

The Consistency of Yulgok's Theory of Education in his Philosophical System

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1. Introduction

It is well known that the core idea of Neo-Confucianism is to teach people to follow the Confucian way of life and, finally, to become sages. To become sages signifies no more than to realize the human inborn nature. In other words, it simply means that human beings live their own lives as they are supposed to live. Undoubtedly, this is closely related to the Mencian idea of human nature. Mencius believes that human beings are born with nature, but that they cannot realize their nature without any effort. Since human beings are fallible and tend to deviate from the right path and do wrong deeds, they need to find a way to rectify the misdeeds to recover their nature. Here arises the necessity of education.

Following Mencius, Yi I (Yulgok, 1536-1584), who was one of the most influential Neo-Confucian thinkers in sixteenth century Choson Korea, also had firm beliefs in the goodness of human nature and the perfectibility of it through self-cultivation.¹ In other words, he indeed believes that human beings have the inborn nature which is originally good, that they have the capacity to realize it, and that the realization of it is achieved, in particular, by self-cultivation. Although their nature is originally good, it

¹ The vigorous scholarly discussion of Yulgok's followers resulted later in the formation of the so-called Yulgok School. As we shall see later, although most Neo-Confucian thinkers were interested in education, his formula for an educational system as well as a theoretical foundation for it appears particularly outstanding and consistent.

can be evil at times and so they need to rectify it to recover its goodness. In this vein, Yulgok goes on to assert that Human beings in this world cannot be human beings without education.² His ideal of education is that human beings need to cultivate themselves in the way in which they can achieve, preserve, and recover their original nature. Up to this point, he appears to sound pretty much the same as most of the other Neo-Confucians and there seems to be nothing new in his theory. Indeed, it is true that Yulgok's basic idea of education is more or less the same as that of Neo-Confucianism. However, his originality can be found in the following three important theories: (a) the rectification of physical quality (*kyokijil*, 矯氣質), (b) the mutual transformation of the human mind and the moral mind (*insimdosimsangwichongsisol*, 人心道心相爲終始), and (c) sincerity (*song/ch'eng* 誠).³

In what follows, I shall first show the characteristic marks of Yulgok's monistic theory of principle (*li/li*, 理) and material force (*ki/ch'i*, 氣). And then I shall return to examine his allowance for the possibility of the recovery of human nature explained in terms of (a) and (b) above. In addition, I shall analyze the characteristics of the concept sincerity which he introduces as a way of self-cultivation. In following the course of our discussion, we shall see that Yulgok's theory of education neatly fits into his overall philosophical system⁴ and that the educational system he has

2 *The Complete Works of Yulgok*, Bk. 27:2. Translations are my own, unless otherwise stated. Yulgok's works on education include the *Kyongmongyokyo* (Essential Instructions of Model for an Academy) (1577), the *Hakkyomobom* (Model for an Academy) (1582), *Songhakchipyo* (Essentials of the Learning of the Sages) (1575), etc. all of which are included in the Complete Works of Yulgok. It is to be noted that they are not textbooks, but rather manuals for school managing, teaching, and learning. They are understood as an application of the essence of Neo-Confucian ideas on education to the reality, i.e. to practical matters.

3 As we shall see below, (a) and (b) embody the possibility of human rectification as well as the necessity for cultivation to become sages, whereas (c) is introduced as a practical way to cultivate oneself.

in mind can be characterized as holistic in the proper sense of the term.

2.The Obscure Relationship between Principle and Material Force

Apart from the fact that Yulgok and T'oegye (Yi Hwang, 1501-1570) did not have the teacher-pupil relations,⁵ their academic relationship might well remind us of that between the two Greek philosophers Plato (427-347 BC) and Aristotle (384-322 BC). As Plato had a dualistic view of form and matter or soul and body, whereas his disciple Aristotle had a monistic view in the sense that he did not allow the possible existence of form without matter and vice versa, T'oegye had a dualistic view of principle and material force, whereas Yulgok did not allow the possible existence of without principle apart from material force and vice versa.

