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**<Sung(誠, endurance) and Hyo(孝, selfless selfness) as two universal foundations of human civilization in the 21st century>**

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**Beginning words**

We are living in a generation where barriers in various areas of our lives are being torn down. Teilhard de Chardin(1881-1955), a French priest and paleontologist said that human being had lived a life of expansion, spreading their species on the surface of the earth until the end of the 19th century as the period of ‘expansion’, and then it entered the period of 'systole', closing the period of expansion and gathering the dispersed people into various forms of groups. He had participated in the discovery of Peking Man and predicted the development of human life and consciousness as the 'ultra-socialization' or the 'ultra-personalization'. The reason why this prediction is meaningful is that the sounds of the collapse of the demarcations and the boundaries are now more loudly heard in many areas of our lives and scholarship. Such dismantling is not rare and dramatically occurring today even on the individual level, and the existence of cyborgs and AI (artificial intelligence) have not become really strange. There seems to be getting more and more evidence of Chardin’s claim “exactly speaking, there are neither matter nor spirit, there is only matter which is going to become spirit."[[1]](#endnote-1)

But when the boundaries and distinctions of human life are dismantled and decommissioned, we experience new dimensions of life, but at the same time, the dismantling evokes the risks and crises, which are more serious and fundamental than ever. It is proved that the earth, our home, itself is now in crisis, and that past and future time are never be guaranteed, and can be manipulated in any possible way. In our daily lives, the credibility and predictability of words and actions are also seriously undermined, and such foundations of our lives are in severe danger. These realities can be called as crises for the emergence of the second axle with the end of the first axle of human civilization, or, more closely, the limitation of Western modernism, or more generally speaking, a crisis for a big transformation in the old 'triad' of human civilization, namely, 'tradition', 'religion', and 'authority'.[[2]](#endnote-2)

The fact that contemporary modern Western civilization does not work any more smoothly indicates that the Judeo-Christian sense of the Ultimate as the birthplace of Western modernism, no longer works well. Seeing this situation, I’d like to propose another consciousness on the Ultimate from the dialogue between Confucianism and Christianity, especially, from the examination of the East Asian Confucian concept of Sung (誠). Yoon Sung–beom (海天 尹聖範, 1916-1981), a Korean theologian pointed out that Asian word 誠 expresses very well the core message of Christianity, namely, "the word (言) has become (成) flesh (誠)". Western modernism, which has been in the modern times the representative of human civilization, was based on such Christian declaration as its root, but with the time, by radically dividing this world from the above world, transcendence from intrinsic, and universal from individual, it is now confronting the crisis of falling to the massive materialism or materialistic monism. However, East Asian Sung (誠) of *Zhongyong* (the Doctrine of the Mean)does not cease to signify the transcendental character of all the appearances in the world by encompassing and unifying the two dimensions into one in non-dualistic (不二的) way. In our age of secularization or post-secularization, this kind of transcendence-immanence relationship can give more meaning and energy to our lives and actions.

Given this basic understanding, I will examine the word of 誠 in three dimensions. Firstly, I’ll see if it can provide an ontological basis of our life and knowledge, secondly, reflect on how we can hold Confucian 誠 as our guide in our daily lives as the principle of our action here and now, and finally, I will see if it can become a spiritual principle of persistence and endurance that makes our life sustain in confronting the reality of present crisis and future prospects. In all of these reflections, I will also examine how this Confucian 誠 can be well related with another Confucian principle of life, namely Hyo (孝), the filial piety. Through showing the relationship between the two, I’d like to propose 誠 and 孝 as two universal bases and fundamentals to lead our human life in the 21st century. More than 2,000 years ago, The Doctrine of the Mean (*Zhongyong* ) stated the ideal of the universality of human life, saying that "The width of the current two wheels of the cart is the same, the writing is the same, and our conduct is more than the same" (今天下 車同軌 書同文 行同倫).[[3]](#endnote-3) Today, the life of the humankind in the 21st century is indeed asking for more than this. So, once again, it is time to think about through honestly facing the reality of our present life where we can find the foundations of universality that will connect our lives more concretely and harmoniously.

