades in Canada, there have been increasing numbers of immigrants from South Korea, Hong Kong, China, and Taiwan. Korean immigrants have been coming to Canada steadily since the late 1960s. The rate of immigration from South Korea accelerated rapidly in the mid-1970s and 1980s when many changes were made for family-sponsored immigrants in Canadian immigration law. Over the past ten years, there has also been a higher number of business immigrants and their families. Koreans in Canada live mainly in larger cities such as Greater Toronto Area and Vancouver. Smaller concentrations of Koreans are found in Ottawa, London (Ontario), Hamilton, Calgary, Montreal, etc. Like other East Asian immigrants, Koreans are positively received in Canada, which has helped them adjust to Canadian life through a set of various channels and activities, including education, business, and religious activities.

It is worthwhile to note that the life experience of first-generation Koreans has managed to maintain Korean identity by transmitting it to their children at home and by establishing their language schools and community associations. They generally remain proud of their family and cultural traditions. These Korean-



Canadians are now becoming older (ranging from mid-60s to 80s) as a senior group within the Korean community. The experience of the so-called *il-jjöm-ose* (one-and-a-half) Korean generation in Canada (intermediate group of immigrants between the first and second generations) is broader and more Canadian. Most of these people (including myself) were educated both in Korea and in Canada, so they are bicultural and bilingual, Korean and English. At home and in their cultural and business communities, they understand the values of their elders and are also able to assimilate them with Canadian society and standards.

The experience of *yise* or second-generation Koreans is more complex and also less researched than those of their older generations. These Canadian-born, younger Koreans (including my son and daughter) understand some basic Korean values, but they are much more accustomed to Canadian society and lifestyles. Some people even say that they are “not 100% Canadian.” Some of them seem to struggle with generational gaps and crosscultural issues with their parents and other Koreans.

Accordingly, the whole topic is a challenging one because the Korean-Canadian community is by no means a homogeneous group due to certain generational, cultural and ideological factors.



2. Korean Identity and Confucian Values

Koreans generally share Confucian family values, although ordinary people do not necessarily pay specific attention to ancient sages, famous Neo-Confucian scholars, or their schools of thought. As I discussed in the preceding chapters, various aspects of this reality have been reported recently in public surveys and scholarly works. In general it might be awkward for a Korean or Korean-Canadian to call himself or herself religiously Confucian in terms of identity or group membership, insofar as East Asians generally do not acknowledge the religious identity of Confucianism as explicitly or clearly as those of Christianity, Buddhism, and other organized religions. Koreans in North America, like those in South Korea, normally do not see Confucianism as a religion. This is because Confucianism, unlike Christianity or Buddhism, is not a membership religion with an organized set of religious doctrines, beliefs, or worship; in fact, it did not need to establish a religious system of priesthood, membership, and congregational service.

Nonetheless, Confucianism exists in Canada as a diffused tradition ethically and culturally. Like their fellow Koreans in the homeland, Koreans in Canada tend to maintain family values and relationships to varying



degrees, depending on generational, social, and gender-related factors. In this regard, a relevant issue is how to interpret the international heritage of Confucian values vis-à-vis Canadian lifestyles as well.

One key aspect of Korean identity raises the question of family because family values remain the backbone of modern Korean identity. As I have pointed out in the preceding chapters, the moral foundation of Confucianism remains family and social relations. Among overseas Koreans, moral education for children is usually maintained at home. It is also incorporated into the Korean heritage language schools, Sunday Bible classes, or special summer programs. I also find that the educational-ethical part of the language spoken by Korean immigrant families is reminiscent of modern Confucian values: i.e., higher learning, self-discipline, and work ethic are ideal for successful career and economic success.

Many Koreans in Canada or America have become Christians, and there is a noticeable number of Buddhists as well. However, it is important to note that many of them assimilate traditional Korean values and daily manners. Core family values and human relationships are essentially Confucian in nature; in particular, parental benevolence (*in*) and filial piety (*hyo*) are emphasized for family happiness. Although this trend may be visible to a



lesser degree in the West, we can still see it at Korean (or other East Asian) homes and retail shops or by making a quick visit to a Korean church there. International Korean communities have maintained their Korean identity and values, which helped them to hold together their family and cultural heritage.

Nevertheless, generational conflict and its ideological issues exist here and there, indicating the younger generations' opinions on occupation, marriage, lifestyle, etc. Korean-Canadian teenagers, college students, and young career men and women (including my two children) express much more individual freedom, personal choices, liberty, and privacy in the Western context. They are not really different from average Canadians of North American or European background. On the whole, there is more assimilation than conflict between Korean values and Canadian standards, to varying degrees of personal understanding and bicultural harmony.

3. International Integration of Confucian Values

Koreans in Canada, as well as those in America, see proper human relationships as a desirable part of maintaining their cultural heritage. This trend of cultural integration includes some daily patterns of traditional



manners, insofar as it is assimilated with Canadian lifestyles and customs. Modern Confucian values continue to be an essential part of the Korean heritage, influencing international Koreans, whether consciously or unconsciously. From a similar angle, Robert Ellwood of University Southern California correctly pointed out in his study of East Asian religions in America:

East Asian American families are also frequently noted for the same emphasis on education, family cohesiveness and cooperation, and traditional values sometimes to the point of tension with their younger, more ‘individualized’ members over issues such as marriage or going into the family business... (Ellwood 2000:158)

As we discussed in Chapter 6, Confucian values in East Asia, often under other names, contributed to education and economic development. From a similar angle, we can talk about Confucian influence on Koreans in North America as well. For example, regarding Korean Canadian communities, the modern quality of attitudes toward family, education, and business is well-known, although there is obviously a workable balance between Korean values and Canadian standards. There is also a



lot of attention to children's higher education, work ethic, and their immense implications for professional career and economic success. Other ideals such as personal cultivation are also emphasized, thereby reflecting on some indication of Confucian values.