Although Chu Hsi (1130-1200) in general claims that principle cannot be separated from material force,⁶ he occasionally appears to allow the chronological sequence of principle and material force,⁷ which appears to suggest the separate existence of principle from material force. Modern Korean scholars who are not happy with ascribing such inconsistency to Chu Hsi are inclined to say that his remarks should be understood not as claiming their chronological sequence, but their logical sequence.⁸

4 Cf. Jang (2009), p. 96

5 It is well known that Yulgok visited T'oegye in 1558 and then exchanged a number of letters for a while, but it is not clear whether they met more than once. Although their relationship was not so intimate, Yulgok always had an open ear to T'oegye's academic development and occasionally made indirect comments. The immediate evidence to this is his discussion of the human mind and the moral mind with Song Hon (Ugye, 1535-1598), which originally started in his criticism of T'oegye's Four-Seven thesis (see below).

6 *The Classified Conversations of Master of Chu*, 1:6, 1:9, 1:13 etc.

7 *The Classified Conversations of Master of Chu*, 1:2, 1:11, 1:14 etc.

However, in his famous debate on the Four Beginnings (*sadan/ssu-tuan*, 四端, i.e. commiseration, shame/dislike, deference/compliance, and right/wrong) and the Seven Feelings (*ch'iljong/ch'i-ch'ing*, 七情, i.e. joy, anger, sorrow, fear, love, hatred, and desire) explained in terms of principle and material force, T'oegye ascribes the possibility of activity to principle, which immediately suggests the independent or separate existence of principle from material force and which most Neo-Confucian scholars are unwilling to accept or claim. This is known as the theory of alternate manifestations of principle and material force (*likihobalsol*, 理氣互發說).

Unlike T'oegye's understanding of principle and material force, Yulgok explicitly claims that Principle and material force have no beginnings and so it is not possible to talk about [their] order [in time]⁹ and characterizes their relationship in the notorious expression of the obscurity of principle and material force (*likichimyo*, 理氣之妙). This expression is often regarded as the most significant term in Yulgok's philosophy. He says in the fourth letter to Song Hon (or Song Ho-won) in 1572 that The obscurity of principle and material force is not only difficult to know but also difficult to explain.¹⁰ The obscure relationship he is referring to is indeed to describe the relationship between principle and material force which is often said to be one yet two as well as two yet one. This means to suggest that principle and material force are, strictly speaking, neither one nor two. Yulgok says thus,

8 However, they do not clearly explain what they really mean by it logical sequence. For this problem, see Chung (1995), p.120; Yoo (2006), notes 5-6 & pp. 229-232.

9 *The Complete Works of Yulgok*, Bk. 10:38. For Yulgok's criticism of Chu Hsi, see Chung (1995), pp. 108-109.

10 *The Complete Works of Yulgok*, Bk. 10:17. Cf. the translation of Kalton et al. (1994), p. 156: The wonder that is principle and material force is difficult to understand and difficult to explain.

In general, principle is the master of material force, and material force is what principle mounts upon. Without principle, material force has no grounding, without material force, principle has nothing on which to depend. They are not two [separate] things, but again they are not a single thing. They are not a single thing, therefore they are one and yet two; they are not two things, therefore they are two and yet one.¹¹

Yulgok's explanation in the above passage is some what confusing: he primarily appears to convince us that principle and material force are not two separate entities, but still maintains that they have their distinct roles or functions.¹² However, his position becomes clearer when he denies T'oegy's description of the relationship between principle and material force. The separability of principle from material force is implied in T'oegye's claim that The Four Beginnings are the arousal of principle and material force follows it, and the Seven are the arousal of material force and principle rides on it.¹³ In other words, he allows a time gap between the arousal of principle and the following of material force and, also, between the arousal of material force and the riding of principle.

As for this claim, Yulgok goes on to refuse the first half of it and accepts the second half.

T'oegye establishes a thesis based on this and says that The Four Beginnings are the arousal of principle and material force follows it, the Seven are the arousal of material force and principle rides on it. To say that material force arouses and principle rides on it is right, it is not the case only with the Seven Feelings, but the Four Beginnings are also the arousal of material force and principle rides on it. However, since the claim that principle arouses and material force follows clearly allow priority and posteriority, how can this not violate [what is true about] principle?¹⁴

11 *The Complete Works of Yulgok*, Bk. 10:1 in Kaltonet. al. (tr.) (1994), p. 126.