**1. Sung(誠) and Natality as the undeniable existential ground of our being**

Last year, Yuval Harari, historian of the Western civilization predicted in his book *Home Deus* “Data Deity" as a religion of future humanity. According to him Data Deity goes beyond the "Humanism", the religion which modern humans were preoccupied with; it refers to a new god, Internet-of-the-Worlds, which completely recognizes life as a "flow of information". According to his view of radical materialistic reductionism (computer science and biology), as it happens, homo sapiens will gradually disappear, and the realization of 'immortality', 'happiness' and 'deity’ (homo deus) will come true a lot closer. But nevertheless, he finally mentions about the "mystery" of the Data Deity again. In other words, Data Deity will not worship "God" nor "human", and through this, human beings now find themselves "not as the apex of creation". However, one key question will still remain, namely, someone will continue to ‘feel’, ‘intend’, ‘think’ and will add the algorithm of another dimensions, but no one can fully understand the whole process of astronomical accumulation of algorithms and cannot see why the accumulation is going to evolve to such a path. This question indicates that the Data Deity is far beyond the traditional divine consciousness and humanism, but nonetheless it is not "anti-humanistic".[[4]](#endnote-4)

In my view, this circumstances let us know it is high time to pay attention to the Confucian discourse of 誠. In fact, even when we look at the compositional form of the letter ‘誠’, which *Zhongyong* describes as "the heavenly Way" (誠者 天之道也), it shows that the meaning of the letter is that the word/intention/idea (言) will become (成) a reality (誠), and this realization is very well connected with the accumulation of new algorithm, which Harari foresaw as a new form of human religion in the future. In other words, Confucian transcendence 誠 goes far beyond the anthropomorphic dimension of Western Christian transcendence; it allows people to be conscious of transcendence (神/聖) in a new way, letting them get rid of the human-centered consciousness that existed conventionally in the Western Christian tradition. This tells us that any external form of transcendence or transcendence as an absolute Other can’t be possible any more. In this sense, I think that the story of Confucian heavenly Principle (天理), the Nature (性), or the Sincerity (誠), as the discourses of innate and intrinsic transcendence of East Asian tradition has much significance.

As is known, *Zhongyang* pointed out that transcendence is inherent in human world and in our mind, by its first words "what Heaven confers is called (human) Nature (天命之謂性), to follow this nature is called the Tao (率性之謂道), and cultivating the Tao is called Education (修道之謂教)”. All subsequent stories show how the heavenly Way is that we cannot "leave for a moment" (不可須臾離也) in life, and the subtle movements of our feelings are the lives of its manifestation, and so " nothing is more visible than the hidden, and nothing is more apparent than the subtle" (莫見乎隱 莫顯乎微). It is a story of transcendence that exits all over the world, or, more radically, it can be said that all life and work in this world are nothing but those of transcendence (鳶飛戾天 魚躍于淵). The great sage king *Shun* (舜), who deeply perceived this truth, was the one who was curious about all things in this world (好問), and the curiosity led him to “look closely at the nearby languages" (好察邇言). Because the language we hear around us itself can be regarded as the accumulation of various forms of manifestation of transcendence, or a result of accumulation of algorithms from the past, we can see there the truth of life and can find what kind of judgment we should make in each reality. So Confucius liked to start his politics in "correcting names” (正名), saying that "It is human's law to live in a simple place and to wait for the Mandate of the Heaven".[[5]](#endnote-5) And Mencius also described himself as the person who knew words (知言).

But today, as we all know, the language corruption is very serious, as it was in the time of Confucius and Mencius. Facts and truths of the past are very easily distorted and caricatured these days in all forms of parody, and people's words are no longer trusted. The authority of language of the various public media and their representatives is crumbling. Even Christian faith, which was regarded in Korean society as a reliable foundation for words and deeds, has now lost credibility so as to be called a ‘dog’s religion’. In other words, the authority of the external transcendental divinity of Western Christianity is no longer believable. Then, what does it mean to follow the inner transcendence of human mind Sung (誠) as the stump of our trust?