An average Korean in North America, whether a first-generation or even 1.5-generation person, likely assumes a particular identity in the context of integrating Western lifestyle with some Korean values. Certain kinds of cultural issues exist due to the younger generations' strong Western opinions on their lifestyles, occupation, social life, marriage, etc. On the whole, we can discover one or another level of Korean influence on their daily values. It is therefore possible to talk about Korean-Western integration in relation to modern Confucian adaptability.

Traditionally, the Confucian teaching on *ye* (ritual propriety) and filial piety (*hyo*) was highly significant. As I discussed in Chapter 9, this is partly why many families in South Korea continue observing the national tradition of ancestral rites at home or grave sites. Likewise, some Korean immigrant families continue practicing it. I should also note that among these Korean families in the West, the tradition of ancestral rites has undergone a good deal of modification according to Western religion and society.



For example, most Korean Protestant families in North America, like those in South Korea, replaced the ancestral rites with Christian memorial service.⁷⁶

Furthermore, it is not surprising that those families who observe the modified ancestral rites at home usually see no serious conflict between Christian life and Confucian teaching. This is partly because Confucianism is not an organized religion like Christianity in terms of religious identity, membership, ordained clergy, or institutional authority; so the two traditions of values could mutually co-exist. For instance, 92% of Korean Christians in the New York area who participated in a survey have claimed that they have experienced no real conflict between the two traditions (Mullinax 1994).⁷⁷ As I discussed in Chapters 1 and 9 and elsewhere (Chung 2010a, 1995b), Confucianism as an ethical humanism or lay spirituality offers a set of values and a spiritual teaching of wisdom that can co-exist and interact with other spiritual traditions.

4. Conclusion

The international phenomenon of religious-cultural assimilation may contribute to our understanding Korean Confucianism from a broader global perspective.



Confucianism exists among Korean immigrant families and communities in the West. Therefore, Neville's notion of "portable Confucianism"⁷⁸ is relevant here in terms of its contemporary crosscultural adaptability.

Contemporary Confucianism—or whatever we call it—is open to other spiritual traditions. In large North American cities, for example, we may find a new group of Confucians of Western or Christian backgrounds, including some scholars and students who respect or practice some of Confucian moral principles and human relationships. So we may start talking about some new labels such as "global Confucianism," "Canadian Confucianism," "American Confucianism," etc. To add a bit of philosophy here, I note that the Confucian Way basically promotes learning and personal cultivation. Its ultimate teaching of sagehood requires a virtuous life, insofar as its role model for wisdom addresses global peace, harmony and prosperity. This may enable us to reflect further on Confucian influence on Koreans in the West regarding education, work ethic, family relations, multicultural engagement, and so on.

In the final analysis, the question is: What can we learn from this? Some scholars might see my interpretation as extending far beyond the earlier tradition of classical learning, elite Confucianism, or bureaucratic



Confucianism. But we do not find international Confucianism so surprising because the Confucian Way is intended to be a continuous “human project,” one that ideally transcends language, intellectual, cultural, or religious differences. It has helped Koreans in Canada to preserve family cohesiveness and cultural heritage and also to manage bicultural social assimilation, thereby linking the East and the West.

The international paradigm of Confucian values and cultural integration is certainly a relevant topic for more scholarly research by other specialists. The intended meaning of multiculturalism and diversity is to encourage participation and assimilation rather than isolation and segregation. The Korean case of cultural integration in the West is interesting.



11 The Relevance and Future of Korean Confucianism in the Modern World

Confucianism was declared dead not long ago: many Western intellectuals anticipated its complete collapse in East Asia including Korea. However, it still remains healthy and engaging in South Korean society and its overseas communities including those in North America. Confucianism is an important and interesting topic for understanding Korean people, society, culture, religion, and thought. This book therefore discussed various aspects of Korean Confucianism in terms of tradition and modernity pertaining to the fundamental patterns of its history, philosophy, education, family values, social ethics, and spiritual culture.

As we discussed in the preceding chapters, the Confucian school of thought generally sees the world to be transformable, calls for a return to human virtue, views the political realm in moral terms, teaches fundamental human values and relationships, articulates their proper



social roles, and emphasizes self-cultivation as the universal foundation. The inseparability of learning, morality, society, and politics was emphasized in the entire Confucian tradition of East Asia. For five centuries in Chosŏn Korea, this promoted an intensive competition in the public domains including education, examination system, government, public career, commercial arenas, and even family reputation, many of which still influence today's Koreans in various modern ways.

Confucianism is no longer the elite tradition that had once dominated intellectual culture, philosophic orthodoxy, political authority, bureaucratic system, and social hierarchy in Chosŏn Korea until the end of the nineteenth century. Its current situation embodies a diffused language influencing the moral, social, and cultural core of Korean identity. As I discussed in Chapters 5 and 7, Confucianism in modern Korea has transformed itself into a common national discourse associated with academic elitism, family values, moral education, social relationships, political leadership, and so on. Nonetheless, we also need to understand the sophisticated issue of how traditional values in South Korea are adjusting themselves to new economic and institutional changes.

The Confucian value system is a major source of



inspiration for Korean people, thereby endowing them with a common belief in the worth of humanity and human-relatedness, as well as with a shared path to academic and ethical growth. On the whole, it remains vital in the backbone of Korean society. An average person has a collective sense of Korean identity; ideally he or she is expected to think and act according to social norms and interests. Overall, it is essentially the Confucian pattern of family values and interpersonal relationships that maintains the moral educational dimension of Korean society. This combination of cultural acceptance and social expectation is sustained more by public adherence to traditional values. Even with the massive economic, political and social changes since the late 1980s, it continues to be important and is quickly going through a process of assimilating more new changes. The attitudes of Koreans toward their traditional values associated with Confucian principles vary according to generational, family, social, economic, and religious factors.