12 Tu (1982, p. 46) suggests that this can be understood as a conceptual distinction.

13 *The Complete Works of T'oegye*, Bk. 16:31.

14 *The Complete Works of Yulgok*, Bk. 10:4-5.

Yulgok thinks that it is wrong to say that principle arouses and material force follows it (*libalkisu*, 理發氣隨) since it allows a time gap between them, whereas the phrase material force arouses and principle rides on it (*kiballisung*, 氣發理乘) does not allow any time gap.¹⁵ In this way, he is concerned with the possibility of time gap and accepts the arousal of material force in one way only (*kibalildo*, 氣發一途). Although he is not very careful about the activity of principle in that the arousal of principle somehow appears to be a sort of activity, he wants to say that only material force is active. And this is very important in the establishment of the rectifiability, i.e. the possibility of rectification, of the human mind as well as the physical quality in learning to be sages to realize human nature.

3.The Mutual Transformation of the Human Mind and the Moral Mind

Yulgok's debate with Ugye on the Human Mind and the Moral Mind through correspondence in 1572 was triggered by the earlier debate between T'oegye and Ki Dae-Seung (Kobong, 1527-1572) on the Four Beginnings and the Seven Feelings. Ugye did not intend at first, but as his debate progressed, he came to take T'oegye's side, whereas Yulgok happened to take Kobong's side. At the beginning, Ugye asks Yulgok a number of questions concerning T'oegye's discussion about the Four and the Seven in relation to the human mind and the moral mind. The main point he is concerned with is whether the moral mind can be equated

¹⁵ I shall simply point out without any discussion that the second half of the proposition, i.e. the relationship between the arousal of material force and the riding of principle on it, still seems to allow for a time gap. For this problem, see Yoo (2012b), note 11.

with the Four, whereas the human mind should not be equated with the Seven.

In his debate with Kobong, T'oegye initially claimed that the origin of the Four is principle, whereas the origin of the Seven is material force and so severed the connection not only between principle and material force, but also between the Four and the Seven. The consequence is that since the Four and the Seven have different origins and so properties, logically speaking, the Four are no longer good parts of the Seven and, indeed, the Four and the Seven have nothing to do with each other. Therefore, if the Four are originated from principle only, they will always be good, whereas if the Seven are originated from material force only, they will always be evil. In this way, the Four will always remain good, and the Seven will always remain evil. If this is the case, there is no possible rectification of what is evil to become good. For one who was once a villain will always remain as a villain. Although T'oegye tries to show later that he did not mean to sever principle and material force so severely, the impression he gave at an earlier stage was too strong and too prevalent to retrieve.

In contrast, Yulgok treats the Four as parts of the Seven and understands that the Four are the good feelings of the Seven, whereas the rest of the Seven are bad feelings.¹⁶ Human feelings do not have separate origins, but they are originated from nature, i.e. the composition of principle and material force.¹⁷ Yulgok is more interested in the mind than feelings. He distinguishes feelings from the mind by saying that the mind refers to feelings plus intention or will (eui, 意),¹⁸ but he also thinks that the human mind and the moral mind do not have separate origins. However, in comparing feelings with the mind, he says that the Four can

¹⁶ *The Complete Works of Yulgok*, Bk. 10:6.

¹⁷ *The Complete Works of Yulgok*, Bk. 9:36.

¹⁸ *The Complete Works of Yulgok*, Bk. 9:34.

be equated with the moral mind, whereas the Seven cannot be equated with the human mind. The criterion of the distinction seems to be the moral characteristic. That is, the moral characteristic of the Four is the same as that of the moral mind, whereas that of the Seven is not the same as that of the human mind. Yulgok appears to think that the Four and the moral mind can be equated since both of them are good, but that the Seven and the human mind cannot be equated since the Seven are both good and evil, whereas the moral mind is always good. It is generally said that The moral mind is aroused from the correctness of nature and destiny, whereas the human mind is aroused from the selfishness of the physical form. However, Yulgok does not think that they have two separate origins nor that they refer to two separate minds. He clearly states that The human mind and the moral mind are not two minds¹⁹and that Although the human mind and the moral mind have two names, their origin is only one.²⁰

According to Yulgok, the human mind and the moral mind become each other's beginning or end (*insimdosim-sangweechongsi*, 人心道心相爲終始). Since the two minds do not have separate origins, but one and the same origin and so one and the same attributes, they can be transformed into each other. That is, the human mind can become the moral mind and vice versa. This is Yulgok's original and distinctive theory. This theory implies that whether one becomes a sage or an inferior man is neither fixed nor determined. One can be either of them in accordance with one's effort for, or extent of, self-cultivation. Chung succinctly summarizes Yulgok's theory thus: even if one begins with the human mind mixed with selfishness, one can still transform it into the moral mind if one decides to follow moral principles and overcome selfish

19 *The Complete Works of Yulgok*, Bk. 10:3 .