Our modern times were opened by R. Descarte, who suggested the existence of undoubtable res cogitans. Today, however, human civilization faces a crisis due to that ego’s absolutist way of thinking that is supported by anthropomorphic exclusivist Christian understanding of transcendence as its ontological basis. But Confucian 誠 has much more integrative character. If we examine the process of discussing the heavenly Tao in *Zhongyong* which runs from the discourse of "中" to that of "誠", the full story about 誠 comes out very secularily during the explanation of 九經 as the way of governing the world and the state. With comment that to sum 九經 up as one thing is "誠", it is said that in many types of relationship in our communal lives in the world, the most basic ground is "intimacy with parents" (純乎親), which makes all our relationships as the those of “faith and trust”(信). And further, it is said that "there is a way for the relationship with parents to be so intimate; If you look at your body and you are not faithful, you cannot be tame to your parents" (純乎親有道 反諸身不誠 不純乎親矣), and it is further said that "there is a way to be faithful, and if you are not bright in goodness, you cannot be faithful to your body" (誠身有道 不明乎善 不誠乎身矣).[[6]](#endnote-6) As shown here, the first place where Sincerity 誠 as the heavenly Tao that is possible to participate in the work of Heaven and Earth (贊天地之化育) by helping the cultivation of all things of Heaven and Earth (與天地參) and to be praised as the creator of the world (誠即形/爲能化) appears, is our 'body' (身). And soon, by linking the body to the goodness(善) of our hsin (心), it reveals how Confucian transcendence is the way of integration that unites body with spirit, the sacred with the profane, and the world with the transcendence in a non-dualistic way. It is revealed that the non-dual Tao of 誠 can be experienced and embodied within a humane intimate relationship to parents, so in this sense, human capability of believe and trust will not be expected in regard to an existence of a transcendental Godhead, rather can be expected when connected with concrete bodily experiences here in this world. That is, human perceptions based on the existence of an external God or related only to intellectual transcendence will not be very reliable.

What cannot I doubt more than the fact that 'I can think' (cogito ergo sum)? Is it not that I have been born, and isn't it true that the ability to think about had been also born there? That is, I am a being of ‘natality’ given a birth by someone, and that was possible because someone had been in this world before I was born.[[7]](#endnote-7) So, there was surely a time when I do not know for sure. In other words, the present is always shaky and uncertain, and the future is not fully guaranteed, but the past is certain than anything else. Therefore, it is more reliable to find the stump of our being and trust in the past, and it is quite natural for the existence of our parents to become the basis of my being and to be the object of my reverence and respect. Today, everything is shaken, there is nothing reliable, and especially in the situation where modernism based on the Western transcendental consciousness no longer plays a role, I’d like to bring to the light the fact that we were born (誠) as the most reliable foundation of our being and thinking, and so, appreciating the existence of parents (孝), that made me possible, I think that human civilization should be more intense in the future in this work of 孝, the work of appreciating my selfless selfness.

In this context, Yoon Sung-beom, a Korean theologian of 誠, who emphasized much the filial piety孝, said, "孝 is the ontological basis of 仁", not the opposite, and 仁 is rather the epistemological basis of 孝.[[8]](#endnote-8) This means that human beings are able to cultivate the ability to be humane (仁) and faithful (誠) through the experience of filial piety (孝) and intimate familial relationship, not vice versa. And when people see that they are good (仁) and faithful (誠), you can know that they are good person who serves the heavenly Tao through 孝. This claim reverses the common Confucian understanding of 仁 as the ontological basis (metaphysical a priori, 理/性) of all other Confucian practical virtues including 孝 (仁之實 事親是也). It is why Yoon confesses as a Korean theologian that “truly, Jesus is the man of filial piety”. He claims Christianity is originally "Oriental religion," and the essence of Jesus' gospel is nothing but the filial piety toward the heavenly Parents.[[9]](#endnote-9)