In South Korea, the Confucian value system has been interacting with other religious traditions as well. Buddhism has influenced religious life for many centuries, and Christianity is a very popular and somewhat “Koreanized” religion in this religiously



diverse and competitive society. However, most Koreans including Buddhists and Christians tend to share the cultural heritage that influences their attitudes toward daily values and norms. In this regard, they, as well as overseas Koreans in the West, do not usually find any serious friction between Korean values and religious identity; this is true in the context of assimilating the basic moral principles, such as Confucian human-heartedness and filial piety, Christian love and fellowship, and Buddhist wisdom and compassion.

The arena of the Korean family appears to be a moral-cultural institution that maintains an essential life of its own in its own right; this is central to Korean Confucian culture. As we discussed in Chapter 9, many families participate in the regular ancestral (memorial) rites at home or grave sites, for these rites are viewed as important for sharing family bond and preserving core human values. Children are encouraged to remember and respect their ancestors' virtue and wisdom. The fundamental moral principles that support the ancestral rites are filial piety, propriety, reverence, and family love. Overall, the basic Confucian teaching of ritual propriety (*ye/li*) plays a key role in Korean people's moral thinking and practice.

The tradition of ancestral rites is already making



necessary adjustments in today's Korea partly because a growing number of urbanized families want to simplify its ceremonial procedure and requirements in response to recent economic and social changes. Family and public ritual standards in today's Korea clearly reveal the living elements of Confucian ritual practice. There are also Korean immigrant families in the West who observe their simplified ancestral rites, except most Protestants and many Catholics who generally replaced the Confucian ancestral rites with Christian prayer and hymn-singing.

In general Koreans think and behave more as members of groups than as individuals with absolute freedom and self-autonomy. Stable families, affectionate parents, filial sons and daughters, benevolent elders, superiors, and employers, loyal juniors, inferiors, and employees, and faithful friends and colleagues are often mentioned; in other words, interpersonal relationships and values are expressed in Confucian terms, thereby conveying the public view that the proper understanding and practice of these social relations is an important part of the educational curriculum.

Confucianism emphasizes self-cultivation as the basis of maintaining family solidarity, social harmony, and political order. When educated Koreans (including politicians) talk about "democracy" (*minju chuui* in



Korean; literally, people-centered ideology), they usually emphasize moral leadership and social-ethical responsibility in addition to democratic government and politics. For example, “democratic government and economic growth” cannot be accomplished properly without maintaining the moral and social order of the nation.⁷⁹ Chapter 5 therefore articulated that these kinds of public voices remind us of the modern reformist tendency of Confucian moral-political thinking, which can be effective in a country where the Confucian-oriented value system remains a common, national discourse.

These and related factors made the Korean work ethic strong for both men and women, thereby playing an important role in South Korea’s economic development since the late 1970s. The Korean people’s serious dedication to education also contributed to this development by improving both individual and family positions. In South Korea (as well as in Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore) various kinds of examinations are still very important for personal, family and social success, thereby maintaining an intense level of competition. According to the proven power of this system, successful people are said to be those who work hardest for entrance exams, family reputation, career success, etc. This is deeply grounded in elite Confucian



culture; in the long run, it facilitated South Korea's economic success on both personal and collective levels.

However, the whole topic is more sophisticated than just competitive education. As I mentioned in Chapters 6 and 7, we should consider South Korea's economic success in a holistic way by discussing the unifying influence of Confucian values on family contribution, moral education, political authority and economy, social competition and mobility, group dependency and productivity, and so on. For example, family culture, an essential part of the Confucian tradition, made a significant contribution which is directly related to the Korean mother's dedication to dealing with family goals such as academic excellence. In South Korea, the mother's roles are significant especially through nurturing her child(ren) intellectually, ethically, and culturally, thereby facilitating the child's study, school, and teachers. I know this well from many cases regarding my relatives and friends and other Koreans both inside and outside South Korea.

As economic prosperity gained its full momentum in the late 1980s, authoritarian norms and hierarchical structures began to decline quickly, thereby allowing many political, institutional, and social changes. In recent years, the ideas of self-awareness, self-autonomy and self-esteem have quickly developed among the younger



generations in their thinking, behaviour, and social interaction, all of which strongly affect their individual opinions and attitudes about almost everything including traditional values, partly under the influence of Western life-styles and the appeal of Christianity.

Regarding today's Korean women as well, traditional group norms and expectations have definitely declined to the lowest level. For example, the tradition of gender role specialization is observed to a far lesser extent than before; some people now argue that it no longer exists in South Korea. The updated value system of social harmony and gender balance in the family and larger social units appears to be maintained at the heart of Korean society. Chapter 8 also pointed out that greater emphasis is now placed on women's equal status and full rights in both public and domestic spheres. The role of women has become much stronger, exerting a much more powerful influence on all family, educational, social, economic and political matters.⁸⁰ In the socio-political arena, for instance, South Koreans elected Madam Park Geun-hye as their eleventh and current President in December 2012; indeed, she is the first female head of state not only in the Republic of Korea but also in the modern history of East Asia.

Since the 1980s urbanization and industrialization brought the Korean people into modern standards of life,



and the recent influence of the internet, social network, and high-tech culture quickly advanced their daily ideas and lifestyles. As a result, the younger generations' perspectives exert a much stronger impact on traditional values, education, work, marriage, career, business, politics, and so on. Given all these changes, however, new problems—such as increasing materialism, moral decline, disrespect for the elderly, and an increasing crime rate—have stimulated concerned parents and the media to recognize the relevance of their proud moral tradition. These public voices basically point to the unifying moral, social, and political order and harmony, which appears to be associated with the Confucian foundation of Korean society.

So what is the future of Confucianism in Korea, where religious dynamism and division are led by Christianity and Buddhism? We may anticipate Korean Confucianism to continue as an engaging tradition of ethical humanism and family spirituality while influencing Korean people's moral, educational and social thinking. In other words, the Confucian coding of “cultural DNA” seems to exist in their daily value system. Confucianism has never been a membership or congregational religion with organized priesthood and religious dogmas. As a socially “diffused” tradition, it will continue co-existing with other spiritual traditions



positively. From a comparative and crosscultural perspective, it is important to study this living tradition in Korea, East Asia, and their international communities. Otherwise, it would be difficult to develop a penetrating global understanding of Korean Confucianism in terms of tradition and modernity.