20 *The Complete Works of Yulgok*, Bk. 10:4.

desires.²¹ Although the human mind and the moral mind can be transformed into each other, the ultimate end is the moral mind which has the moral characteristic of goodness and which can be achieved only by means of preserving or recovering human nature. Yulgok's allowance for the possibility of the transformation of the human mind into the moral mind is to leave the room for evil men to become sages in the end. In other words, the evil man is not always evil, but can become good through his effort. Now, the next question to enquire is, therefore, how to transform the evil mind to become good and be the moral mind.

4. The Recovery of Human Nature by means of rectifying the Physical Quality

It is generally accepted in Neo-Confucianism that, although human beings are composed of principle and material force and share one and the same principle, the qualities of their material force might be various. Yulgok explains this point as follows:

Indeed, principle is only one. In it, there is originally no differentiation between the partial and the full, the penetrating and the blocked up, the clear and the turbid, the pure and the mixed. However, the material force mounting on principle rises and falls, and flies and is flown, neither has rested nor ceased before, neither becomes mixed nor ordered. [Therefore] although principle is one, once it is mounted, it is differentiated in innumerable ways.²²

Human beings are different from one another because of the different qualities of material force. Thus, some of them become superior men or sages, whereas others remain inferior men. However, since although

²¹ Chung (1995), p.89.

²² *The Complete Works of Yulgok*, Bk. 10:2.

principle is inactive and unchangeable, material force is active and changeable,²³ there is a possibility that the turbid and mixed material force can be rectified.

Only human beings have received integral and penetrating material force and at the same time have innumerable variations as to the degree of clarity or turbidity, being pure or mixed. Thus the turbid can change and become clear, the mixed can change and become pure. Therefore, the practice of self-cultivation belongs only to man, and the ultimate perfection of that practice extends even to bringing it about that Heaven and Earth assume their proper positions and all creatures are properly nurtured.²⁴

Yulgok emphasizes that human beings are capable of recovering their nature (*pokkisong*, 復其性) by means of rectifying the physical quality (*kyokijil*, 矯氣質).²⁵ Elsewhere, he distinguishes between recovering nature and recovering material force and says that it is all right to say the former, but not the latter.²⁶ According to him, it is reasonable to say recovering nature since although the goodness of nature is obscured by selfish desires, it is still good and its goodness can be easily recovered. On the contrary, since the turbidity and impurity of material force is fixed at birth, it is not possible to recover material force, but rather to rectify the quality of material force, i.e. physical quality. We have to remember that the rectification or purification of physical quality does not mean any change in human nature. In other words, human nature does not go through any change at all in any case. The goodness of human nature is simply revealed by purifying the contaminated material force.

There are two more points to be noted in the above quotation. The first point is that the rectification of physical quality signifies the self-cultivation

23 *The Complete Works of Yulgok*, Bk. 10:11.

24 *The Complete Works of Yulgok*, Bk. 10:2 in Kalton et. al. (tr.) (1994), p. 127.

25 *The Complete Works of Yulgok*, Bk. 20:6.

26 *The Complete Works of Yulgok*, Bk. 31:5. Cf. Hwang (1994), p. 238.

of human beings. Yulgok distinguishes three types of human beings, i.e. sages, worthies, and inferior men.²⁷ Sages are born with the clear and pure physical quality and they never transgress the norm even though they follow their hearts. In other words, they always have the moral mind, but not the human mind in Yulgok's terms. That is, they do not even need an effort to preserve the original clarity and purity since they are clear and pure and, also, they have no selfish desires at all. On the other hand, the worthies have the slightly turbid physical quality. They have to cultivate themselves to recover their original nature. Since their physical quality contains some dirt inside, it never becomes clear enough without an effort to clean it. Finally, there are inferior men who have a lot of impurity and turbidity in their physical quality. Thus, the self-cultivation or rectification is necessary for the worthies and the inferior men since they are born with the turbid and mixed physical quality. As mentioned earlier, Yulgok not only believes in human nature, but also in its goodness. To say that human beings have nature is to say that human beings are born with a definite, but potential, aim in their lives: that is, they have the essence they are ultimately supposed to realize.

