Yulgok and Kim Sisūp: on Self-Cultivation and Retirement

Freie Universität Berlin
15.08.2019

Diana Yuksel
University of Bucharest
diana.yuksel@g.unibuc.ro
# Early academic development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>梅月堂 金時習 (1435-1493)</th>
<th>栗谷 李珥 (1536-1584)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• age 5: Confucian prodigy, confirmed by State Councilor Hŏ Cho 許稠</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Tested by the State Council at the order of King Sejong → Sejong awards him silk → 五歲</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• studies 論語, 孟, 詩經, 書經, 春秋, but also 周易) and 禮記</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• studies at the State Confucian Academy in preparation for the initial stage in the civil service examination</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• age three - began learning hanmun</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• age seven – has read several classics, including Four Books</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• age eight – began writing poetry</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• from the age thirteen, started taking a series of civil service examinations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Encounter with Buddhism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kim Sisŭp</th>
<th>Yulgok</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| - Concludes three years of mourning for his mother (who died when he was 18)  
- He studies Buddhism at Songgwang-sa (a monastery on Mt. Chogye)  
- returns to Seoul to study for the civil service examination | - after 3 years of mourning for his mother (who died in 1552, when he was 16), went into retreat on Kŭmgang Mountains → studies Buddhism → later influence on his thought, especially on the self-cultivation  
- returns to live with his maternal grandmother and resumes his study of Confucianism |
Difference in scholarly paths

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kim Sisŭp</th>
<th>Yulgok</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Fails the civil service examination and goes to Chunghŭng-sa, a monastery on Mt. Samgak, to study.</td>
<td>- Passes the civil service examinations in 1565 and enters government service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Burns his books and begins wandering upon learning that King Tanjong (r. 1452–1455) has effectively been stripped of power by his uncle, Sejo;</td>
<td>- Begins a series of alternating moments of serving as a government official and retiring from official posts in order to dedicate himself to the study of Confucianism and self-cultivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Lives in seclusion in protest of the depredations of King Sejo (r. 1455–1468).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• Yulgok – constantly pendulating between social (official government) duty and private pursuit of scholarship and self-cultivation, between 性理學 and practical issues related to government (Eg. 東湖問答 Questions and Answers at Eastern Lake)

• Kim Sisŭp – pursued rather the private matter of self-cultivation, but had a constant preoccupation for morality in politics and for the idea of a just government. (Eg. 人君義, <存心>, <古今君子隱顯論>, <伯夷叔齊贊>, <雜著>)
“Confucianism is strong as a personal ethics but weak as a political philosophy.”

Counter argument: Kim Sisup and Yulgok - a strong case for political philosophy

- the moral agent that personal ethics is concerned with is the individual;

- the moral agent that political philosophy is concerned with is society or, more particularly, the government

personal and political are not separate→ 礼
Virtue politics for Kim Sisŭp & Yulgok

- cultivating authenticity 誠/ 實
- acquiring (moral) knowledge 知
- adhering to the “principle of just positioning” (義理ũiri)

- less important: respecting the rites 禮 which set the society and the government in good order
Yulgok

• authenticity - source of intellectual, ethical and socio-political development
• authenticity = sagehood < *Doctrine of the Mean*

中庸, 22: 誠身有道：不明乎善，不誠乎身矣。誠者，天之道也；
誠之者，人之道也。誠者不勉而中，不思而得，從容中道，聖人
也。誠之者，擇善而固執之者也。

• practical learning for „self-cultivation and governing the people must be founded on sincerity”
• practical learning as political ideal = unity of knowledge and action 修己治人 („self-cultivation for participating in the process of government”)
• „In the effort of self-cultivation are both the way of knowledge and the way of action. The way of knowledge is to illuminate good, and the way of action is to abide by authenticity.”
實心 = Fulfilled mind/heart = Authentic mind/heart

一心不實，萬事皆假，何往而可行。一心實，萬事皆真，何為而不成。故周子曰：誠者聖人之本。

臣按：窮理既明，可以躬行。而必有實心，然後乃下實功。故誠實為躬行之本。
Two options for true Confucian scholar:

1. put himself at the service of the group/ society, government = one scholarly Way

2. retire to study and cultivate himself until the time is right to take one’s role at the service of others

士生斯世 進則行道 退則守志 二者之外 更無他歧.
Kim Sisŭp

- attachment to the supremacy of the principle of just positioning (義理) → reclusion

夫元亨利貞。天之德。仁義禮智。性之德也。天以四德。能運行不息。化育萬類。故君子體之。以得於吾己。則性之在我者。無有不善。德之及物者。無有不誠。故云存諸中之謂理。得之心之謂德。發於事之謂行。(1)

君子之處身。難矣哉。不可以利躁進。不可以危勇退。接淅而行。非強速也。遲遲吾行。非強緩也。聖賢之進退。惟在義之當否。時之可不可如何耳。(2)
감사합니다