The heart of Korean identity will motivate more public discourses, embodying Confucian ideals, often under different names. “The Way of learning to be human” may play an essential role in the ongoing process of Korea’s changing identity in the coming years. The modern West is also something that should be addressed because its institutional and economic ideas strongly influence East Asia including South Korea. The Confucian heritage of today’s Korean society will therefore continue to interact with the globalizing process of its economic, social, and political transformation.

Furthermore, Confucian values have helped the international Korean community to achieve much of its well-known academic and cultural reputation in the West. The mutual interplay between Korean identity and Western society may help us to develop a balanced global understanding of Confucianism. Although there are some generational gaps, younger Koreans in the West basically assimilate their Korean values to varying



degrees in managing bilingual adjustment and bicultural harmony. As we explored in Chapter 10, their respect for education and family relations may be integrated with their international identity vis-à-vis Western ideas and lifestyles.

If we refer to Confucianism as a cultural heritage of appreciating the worth of humanity, of emphasizing the human capability of intellectual, ethical and spiritual growth through learning and self-cultivation, and of sustaining the fundamental human relationships in a harmonious family and society, then it is certainly relevant to today's Korean people and, thus, remains as an important living tradition in both today's Korea and the world.

As a final reflection, I note that Confucianism is adjusting itself to the globalizing world of ideas, values, beliefs, and rituals; indeed, it is an “ethic of adjustment to the world,” to borrow an early insight by Max Weber (1968), an eminent German sociologist and comparative thinker. From a crosscultural international perspective, Korean Confucianism supports a natural, human concern for harmony, a moral and socio-political concern for order, and a cultural and economic concern for balance and prosperity. To conclude, this is potentially compatible with our global ethics and our universal mission of education and cultural development.



NOTES

1 The same question could also be phrased as follows: Is Confucianism an educational discourse, a socio-political ideology, or a cultural system? It is also relevant to study the modern transformation of Confucianism. Some scholars (e.g., Ebrey and others) look at the Confucian tradition in terms of the family because one central aspect of being “Confucian” raises the issue of family system, rituals, and values. Confucianism has also been studied as a philosophy or a religion by various specialists (e.g., de Bary, Chan, Tu, Ching, Talyor, Neville, etc. for the Chinese tradition; and Kalton, Chung, and Ro for the Korean tradition). Other scholars in East Asian Studies discussed its impact on politics and society in traditional East Asia; regarding the Chosŏn Korean case, for example, see those works by Kim Haboush, Deuchler, Duncan, and Palais (as indicated in Selected Bibliography). Furthermore, there are ways of addressing the issue of Confucianism and modernization from historical, educational, sociological, political, and comparative angles (e.g., Tu 1996 and 1992, Rozman 1991, Vogel 1991, Smith 1991, Tai 1989, Berger 1988, Elman et al 2002, Robinson 1991). I also discussed Confucianism from various philosophical, religious, and cultural angles (see my works in the Selected Bibliography).

2 In short, *illi* means the metaphysical “ground of being” present in each thing in its fullness; it is the principle of all things in full goodness and truth. By contrast, *ki/qi* refers to the material or physical energy that actually brings each phenomenon into concrete existence, and determines its transformation that may lead to either good or evil; so *ki* also represents our physical and psychological makeup as well. For this topic, see Chan 1963, de Bary 1960, Chung 1995a, etc.

3 I note that the phrase “ChengZhu” (Chŏngju in Korean) originates from the two family names of Song Chinese Neo-Confucians, the two brothers Cheng Hao and Cheng Yi, and Zhu Xi. In Korea it is also called the Chujahak because Chuja/ Zhuzi (“Master Zhu”) refers to Zhu’s honorific title “Master Zhu” as this school of



Neo-Confucianism was established by him in Song China.

4 From 57 BCE to 668 CE, the Korean peninsula was divided into three kingdoms: Koguryō (37 BCE-668 CE), Paekche (13 BCE-668 CE), and Silla (57 BCE-668 CE). Koguryō occupied the northern half, Paekche the southwestern quarter, and Silla the southeastern quarter. Silla conquered the other two kingdoms in 668 C.E. and ruled the whole peninsula until 935 CE.

5 For example, the eminent monk Wōn'gwang emphasized Confucian moral precepts, such as filial piety and truthfulness, for the secular life of self-cultivation and public service; this is recorded in Kim Pusik's *Samguk sagi* (Historical records of the three kingdoms). Furthermore, it is also said that Wōn'gwang "mastered the major Buddhist scriptures as well as Confucian classics"; see Ilyon, *Samguk yusa: Legends and history of the three kingdoms of ancient Korea*, translated by Ha Tae-Hung and Grafton Mintz (Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 1972), bk. 4, ch. 5, sec. 97. For his study travel to China, see also Peter H. Lee and de Bary 1997 (*Sources of Korean Tradition*), 44-45.

6 Three-year Confucian mourning was known to the people of Koguryō as well. But the Buddhist custom was more popular because most people found it much less demanding.

7 This academy adopted the key teachings of Daoism and Buddhism as well, together with martial arts. The Silla youth learned about the "Five Confucian Virtues" (benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and truthfulness) and the "Six Ways to Serve the Government" (sagely minister, good minister, loyal minister, wise minister, virtuous minister, and honest minister). For more on the Hwarang academy, see Peter H. Lee and de Bary 1997:54-55.

8 The Hyanggyos served as important local Confucian academies during the Chosŏn dynasty. In South Korea, there are about 231 Hyanggyos, which still serve as local ritual sites, meeting halls, and classrooms for Confucian ethical education. The former Chinese and Korean Confucian sages and worthies are periodically venerated at many of these places. Ancestral rites and other traditional ceremonies are observed. They also provide people in local areas with knowledge about Confucian rituals and genealogical information.