The second point is that the recovery of human nature is not only for the welfare of human beings, but of all the myriad things in the world. That is, the goodness of their nature implies not only that the realization of nature is good for human beings, but that it will benefit the world. We shall say in the following section something more about the connection between human cultivation and the welfare of other existents.

5. Yulgok's Theory of Sage Studies in terms of Sincerity

²⁷ *The Complete Works of Yulgok*, Bk. 10:13-14.

The recovery of nature by the rectification of physical quality is possible through self-cultivation. In Neo-Confucianism, self-cultivation is primarily learning to be a sage. It is also called the Sage Learning, Learning of the Sages, or Sage Studies (*Songhak*, 聖學) which is, according to Kalton, a term frequently used in a genre of Neo-Confucian literature designed for the instruction of rulers. Its usage reflects the particular duty of the ruler to learn from and model himself after the ideal sage rulers of the past.²⁸ As passionate and faithful Neo-Confucians who were retainers as well as advisors to a king, T'oegye and Yulgok composed the *Songhaksipto* (*Ten Diagrams of the Learning of the Sages*, 1568)²⁹ and the *Songhakchipyo* (*Outline of the Learning of the Sages*, 1575), respectively, for King Sonjo.³⁰ As noted, although the books were written for a king, the sage learning itself is not only for kings or educated people, but for all human beings with nature.³¹ In other words, sagehood is the goal of every man, and anybody has the inherent ability to achieve sagehood because a sage is nothing but the fullest realization of human nature.³² Anybody who fully realizes his/her nature will become a sage. That is, a sage is no more than a fully realized human being.

Although both T'oegye and Yulgok were Neo-Confucian scholars who took the sage learning or the self-cultivation to become sages as the primary task of human beings, they adopted and suggested different methods. It was pointed out for a while that of the two methods for the

28 Kalton (1988), p. 25.

29 In the book, T'oegye carefully selected ten subjects which he thought it necessary for the king to know as a ruler and briefly explained each subject with a text and a diagram. This book is a highly compressed work which includes the essence of his philosophy.

30 T'oegye composed it in 1568 in the first year of the king's succession to the throne at the still tender age of 17 and, seven years later in 1575, Yulgok also composed the same king

31 *The Complete Works of Yulgok*, Bk. 19:9.

32 Ro (1988), p. 96.

self-cultivation or the sage learning, i.e. reverence (*kyong/ching*, 敬)³³ and sincerity (*song/ch'eng*, 誠), T'oegye preferred the former as a way of self-cultivation, whereas Yulgok was in favor of the latter.³⁴ Contrasting them in this way is naturally taken to mean that T'oegye was interested in cultivating oneself (*suki*, 修己) only, whereas Yulgok was interested in directing others (*ch'iin*, 治人) only.³⁵ However, that is not quite true. Recent studies have shown that although it is true that they put more emphasis on one side, they never disregarded the other side. T'oegye also acknowledged the significance of sincerity and Yulgok also took the necessity of reverence as a prerequisite for sincerity.³⁶

Chung explains T'oegye's concept of reverence as follows:

In fact, *reverence* may refer to the inner motivation that inspires the practice of self-regulation. The cultivation of reverential seriousness pertains to the Mencian doctrine of preserving the mind in itself and nourishing the original goodness of human nature. It also takes the manifest mind as the basis for self-introspection and self-realization. To T'oegye, then, this represents the essence of learning for sagehood.³⁷

According to the above explanation, reverence tends to be directed

33 For the problem with the translation of the term *kyong*, see Kalton (1988), pp. 187-188 and pp. 212-214.

34 Ro (1988, pp. 87-88) states that For T'oegye, *ching* (reverence) is the basic condition for calming the mind and illuminating principle, and when this state of mind and understanding are achieved, one becomes *ch'eng* (sincere). I am not quite sure whether this is true since this description seems to apply to Yulgok rather than T'oegye. Unfortunately, he does not provide any textual evidence for his claim other than a secondary literature. Hwang (2003, pp. 207-209) claims that although T'oegye clearly says that both cultivating oneself and directing others are important, we have to view his theory of studies as centering mainly on cultivating oneself.