According to *Zhongyang*, if we want to grow up to be a true person (修身), “we cannot help but serve our parents” (不可以不事親), and because, in order to serve the parents, “we finally must not fail to understand Heaven” (不可以不知天). So, serving the parents (事親) becomes with honoring the Heaven (事天) the one thing. In fact, as pointed out earlier, language (言) is closely connected with human actions of creation and experiences as the work of the past. The Sincerity 誠, that implies language as the manifestation of past algorithms, can firstly understood as creator or caregiver that gives birth to, and takes care of things (天地生物, 發育萬物). As described in the Genesis of Christianity “God created the world by Word”, I would like to connect Sincerity 誠 in the first place with the action of creation and the natality of us.[[10]](#endnote-10) However, I consider the natality, which comes from our parents of this world differently from the case of Western Christianity, and I think this concretely and physically defined natality can lead us better to perceive that our being is a priori conditioned being from the past. It is a priori condition of our existence that we cannot doubt, so it becomes a 'divine' condition, and we must confess and worship that condition as the starting point and source of our being and action (追遠報本). So, 誠 becomes our parents and creator (不誠無物), and *Zhongyang* says, “They used the Winter and Summer festival to make offerings to the Lord-on-High (郊社之禮 所以事上帝也), and used the rituals on the ancestral temple to make offerings to the ancestors (宗廟之禮 所以祀乎其先也). The one that who could completely disclose the meaning of the Winter and Summer sacrifices and the great Imperial sacrifice (明乎郊社之禮 禘嘗之義) could govern the country as easily as if he were pointing to the palm of his hand" (治國其如示諸掌乎).[[11]](#endnote-11) It reveals why we must accept 誠 and 孝 as the universal foundation of human life in the 21st century.

**2. 誠 and plurality as the real condition of our every day’s practical lives**

For our contemporary secular life, we have defined 誠 as the word that designates the ontological basis of our being. However, 誠 is not just concerned with the past. Rather, it can undertake the role of a compass that leads our every day’s and moment’s practical lives. *Zhongyang* said as its famous word: “Sincerity is the virtue of Heaven. Making oneself sincere is the virtue of human. … A person who does sincerely is a person who takes good and keeps it firmly (誠者 天之道也 誠之者 人之道也 … 誠之者 擇善而固執之者也).” This tells us that it is our destiny to lead a life of looking carefully at what is good in every moment and to choose and realize it. However, why cannot we live a good life despite these human duties and rules, and why do we lie and self-deceive, or put our life at risk, and even drive the relationship with our parents and children to that of profit relations? When we visit to the Dosan Seowon Sunbee Cultural Training Center (陶山書院선비문화수련원) in Andong, South Korea, we can meet one verse of Toegye’s poem like " (My wish) is to have many good people” (所願 善人多), inscribed at the bottom of his statue. Toegye (退溪 李滉, 1502-1571) described the illness of his time as "a disease that cuts off the world to its own right and disposal” (認物爲己之病).[[12]](#endnote-12) In other words, the people of his time cannot see the world and other people as they are, but distort them into their own perspectives, using them as a means to drive their own benefit. That means that they are not good person, they are not faithful people, and they are obsessed with the self and the ego, not being able to see the ‘plurality’ of neighbors, the other and the world.[[13]](#endnote-13)

Why do we fall into this disease? Toegye wrote a book entitled 「傳習錄論辯」, which criticizes Wang Yang-ming's book 『傳習錄』, around the year of 1566 (66 years old), when he was exchanging the thoughts on the theory of ‘four Beginnings and seven Feelings’ (四端七情論) with a young Confucian scholar Gidaecheung (奇大升, 1527-1572). As we are well aware, Yang-ming’s thought of ‘心卽理’ (The mind-and-heart is principle) and ‘致良知’ (the extension of the innate knowledge of the good) improved the authority and the right of human mind-and-heart (心) as the creator and ruler of all things in the world. It happened through a radical internalization of the heavenly Transcendence (太極/理) into human hsin (心). However, for Toegye who had experienced several bloody Confucian scholar’s purge of Chosen society, that ideas of Yang-ming (王陽明, 1472-1528) seemed very dangerous. They seemed to be in a state of self-centeredness and especially be focused on the "willing”(意) activity among others of human mind-and-heart, like the illness of not recognizing the world beyond the self. Thus, Toegye criticized Yang-ming’s learning of the unity of knowledge and action(知行合一) very sharply, while he designated Yang-ming’s error as the concentration on his self, the alienation from the world and the reality, and “the fear of being bothered and obsessed by the outer things” (患外物之爲心累/ 陽明之見全柱本心怕有一毫外涉於事物).[[14]](#endnote-14) According to Toegye, Yang-ming is critical of Buddhism, but he himself is fallen in Buddhism.[[15]](#endnote-15)