9 See note 3 for the "ChengZhu" and "Chujahak."



10 See photos 1a-c for the Sōnggyun'gwan. The Sōnggyun'gwan is now affiliated with a public, secular university called Sōnggyun'gwan University in Seoul. But the Sōnggyun'gwan itself still serves as the headquarters of Confucianism in Korea, while Sōnggyun'gwan University maintains its College of Confucianism and Department of Korean Philosophy. The Sōnggyun'gwan is currently organized into the eight areas of the Confucian tradition: rituals, classics, culture, education, newspapers, and so on. Only in South Korea, Confucianism is still practiced formally through public organizations, rituals, meetings, and seminars on both national and local levels. It is strong enough to be institutionalized, if necessary, even as an organized religion. The Confucian Yurim (literally, “forest of literati”) organization consists of active Confucian elites and ordinary citizens who expand their network at both national and local levels. Some leaders of the Sōnggyun'gwan and the Yurim are academic professors of Confucianism and Korean philosophy at Sōnggyun'gwan University and other universities. The national organization of the Yurim is the Yudohoe Ch'ongbonbu (General organization for the way of Confucian literati) which was established in 1970. In the countryside, there are 231 Hyanggyos (local Confucian academies in the Koryŏ and Chosŏn periods) which now serve as local ritual sites and meeting halls. Official rituals are annually performed at the Sōnggyun'gwan; for example, the celebration of Confucius' birthday is observed there in September, and Chinese and Korean Confucian sages and worthies, including eminent Korean scholars like T'oegye and Yulgok, are periodically venerated at the Sōnggyun'gwan and Hyanggyos. The Confucian heritage of ancestral rites and other rituals (especially funeral service) are still observed. For other relevant points, see my articles on modern Confucianism in Korea: Chung 1995b and 1994a/b.

11 For Chŏng's biography, see Peter H. Lee et al. 1992:454-458. For his life and thought, see also Chai-sik Chung's article in de Bary and J. Kim Haboush 1985 (*The Rise of Neo-Confucianism in Korea*), or Lee and de Bary 1997: 254-255, 282, 297-299, 328.

12 These include three classes in the following order: 1) the middle class (*chungin*) who held the technical posts as medical officers, translator-interpreters, accountants, artists, and etc; 2) free-born commoners (*sangmin*) like farmers and merchants; and 3) low-born servants (*ch'ŏnmin*). Furthermore, the *yangban* class itself also had some distinctions: the military group received much less respect than the civil group did. Likewise, *sōja*—sons of *yangban* by secondary wives, their descendants, and sons and grandsons of *yangban* widows who remarried—could not



sit for examinations in order to qualify for civil office appointments.

13 See Kim Haboush's article, "Confucianization of Korean Society" (1991).

14 This subject of Korean Neo-Confucianism in the Chosŏn dynasty articulated the socio-political structures and historical aspects of Chosŏn Korea. Kim Haboush (1991) is a historical survey that discusses the Korean process of "Confucianizing" the society in terms of education, government, ancestor worship, and patriarchy. It focuses more on the Koryŏ-Chosŏn transitional period. See also Deuchler's *The Confucian Transformation of Korea: A Study of Society and Ideology* (1992), which presents the way in which the Chosŏn dynasty used Neo-Confucian ideology as a "political vehicle" to alter many aspects of Koryŏ's life, including the social structure, position of women, ancestor veneration, and inheritance. For other relevant studies, see Kim Haboush, *A Heritage of Kings: One Man's Monarchy in the Confucian World* (1988) and Palais' *Politics and Policies in Traditional Korea* (1975).

15 For the examination system of the Chosŏn dynasty, consult Yong-ho Ch'oe, *The Civil Examinations and the Social Structure in the Early Yi Dynasty Korea* (1987); Yi Songmu, "The Influence of Neo-Confucianism on Education and the Civil Service Examination in Fourteen- and Fifteenth-Century Korea," in de Bary and Haboush 1985:59-88; or Duncan's "Examinations and Orthodoxy in Chosŏn Korea" (2002).

16 The phrase Sŏngnihak (learning of human nature and principle) basically means the "learning" (*hak/xue*) of two metaphysical and ethical concepts, *sŏng/xing* (human nature) and *ili* (principle). In the Chinese ChengZhu transmission of Neo-Confucianism, these are two of the most important ideas in its metaphysics and ethics in China, Korea and Japan. In Korea, the Sŏngnihak was also known as the ChengZhu (ChŏngJu) school, which refers to the two family names of Song Chinese Neo-Confucians, the two brothers Cheng Hao and Cheng Yi, and Zhu Xi.

17 For a chronological and annotated description of these works by T'oegyŏ, see Chung 1995a, Appendix 3, in addition to Kalton 1988. For T'oegyŏ's life and thought, see the same sources and my articles in Bibliography.

18 The current literature on Yulgok's life and thought includes Ro 1989, Ching's article in de Bary and Kim Haboush 1985, and Chung 1995a (a comparative

study of T'oegye and Yulgok), 1998.

19 The current literature on the Sirhak tradition include the following: Yi Ŭisōng, "Korean Intellectual Tradition: The *Sirhak* School of Thought," in Hugh Kang, ed., *The Traditional Culture and Society of Korea: Thought and Institutions* (1975); M. Kalton, "Chōng Tasan's Philosophy of Man: A Radical Critique of the Neo-Confucian World View," *Journal of Korean Studies* 3 (1981): 3–37; Yi Ul-ho, "Tasan's View of Man," *Korea Journal* 25, no. 9 (Sept. 1985); Han Yongu, "Chōng Yag-yong: The Man and His Thought," in *Main Currents of Korean Thought* (1983), pp. 185–203. See also Han Yong-u, "Tasan's Approach to History," Cho Sung-eul, "Tasan on the Social Hierarchy," and Kum Chang-t'ae, "Tasan on Western Learning and Confucianism," all in *Korea Journal* 26, no. 2 (Feb. 1986).