35 Hwang (2003), p. 206; Jang (2009), p. 96. As noted, in general, cultivating oneself refers to the perfection of self, i.e. the perfection of a human being as a human being, whereas directing others refers to the extension of self-perfection to the other fellow people, communities, all the myriad things, and the natural world.

36 Kim (2002), p. 388; Hwang (2002), pp. 310-312.

37 Chung (1995), p. 134.

inwards. It is largely about the inner self and hardly goes beyond the self. In other words, it is to preserve the mind and nourish the goodness of human nature in an unaroused state of feelings. If reverence is to reflect what is inside in the mind only, that is, to keep what is already inside as such without any change, then it has no direct connection to the outer world. If so, it follows that one who becomes a sage through reverence will not concern whatever happens in the world.

However, we should not jump to such a conclusion. For although it is true to say that T'oegye emphasizes cultivating the self by reverence, maintaining the inner state of the mind, and recovering the original nature, it is wrong to say that he is not concerned with directing others at all. Indeed, he focuses rather heavily on reverence because he thinks that reverence is a necessary and sufficient condition for directing others. That is, he believes that once human beings rectify their physical quality and recover their nature, they will automatically have the capacity for directing others. However, as we shall see presently, this is different from Yulgok.

Let us turn to the concept of sincerity. As noted, the term was closely defined in the *Doctrine of Mean*.³⁸

[a] Sincerity is the Way of Heaven. To think how to be sincere is the way of man. He who is sincere is one who hits upon what is right without effort and apprehends without thinking. He is naturally and easily in harmony with the Way. Such a man is a sage. [*The Doctrine of the Mean* 20]

[b] Only those who are absolutely sincere can fully develop their nature. If they fully develop their nature, they can then fully develop the nature of others. If they can fully develop the nature of others, they can then fully develop the nature of things. If they can fully develop the nature of things, they can then assist in the transforming and nourishing process of Heaven and Earth. If they can assist in the transforming and

38 The following translations are due to Chan (tr.) (1975), pp. 106-108.

nourishing process of Heaven and Earth, they can thus form a trinity with Heaven and Earth. [*The Doctrine of the Mean* 22]

[c] Sincerity means the completion of the self, and the Way is self-directing. Sincerity is the beginning and end of things. Without sincerity there would be nothing. Sincerity is not only the completion of one's own self, it is that by which all things are completed. The completion of the self means humanity. The completion of all things means wisdom. These are character of the nature, and they are the Way in which the internal and the external are united. Therefore, whenever it is employed, everything done is right. [*The Doctrine of the Mean* 25]

From [a], we learn that sincerity is the so-called Heavenly Way and that a sage is one who follows it. In [b], we can find a more detailed guide to be sincere. In order to be a sage, to be a man who follow Heavenly Way or Principle, or to realize one's nature fully, one should be sincere or practice sincerity. This point is repeated in [c]. We now see that sincerity is the most important for human beings since they cannot realize their nature without sincerity. Moreover, sincerity is not only to complete the human self, but also to complete other things. In this way, human beings form a trinity with Heaven and Earth. It is thus reasonable to say that a cultivated life of *sincerity* is to be in harmonious unity with the universe; the *sincere self* therefore appreciates the natural beauties respecting all beings.³⁹ The concept of sincerity has a holistic connotation in the sense that it does not simply concern an individual human being or all human beings, but all the myriad things that exists in the world or, rather, in the universe as a whole.

The essence of Yulgok's idea of sincerity is pretty much the same as that in the *Doctrine of Mean*.⁴⁰ For him, sincerity is a method of sage

39 Chung (2011, p. 101) describes T'oegye's idea in this way except that he uses such terms as reverence and reverential self instead of sincerity and sincere self, respectively.