Toegye emphasizes that the question of "the form-and-material force" (形氣) and that of "the principle of justice" (義理) are very different. In other words, knowing the good and being a good person is not merely the job of the willing or intention on our own, but rather how to control our emotions and feelings which happen in countless relationships with other people and events in our lives. This means that we should know that we are precious unique being born from the good will of Heaven and Earth and of our parents, and with the birth we can add a new algorithm to this world that has never existed before, but the birth of other beings also has the same right and dignity. So, in spite of the good 'will' to be with our birth (心卽理/誠意), in our present life, we face also myriad objects of the world, and we deeply engage in the movements of emotion and sense that arise before the will arises. Therefore, we should not neglect our study of the object that causes feelings in our mind-and-heart (格物致知). To recapitulate again, Toegye urges to look more strictly at the countless cases (氣) of our encountering with the world in spite of our transcendental goodness (理), while Yang-ming advocates to live our present lives more actively and fearlessly with the belief in transcendence, which is already done a priori in ourselves. This is why for Toegye the virtue of ‘敬’ is so important, and that the problem of "authority" is of great importance. Toegye’s emphasis on “dividing and analyzing” (分開) in our studying and his deep perception of self-humility (自謙) are the expression of the recognition and consideration of the condition of ‘plurality’ in our actual lives. Like his age, our present is also the age of the abuse of will and intention of self. This is why his way of thinking is meaningful; it helps us not to fall into the error of the absolutism of self and world-alienation.[[16]](#endnote-16)

In fact, in *Zhongyong*’s discourse on 誠, there is a lot of 誠 understanding similar to that of Toegye. We have seen in the previous chapter Sincerity 誠 as transcendent creator in regard to the natality of our being. But in addition to that, it can be understood well as a very dynamic practical virtual power of our hsin related with the very plural condition of our every day’s lives. After *Zhongyong* declared that to follow the heavenly Tao 誠 is the way of human, it asks to learn broadly, to ask in detail, to think clearly, to discern carefully and to act sincerely. These all items teach us how we should live in the world, and these are well harmonized with Toegye’s emphasis on each being’s own right and the dignity of the world that we face at every moment here. *Zhongyong* says, “but 誠 is not just perfecting self, it also means perfecting all things” (誠者 非自誠己而已也 所以成物也); “To perfect yourself, you need humanity (成己仁也). To perfect others, you need wisdom (成物知也). The virtue of our nature is that it is none other than the Tao by which inner and outer are integrated. Thus we can always use it to set things right (性之德也 合外內之道也 故時措之宜也).”[[17]](#endnote-17)

Then, it is our language life where we connect ourselves with the world, and the virtue of our personality is truly present and directly revealed integrated with our wills and emotions together. So, Hannah Arendt designated ‘speech’ and ‘action’ as the most important things for us to live in the human condition of 'plurality', and pointed out the action of 'forgiveness' and 'promise' as two great actions of human lives connected with word and language, that make our lives sustainable in the future. According to her, human life is no different than that of animals without politics that guarantees the possibility of doing such truthful and great actions in the public sphere of our lives. So, she emphasized that the right political work is like the "lifeblood" of human world. But in our real life, the corruption, neglect, and lies of the language are serious. Today, too, the 'facts' of the past continue to be concealed or manipulated, and easily turned into 'opinions', which causes much confusion. That is to say that the words of the human being are true, not false, and that the promises and trusts done through the words are faithfully fulfilled, that it heals past violence, lies and distortions, revives and augments lives through forgiveness and promises, we ask where we can see the possibility to that road. Those languages will become truly a language of life that “presents” to someone “present” lives.[[18]](#endnote-18)