20 For a good introduction to the Wang Yangming school of Chinese Neo-Confucianism, see Chan 1963a and 1963b, de Bary et al. 1960, or Ching 1993. For my discussion of the Korean Wang Yangming School, consult Chung 1992a.

21 Pak's major works include *The Tragic History of Korea (Han'guk t'ongsa)* and *The Bloody History of the Independence Movement in Korea (Han'guk tongnip undongji hyōlsa)*.

22 For more discussion of these Korean Neo-Confucians, consult de Bary and Kim Haboush 1985 (several chapters); Chung 1995a (Historical Background); Peter H. Lee et al. 1992 (including some translations); or P. H. Lee and de Bary 1997 (selected translations of original sources): 254-255, 280-282, 288-292, 297-299, 328, 334, 343-346, 349-374.

23 For a biographical account of Chōng Mongju, see Peter H. Lee, et al. 1992 or Lee and de Bary 1997:254.

24 For a discussion on Chōng Tojōn's life and thought, see Chai-sik Chung's article on Chōng Tojōn in de Bary and J. Kim Haboush 1985, or Lee and de Bary 1997: 254-255, 282, 297-299, 328.

25 Furthermore, the three-part work *Simgii p'yōn* is a critical comparative analysis of Daoism, Buddhism, and Neo-Confucianism in which Sambong criticized both Buddhism and Daoism. Sambong defended Confucianism by criticizing both Buddhism and Daoism. The last part of the *Simgii p'yōn* is



translated by John B. Duncan in Peter H. Lee et al. 1992:454-458.

26 For this diagram see John Duncan's English translation, *ibid.*, pp. 458-460. For a good discussion of this diagram, see also de Bary and Kim Haboush 1985:107-113.

27 See photos 2a-b for T'oegye's portraits including the second one on Korean paper money - 1000 won.

28 I discussed this topic in Chung 2011b.

29 For details, see Kalton 1988 for a full translation of T'oegye's *Ten Diagrams on Sage Learning*. See also Chung 1995a for my discussion of this topic in connection to T'oegye's philosophy of human nature and emotions and its implication for self-cultivation.

30 See Chung 1995a for a full-length study of T'oegye's Four-Seven thesis on the "Four Beginnings of virtue" and the "Seven Emotions" and its entire system of metaphysics, ethics, and spiritual practice. This book also covers the same topic for Yi Yulgok and presents a comparative study of the two leading Korean Neo-Confucian thinkers.

31 See photos 3a-b for Yulgok's portraits including the second one on Korean paper money - 5000 won.

32 I discussed this topic in Chung 1992b:171-175.

33 See Chung 1995a for my book on Yulgok's Four-Seven philosophy and its entire system of metaphysics, moral psychology, and practical learning. This book also covers the same topic for Yi T'oegye and presents a comparative study of the two leading Korean thinkers.

34 For Yulgok's philosophy, see also Ro 1989 or Chung 1998.

35 *Ibid.*

36 See photo 4 for Tasan's portrait. For Tasan's life and thought, see Setton 1997.



37 Catholicism was introduced along with European culture and science into Korea from China in the early seventeenth century, stimulating Korean intellectuals such as Yi Ik (Sŏngho, 1681-1763) and his disciples to search for fresh new measures for reform. As a result, a few members of the Sŏngho school (founded by Yi Ik) including Tasan and his senior colleagues became interested in Christianity and Western culture. Some of them, in fact, became Catholic converts (possibly including Tasan), despite the fact that the government led by the conservative scholar-officials strongly suppressed its spread.

38 Other commentaries include 22 vols. of poetry; 4 vols. of music; 5 vols. of miscellaneous writings; and 6 vols. of medicine. Tasan's *Complete Works* take up over 10,000 pages in the form of literary Chinese (*hanmun*).

39 As I argued elsewhere, the Chinese Wang Yangming school of thought also appears to have had some impact on the rise and development of the Sirhak school. Wang's emphasis on the virtuous dimension of the mind as well as on the practical "unity of knowledge and action" influenced the thinking of a few Sirhak scholars including Yi Ik and Chŏng Tasan. See Chung 1992a:14–23.

40 See Chung 1995a (chapter 1) for my detailed discussion of this topic in relation to the Korean Neo-Confucian philosophy of human nature and feelings ("Four-Seven Debate").

41 See also Kalton 1988; I discussed this topic on T'oegye's ethics and spirituality of self-cultivation in Chung 2010a, 2011b.

42 The relevant literature on this subject includes the following: Deuchler 1992; Kim Haboush 1988, 1991, 2002; Yi Songmu 1985; Palais 1975; Duncan 2002; and Chung 1992a.

43 A major question has been: Is Confucianism a religion, a philosophy, or both simultaneously? Our current scholarship therefore offers various works on the study of Confucianism as philosophy and/or religion; e.g., de Bary, Chan, Ching, Tu, Talyor, Neville, etc. For the Korean case, see Kalton, Ro and Chung in Selected Bibliography. It is also necessary to study the modern transformation of Confucianism as well; for more comments and supplementary readings on this, see note 1 (the first note in Chapter 1).



44 See Kim Haboush 1991:91-103.

45 “Affection between father and son; righteousness between rulers and subjects; separate functions between husband and wife; an proper order between old and young; and faithfulness between friends” (*Mencius* 3A:4). Lau’s translation 1970:127.

46 For a further reading on this topic, see Chung 1995b. Regarding Korean Confucianism, marriage, and gender relationships, see Chung 1994a.

47 The casual notion of ancestors in North America is quite different from the somewhat moral-religious notion of ancestors in Korea (and other East Asian countries influenced by Confucian values). As we know, most North Americans view ancestors as the dead people of the past from whom a living individual is descended. Ancestry is usually considered part of a person’s biological (and social) past; however, it is not significant for living one’s own life including its family spiritual dimensions. By contrast, the traditional Korean notion of family extends from the dead ancestors through the living members to the to-be-born members in the future. Its ancestry embodies a moral-religious belief in maintaining family values, promoting family prosperity, and even aspiring for personal health and fortune.