40 See Ro (1988), pp. 82-86. He offers an helpful account of ChHsi's concept of the investigation of things and extension of knowledge (*kyokmulchijij/ko-wuchih-chih*, 格物致知) on which Yulgok's theory of sincerity is based.

learning or self-cultivation to be a sage by following the Heavenly Way.⁴¹ Considering this connotation, it may seem true that the meaning of sincerity does not match the common usage of the word 'sincerity' in English, which denotes mainly a person's honesty.⁴² However, Yulgok does count honesty as a significant factor in self-cultivation since he clearly accepts that remaining true to oneself without deception (*muchaki*, 毋自欺) even at the time of one's being alone without anybody around is also required for sincerity.⁴³ His usage of honesty is not merely to refer to one's being honest, but also to one's serious attitude towards every job to do. Being honest and serious about self-cultivation is a starting point for sincerity.

However, Yulgok does not forget to consider the role of reverence by saying that sincerity is completed only through reverence.⁴⁴ According to him, the ultimate aim of reverence is sincerity and the foundation of sincerity is reverence.⁴⁵ In this sense, sincerity is now understood as the ultimate principle itself since once sincerity is completed, there is nothing more to be achieved. Yulgok else where defines reverence as the concentration without distraction (*chuilmujok*, 主一無敵).⁴⁶ He introduces two types of reverence: convergence (*suryom*, 收斂) of the behavior, the body, and the mind, and is the correction of the mind (*jongsim*, 正心).⁴⁷

41 *The Complete Works of Yulgok*, <Supyu> Bk. 6:37-38. For reference, in Korean, the pronunciation of the learning for sage (*songhak*, 聖學) is the same as the pronunciation of the learning for sincerity (*songhak*, 誠學).

42 Ro (1988), p. 77.

43 *The Complete Works of Yulgok*, Bk. 21:3 .

44 *The Complete Works of Yulgok*, Bk. 21:2-5.

45 *The Complete Works of Yulgok*, <Supyu> Bk. 6: 10. Cf. Bk. 21:9, Reverence is the beginning and end of sage learning.

46 *The Complete Works of Yulgok*, Bk. 21:27.

47 *The Complete Works of Yulgok*, Bk. 9:2. He again divides the correction of the mind into two types: the preservation of reverence and the recovery of human nature (*hamyang*, 涵養) in an unaroused state of feelings and the differentiation the good from the evil (*songchal*, 省察) in an aroused state.

As seen earlier, T'oegye thinks that cultivating oneself is a necessary and sufficient condition for directing others. Yulgok has no doubt that it is a necessary for one to be able to direct others, but he does not think that it is the sufficient condition. Their different views on reverence is also found in that T'oegye takes it that self-cultivation requires the practice of quiet-sitting 靜坐, whereas Yulgok does not.⁴⁸ The practice of quiet-sitting as a way of reverence is a sort of contemplation of, or reflection on, moral knowledge as well as intellectual knowledge.⁴⁹ Both T'oegye and Yulgok would agree on this role of quiet-sitting⁵⁰ and, also, the Neo-Confucian ideal of self-cultivation that is not only for the good of the self, but also for the good of all the existents. Yulgok's consistent emphasis that cultivating oneself is different from directing others is to claim the application of theory to the real world. He seems to think that T'oegye's idea that the realization of human nature will automatically benefit others is too naive to accept.⁵¹ That is, he might think that even though one realizes one's own nature and knows what to do for the welfare of others, the application of it in the right way requires different types of trainings. In consequence, it is important to remember that his conception of sincerity does not consider the welfare of oneself alone, but tries to extend it for the welfare of others, too.

48 *The Complete Works of Yulgok*, Bk. 20:14-15.

49 Chung (1995, p. 132) quotes from T'oegye and says that the practice of quiet-sitting is to collect the body and the mind so that moral principles can be united together. For his account of quiet-sitting, see Chung (1995), pp. 131-132.

50 Ro (1988, p. 87) summarizes T'oegye's position about reverence as follows: According to T'oegye, however, *ching* ('reverent attention'), not *ch'eng*, was the key to learning. The principle of things can be properly studied and investigated only when we reside in *ching*. This is what he termed dwelling in reverence and thorough investigation of the principle (Korean: *Kogyongkungni*, Chinese: *chu-chingch'iung-li*). For T'oegye, 'dwelling in reverence' is the prerequisite for any kind of learning or knowing. (Bold letters are my emphasis. And *ching* and *ch'eng* in the quotation from Ro refer to reverence and sincerity, respectively.)