In the previous chapter, we looked at the filial piety that indicates the basis of our existence, and whose ground reaches unto the Heaven. In regard to this filial piety, the divination sign ‘People in the Home’ (風火家人) of *I-Ching* (易經)*,* treats the meaning of the "home", and teaches us that a true human being’s word should be always based on "fact" (物), and his/her action should be grounded on "principle" (恒)(君子以言有物而行有恒). Through this, we can recognize that Confucian Tao puts the starting point of the realization of the meaning of the world in '家'(the family), and places further its basis and foundation back into human words and actions. In addition, seeing these words appear in the chapter about the meaning of familial life, we can understand what this diagram sign teaches us, and it is the lesson that the truth and truthfulness in human words is made possible through the solid familial life, and it is the foundation and the starting point which brings peace and happiness to the world (平天下). In the life of our communal being today, the corruption of words is severe, the great acts of humanity are infrequent, and instead, the harm of self-absolutism is serious. In my view, all those things are very narrowly related with the fact that today’s human being feels more and more difficult to recognize and accept other being’s existence which forms the basis and fundamental of the world from the past even before my existence. That is to say, the increasingly difficult recognition of the plurality of the world, which Confucian Tao names as a sense of righteousness (義). And Confucian learning sees its beginning in our feelings of shame (羞惡之心) which we will have when we take away what we owes to others, seeing the possibility of that ability starting from the radius of the nearest familial life. From the childhood on, through bodily real experiences of feelings of human mind such as trust, love, grace and appreciation, human being can naturally learn how to love and honor their parents and people. And this loving and honoring of parents grows up to the ability to be reverent and cautious to the conditions, facts and truths in life that cannot be at will disposed and should not be voluntarily discarded. Mencius thus described the work of humanity (仁) as "Chinchin" (親親, dear to parents, and family member), and that of righteousness(義) as “Kyungjang” (警長, honor elder and old). So, he indicated that the state of 'Mubu' (無父, fatherless) and ‘Mugun’ (無君, kingless) will be dawn to the extreme condition of human beings’ life where human eats each other for survival.[[19]](#endnote-19)

Because human feeling is the most direct pathway to meet the world in our real life, it is easily shaken, distorted and unpredictable. Therefore, ‘authority’ is needed to lead and hold it. But, today, the authority we ask is no longer a metaphysical authority from an external transcendence, but rather a practical authority which really and concretely augments our lives in relation to our every day’s real life. Here we cannot expect more apart from the authority of the parents, and we ask what we can expect from the generation that cannot affirm even the authority of their own parents. So, the sense of justice and authority that everyone needs in order to live with condition of plurality of the world and others, *Zhongyong* first sought it in the relationship with the family members and the parent-child relation, and in that sense, in the work of mourning the diseased parents, *Zhongyong* asks for everyone to pay the same three years’ pension including the king of the country (父母之喪 無貴賤一也).[[20]](#endnote-20) In addition to this, *Zhongyong* sees that the path to a true human being starts from the relationship of marital couple which can refer to the process and achievement which most basically direct the life of home, our body, sexuality and emotion. It declares that idea as follows: "The Tao of the true human starts with the common marital couple, but in its absoluteness, it is observed throughout the universe (君子之道 造端乎夫婦 及其至也 察乎天地).”[[21]](#endnote-21)

**3. 誠 and endurance as possibility to sustain our future Life**

As we have seen, Confucian Tao has understood that the well-being of the world and realization of its meaning start through the careful consideration of our body and mind in a healthy familial life. However, nowadays, especially in Korean society, all such things are very much in threat: The suicide and divorce rate of the elderly people are the highest in the world, the view of future lives of young people are gloomy, and the once fallen birth rate is not going to rise. In addition, artificial intelligence (AI) and virtual world, which will replace the human body, are increasingly occupied in our lives, so that we ask whether all the stories we shared earlier can have a meaning in our lives in the future. We have so far described the familial life, as the most basic chapter in which humanness in words and deeds is born and formed, but as we all know today, how fragile it is and that being lucky to have such a family life becomes increasingly rare.