48 For this topic on Korean family spirituality and ancestral rites, I consulted Chung 2006 (my conference paper) and updated its key points.

49 I discussed this topic before: Chung 1995b, 1994a.

50 As I said in Chapters 9-10, there are two fundamental reasons for this co-existence: first, Confucianism remains a *diffused* tradition intermingled with daily Korean values; second, it has never been a theistic and organized confessional religion like Christianity.

51 Koreans are said to be “Confucian” in the sense of satisfying one or more ethical, social or religious criteria relating to Confucian awareness and experience. For example, 92% of four hundred Korean men and women who participated in a survey study of religious identity are said to be “Confucian” in this way. Furthermore, 90% of Korean Catholics are said to be Confucian in the same context (Korea Gallop Research Centre 1984). Among the four hundred people who



participated in the survey, all seventy-seven Buddhists are viewed as Confucian at the same time, and ninety percent of twenty Catholics, Confucian. This poll certainly indicated an interesting but not surprising result about interaction and participation involving Confucianism and another religion in East Asia. Another work on a similar topic (Kim Sung Hae 1988) indicates that 75% of the respondents affirmed general ethical similarities between Confucianism and Christianity. One major element of the result shows that Korea's cultural heritage (including Confucianism) could be assimilated.

52 This volume includes Kim Haboush's article, "Confucianization of Korean Society," and Robinson's article, "Perceptions of Confucianism in Twentieth-Century Korea."

53 For details, see note 1 (the first note in Chapter 1).

54 See note 51 above.

55 As we discussed in Chapter 6, the topic of education, economic culture and Confucian values in modern East Asia has been studied from various angles. Several recent interpretations highlighted "industrial Confucianism" and "Confucian capitalism," relating to Japan and the Four Little Dragons including South Korea. Berger 1988 addressed the Confucian culture of "political economy" and capitalism in East Asia from a comparative sociological angle. Tu weiming (1996:10) pointed out that "the social and cultural capital...has been at least commensurate with Confucian ethics, if not thoroughly Confucian in nature." Ezra Vogel 1991 explained "industrial Neo-Confucianism" and its contribution to education and industry. Tai 1989 is another relevant work on the topic of Confucianism and economic development. Rozman 1991 presented the issue of modernization and Confucianism in China, Japan, and Korea. For the South Korean case, see also Robinson 1991 and Palais 2002.

56 Pye 1985 also paid special attention to "aggressive" Confucian culture as an essential part of political authority in East Asia including Korea. For the impact of Confucianism on authoritarianism in Chosŏn Korea, see also Deuchler 1992, Kim Haboush 1991 and 2002, and Palais 1975.

57 Good sources for this topic are Deuchler 1992, 1977; Kim Haboush 1991, 1988; and Palais 1975.



58 See Chung 1994a for a detailed discussion of Women and Confucianism in Modern Korea.

59 “Affection between father and son; righteousness between rulers and subjects; separate functions between husband and wife; an proper order between old and young; and faithfulness between friends” (*Mencius* 3A:4).

60 The upper-class Korean women had to study and respect those Chinese and Korean Confucian texts written for women. A good discussion of the Chinese texts is Kelleher 1989; for these and Korean texts discussed in the Korean context, see Deuchler 1977 and Kim Yung-Chung 1976:59-161.

61 Korea Gallop Research Center; Chosun Ilbo (chosun.com; daily newspaper), Aug. 11, 2003.

62 *Ibid.*

63 Various works on “ancestor worship,” shamanism, and rituals in Korean society include: Kendall 1985, Janelli and Janelli 1982, Kendall and Dix 1987, Dredge 1987, Bruno 2006, Walraven 2006, etc., most of which variously discussed Korean patterns of ancestor worship and shamanism. See also J. Y. Lee 1985. However, I note that the Korean tradition of Confucian ancestral rites should not be over-simplified or generalized in terms of the popular label “ancestor worship” in connection to shamanism or rural folk religion. In the current literature on Korean ritual and society, these two popular notions are applied to Confucian ancestral rites unfairly or even incorrectly.

64 The current literature on the study of Chinese Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism as religion and spirituality includes Ching 2000, 1989, 1977; Tu Weiming 1989, 1985; Taylor 1991; Berthrong 1994; Neville 2000; and others. For the Korean case of it, see Kalton 1988; Ro 1989; Chung 2011b, 2010a-b, 2004, 1995a, 1994b; etc.

65 Such as the *Manual of the Four Rites* (*Sarye pyöllum*), a mid-eighteenth century Korean edition of Zhu Xi’s Chinese work, *Family Rites* (*Jiali*). In South Korea, educated older generations (including my own father and my father-in-law) can outline their ancestral rites with fair consistency along the standard customs; some of them are also familiar with basic family rituals and moral-cultural values



that are outlined in a public handbook entitled, *Standardized Guidelines on Family Etiquettes and Rituals (Kajöng ürye chunchi'k)*, an important part of the nation's civil legal code.

66 A recent national survey on the public view of ancestral rites has reported that about 79% of families in South Korea observe the *kijesa* anniversary rites, and 78% the *ch'arye* seasonal holiday rites on the Ch'usök and the traditional New Year's Day. Cited in JoongAng Ilbo newspaper, Sept. 16, 2005.

67 Such as the *Concise Handbook for Confucians (Yurim p'yöllum)*, pp. 139-141, and the new Korean edition, *Our Rites and Manners for Everyday Living (Uri-üi saenghwal yejöl)*. pp. 324-340. The former is published by the Headquarters of Korean Yudoh'oe (Society for the Confucian Way; 1983, 1991), and the latter, by the Sönggyun'gwan (1997).