51 Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1096b 32: even if there is some good which is universally predicable of goods or is capable of separate and independent existence, clearly it could not be achieved or attained by man; but we are now seeking something attainable.

6. Concluding Remarks

Whether one claims that human nature is originally good or evil, one tends to acknowledge the necessity of education as in the cases of Mencius and Xunzi. Although education today is generally understood as teaching, and learning from, others, whereas Neo-Confucian thinkers took self-cultivation, i.e. teaching, and learning by, oneself, to be more important, all of them agree that the purpose of education is to bring about a favorable change in human beings.⁵²

Yulgok had the same thought. Above all, he thinks that human beings cannot be completed without education.⁵³ For him, education is primarily to recover human nature by rectifying physical quality.⁵⁴ This signifies that one has the capacity for controlling selfish desires.⁵⁵ As opposed to T'oegye who ascribes activeness to principle, Yulgok explicitly and strongly denies the activeness of principle and acknowledges the possibility of change in material force. The possibility of change in material force neither necessarily entail the possibility of rectification of the human mind to be the moral mind nor the recovery of the original moral quality of human nature which is good. However, by showing the possibility of change in material force and the possibility of the rectification of the human mind into the moral mind and vice versa, he can nicely go on to claim the turbidity and impurity of the physical quality and the possibility of the rectification to make it clear and pure.

For Yulgok, the process of rectification refers to the process of

⁵² Hwang (1994), p. 230.

⁵³ Hwang (1994), p. 232; Kim (2004), p. 308 and notes 39-40.

⁵⁴ *The Complete Works of Yulgok*, Bk. 21:11.

⁵⁵ Jang (2009), p. 106.

self-cultivation. Unlike T'oegye who claims the significance of the preserving reverence to be sages, Yulgok thinks that the completion of self-cultivation is just sincerity which requires reverence for the completion.

And his idea of self-cultivation is extended to the welfare of all the other existents in the universe. Thus, Yulgok's emphasis on the recovery of human nature is not only about the welfare of human beings, but also about the welfare of the universe as a whole.⁵⁶

From our discussion so far, we can now arrive at the following conclusions: (1) Yulgok's theory of education was consistent with, and well placed in, his philosophical system as a whole, (2) he was successful in drawing the basic ideas of sincerity drawn, in particular, from the *Document of the Mean* and applying it to the account of education, (3) he considered not only the acquisition and absorption of knowledge, but also the practical application of it to the reality to be of importance, and (4) human education is not only for human beings themselves, but for all the existents in the universe. Neo-Confucianism might be initially categorized as philosophical anthropology, but it is a lot more comprehensive than that. For it does not only concern human beings, but all the existents in the universe as a whole. In this sense, we might legitimately call it Holistic education.⁵⁷

56 As seen, this claim that the welfare of self-cultivation is extended to the welfare of the universe is based on the discussion of the relationship between cultivating oneself and directing others.

57 See Chung (2011, p. 93 and p. 105) who, in a discussion of T'oegye's ecological view, uses such expressions as 'holistic system of ethics and spirituality' and 'holistic vision for human-ecological harmony' simply to mean 'both ethics and spirituality' and 'both human and ecological'. Cf. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holism>. Holism (from Greek ὅλος/*holos*, all whole, entire† is the idea that systems (physical, biological, chemical, social, economic, mental, linguistic, etc.) and their properties should be viewed as wholes, not as collections of parts. Many scholars dealing with Yulgok's theory of education often describe it as holistic without specifying what exactly it denotes (see e.g. Kwon, 2006, p. 580). In fact, the term holistic education is not a well-defined term, and on the basis of the etymological meaning of

Greek word *holos* (ὅλος, i.e. a complete whole, we might think of the following four meanings: it might be referring to (a) not only mental training but also physical training, (b) not only the intellectual process of knowing but also the moral process of behaving or cultivating, (c) not only the process of cultivating oneself but also the process of governing or directing other people, or (d) not only the cultivation of human beings but also the well-being of all the myriad things in the universe. Indeed, Yulgok's theory of education appears holistic on all the four counts.

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