So, what other possibilities are there in this situation? I believe that this question is connected with the question of how our ethical judgment and practice can be continuously right, and at the same time, the judgment there is not simply the intellectual ability we understand at a normal level. Rather, I think it relates to the question of the possibility of the uplifting of the level of the human mind to be extended to the so called "spiritual(靈)/godly(神) level. In other words, we want to understand now what we have explored 誠 as our spiritual power of perseverance, imagination, and faith as a force to endure and persevere until the fulfillment of rightly intended thoughts and meanings. I believe that the answer there is also a way to determine the uniqueness of human beings in the AI era, for if we assume that the possibility of familiar human relationship and the filial piety (孝) depend only on our a posterior positive experiences, then it will fall into another serious external authoritarianism and a kind of materialistic determinism.

To understand this situation and get a possible answer, I would like to hear Mencius’ narrative on the filial piety of the sage king Shun (舜). Mencius interpreted that story in various ways, especially with great emphasis on the fact that the sage king Shun loved and longed for his parents even at the age of 50. As we are familiar with it, Shun’s father with his stepmother and half-brother, fooled him twice into a crisis of death, but nevertheless, Shun did not turn his mind towards his parents. Rather, as Mencius assumed, he would throw away his place as king if his father had committed murder and was about to be arrested, saying, “I would live in the sea with my father, sneakingly carrying out, living a life of delight, forgetting the world (終身訢樂而忘天下)”.[[22]](#endnote-22) The father who was touched by such a kind of filial piety changed and became a good father. Like this case, we see that filial piety (孝, selfless selfness) does not simply depend on the outside object (parents). In the case of Shun, it can be said that the circumstance of the familial life of him was much more negative than usual, but Shun changed over the parent's stubbornness to goodness, and even the kingdom and all the honor and the wealth, Mencius emphasizes that he will give up them in order to be filial pious faithfully. This shows that filial piety 孝, if being born as a human, may not necessarily depend on his or her experiences or environment, but rather on its own and be considered as a good innate capability for humans. I think, it is the meaning of human goodness (goodness) what Mencius described it as "innate good knowledge" (良知) and “innate good ability” (良能), and he, taking loving one’s parents and honoring one’s elders as universal examples of human good nature, pointed out that it "passes through the whole world" (達之天下也).[[23]](#endnote-23)

The sage king Shun’s practice of 孝 was not the level of reward that the parents had given to him, more than any other parent. Rather, even though he got the world, “he could not solve his worries until he got a satisfying heart of his parents” (而惟順於父母 可以解憂).[[24]](#endnote-24) Like the work of observing the faith, he persisted it in the time of anxiety, pain, worries and concern. So I want to see the ability of human filial piety rather as a transcendental universal gift (性理, selfless selfness), endowed with the birth of our life, as the fundamental force of life, beyond concrete world experiences of one person, it can be what we call 'fundamental vitality' (生理). Here, we have seen it through an example of 孝, but I want to call that fundamental power to continue our humane works with more universal name ‘Sincerity 誠’. Sincerity 誠 indicates the natality of our being, as we have seen in the previous section, and it acts as a power to begin again in every moment of our lives in the condition of plurality. But what is more, it can be understood as the spirit and power of imagination and faith (信, selfless selfness) that keeps our action of humanity continuously alive. In *Zhongyong*, there are full of stories of this spirit of continuity and persistence. Stories on Anhoe (顔回)’s character that when he gets a good, he takes it and catches it and keeps it in his chest (得一善則拳拳服膺而弗失之矣),[[25]](#endnote-25) and what Confucius said that the only one who has no anxiety and concern, is the king Mun (文王), because he had the son king Mu (武王) who inherited it from him and the father Wanggye (王季) who began to establish.[[26]](#endnote-26) And the famous story, that if someone else gets it in ten tries, I will try one thousand times (人十己千).[[27]](#endnote-27) All those stories tell us on the continuous and endurable power of 誠.