68 I translated, annotated, shortened, and discussed all steps of this formal procedure in my 2006 conference paper.

69 Indeed, it is a formal, polite etiquette of expressing filial piety to parents on traditional holidays, or giving a special gratitude or greetings to old teachers-mentors. Note that it does not imply anything like "idolatry" or "superstition"; I say so because there has been some misunderstanding especially among evangelical and conservative Christians, Koreans or non-Koreans, who either do not tolerate this part of Korean culture or simply ignore its moral nature.

70 For a formal memorial rite at the famous Tosan Confucian Academy, the ritual master chants a *ch'ungmun* reading in order to honor Yi T'oegye, the Academy's founder as well as the most renowned scholar of Korean Confucianism. This is done with local descendants of his family. It is interesting to note that traditional scholarly uniforms and hats are also used.

71 The issue of ancestral rites has been addressed negatively especially by the conservative and evangelical groups of Korean Protestant churches in terms of "superstitious tradition" and "idol worship."

72 For example, the key passages on family and Christian love are read from Paul's letters to the Corinthians and to Romans, New Testament.



73 Therefore, it is not surprising that the Catholic church in South Korea is assimilating ancestral rites and family morality. Since the 1980s, various ideas of indigenization have been studied in South Korea. Several methodological paradigms also include cultural assimilation and Koreanization. In 1989 the Korean Catholic church established a Special Committee for the Study of Traditional Funeral and Ancestral Rites. In early 1993, the Special Committee compiled a lengthy and carefully-written document: “Ceremonial Guidelines for Funeral and Ancestral Rites: A Recommendation” (*Sangjerye yesiksŏ sian*).

74 In this regard, Palmer (1985: 95) correctly pointed out earlier that Confucian ancestral rites are “a continuing feature of Korean social-religious life, maintaining values” through ritual forms and symbols.

75 I have discussed the topic of Confucianism in contemporary Korea in terms of continuity, change and synthesis, relating to moral education, ancestral rituals and family values, social ethics, Korean identity, modernization, etc. See Chung 2006, 1995b, 1994a, 1994b.

76 This is mainly because Korean Protestant pastors discourage the observance of ancestral rites. For more, see note 71.

77 Furthermore, 50% of them have experienced no real conflict even in maintaining the modified tradition of ancestral rites at home (Mullinax 1994). For more comments, see note 51 above.

78 Regarding the notion of “portable Confucianism” here, I am indebted to Robert Neville’s comparative thesis of “Boston Confucianism” (2000) and its international implications.

79 This was mentioned in a national daily newspapers, *Han’guk Ilbo* (Korea daily news), Apr. 16, 1993.

80 Many Korean husbands respect their wives’ wisdom and ability in decision-making processes, depending heavily on their wives in many respects: virtually all of the family finance, the education of children, the purchase of household goods, and the handling of various domestic and social relationships are under the direct control and management of women.

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Illustrations: 19 photos

Photos 1a-c (ch. 2): three pictures on the Sōnggyun'gwan, Seoul, Korea.

Photos 2a-b (ch. 3): Yi T'oegye's portraits (second one on Korean paper money
- 1000 won).

Photos 3a-b (ch. 3): Yi Yulgok's portraits (second one on Korean paper money
- 5000 won).

Photos 4 (ch. 3): Chōng Tasan's portrait.

Photos 5a-b (ch. 9): two photos of the typical ancestral ritual table of food and
related offerings on the Korean New Year's Day.

Photos 6a-b (ch. 9): two photos of the *sebae* prostration custom as special
greetings on the Korean New Year's Day.

Photos 7a-b (ch. 9): two photos of the ritual initiation reading and prostration
at the Tosan Confucian Academy's ancestral rite for Master Yi T'oegye.



Photos 8a-b (ch. 9): two photos of General Secretary of the UN, Mr. Ban Ki-moon's ancestral rite in his hometown on the Ch'useök holiday.

Photos 9a-b (ch. 9): two photos of the Korean World Cup soccer team's ancestral rite at their training camp on the Ch'usök holiday.

Photo 10 (ch. 9): one photo about the ancestral ritual table of food offering with the ancestor's portrait.

Sources of Illustrations:

Photos 1a [Sönggyun'gwan]: Sönggyun'gwan in Seoul

Photos 1b [Sönggyun'gwan]: Sönggyun'gwan in Seoul

Photos 1c [Sönggyun'gwan]: Sönggyun'gwan in Seoul

Photos 2a [Yi T'oegyë portrait]: Bank of Korea in Seoul/ Mr. (Hyuncho) LEE,
Yu Tae

Photos 3a [Yi Yulgok portrait]: Ojukheon & Museum in Gangneung/ Mr.
(I-dang) Kim, Eun-ho

Photos 4 [Chong Tasan portrait]: Bank of Korea in Seoul/ Mr. (Woljeong)
Chang, Woo Seong

Photos 5a [Chesasang]: Korea Tourism Organization

Photos 5b [Chesasang]: Korea Tourism Organization

Photos 6a [Sebae prostration]: Korea Tourism Organization

Photos 6b [Sebae prostration]: Yonhap News

Photos 7a [Tosan Academy's chesa ancestral rite for Yi T'oegyë]: Tosan
Academy



Photos 7b [Tosan Academy's chesa ancestral rite for Yi T'oegyŏ]: Tosan Academy

Photos 8a [General Secretary of the UN, Mr. Ban Ki-moon's ancestral rite in his hometown on the Ch'useŏk holiday]: Yonhap News

Photos 8b [General Secretary of the UN, Mr. Ban Ki-moon's ancestral rite in his hometown on the Ch'useŏk holiday]: Yonhap News

Photos 9a [Ch'useŏk (harvest) holiday *charye* ancestral rite]: Yonhap News

Photos 9b [Ch'useŏk (harvest) holiday *charye* ancestral rite]: Yonhap News

Photo 10 [Ancestral ritual table with offerings and ancestral portraits]: Mr. Son, Sung-Hoon



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