How can this person continually maintain him/herself, overcoming difficulties and achieving meaning, and keeping what he/she says, or avoiding telling lies that do not match the facts? If that ability is not just positively acquired experiences and emotions or simple wills, how can all these things work together as one integral force? We can get a good clue to understand it from the story on human nature by Mencius and in particular from his word that “the job of our mind is to think, so we get if we think, and not if we do not think” (心之官則思 思則得之 不思則不得也).[[28]](#endnote-28) That is, not just seeing what is visible, but what comes first beyond what is visible, it describes the ability of human transcendental imagination as a power to imagine and believe in what to come forward. I see that *Zhongyong*’s 誠 is a language that indicates such a dimension of human mind, a language that directly expresses the spiritual and transcendent aspects of our mind. It is not just about one dimension of body, will, or emotion, but a language that embraces all those aspects and shows a "wide, thick, high, bright, long and enduring" figure (天地之道 博也 厚也 高也 明也 悠也 久也)[[29]](#endnote-29) encompassing and integrating them all.

I consider that the debate between Mencius and Gao (告子) about human nature, humanity and righteousness can be understood well in this context. Mencius insists that Gao’s claims that "life is what we call nature" (生之謂性) is a dangerous statement. Of course, this paper has also emphasized the importance of practical body experience and emotional care for the ability of 孝, and that is the position that emphasizes this "life" (生). However, it can be said that the position of Gaostays at a very onedimensional level of understanding. If Gao reduces the possibility of man only to the level of physiology, one cannot ask him/her the ultimate responsibility for injustice and cannot secure the basis of our hope for life and history. Thus, in the argument with master Gao, Mencius doesn’t give up that human beings can be good without learning and experiencing, in spite of that he often confesses “I even don’t know” (不識).

When I see Mencius’ trust and faith in human nature (仁/義/孝), I remember Russian thinker N.Berdyaev (1874-1948) in the 20th century who said, "Personality is not part of the universe, rather the universe is that of it, and it is the quality of the universe”. Berdyaev deeply believed in humanity and criticized sharply French philosophy of life. According to Berdyaev, the philosophy of life(生哲學), including Henri Bergson(1859-1946), has contributed greatly to the understanding of human in modern times, but ultimately it can be called anti-humanism, because it dissolved human personality (humanity in the language of Mencius) into dimension of physiology or sociology.[[30]](#endnote-30) That is to say, it has opened up a new phase in seeing human beings in terms of the evolution of the universe, but has overlooked the dimension of "personality”, or something else deep beyond that. These criticisms remind me of the criticisms that Mencius has made to the master Gao. In any case Mencius won’t identify the human nature (性/理) with life (生/氣), and I think that a deep reflection on this aspect is the way to find answers to today's AI era. And 誠 of *Zhongyong* expresses that dimension very well, namely, the ability of deep spiritual thinking, imagination, or insight of faith to rise above facts but never overlook them.

Here I would like to briefly mention Jung Ha-gok (霞谷 鄭齊斗, 1649-1736), a Confucian scholar of the post-Toegye era in Chosen Dynasty, who combined Yang-ming's view of hsin(心) from the perspective of Chosen school of li (理, principle). At the beginning, he emphasized the physiological 'living li' (生理) of our mind, because he thought that his time’s Confucian learning was too much inclined to the intellectualism of Chu His (朱熹). But, later he distinguished 'authentic li’ (眞理) from the 'living li' (生理), and designated our learning as the work of ‘making clear the goodness and embodying it faithfully' (明善誠身) and that of learning widely and expressing it beautifully through our body and lives’ (博文約禮). Finally, he summarized it in one sentence “principle is not but propriety” (理者卽禮也). So he declares that all things are integrated in 誠, and says,

"Knowing what is possible in managing principles (of all things) is called knowledge (知), and making all that perfectly, is humanity (仁), practicing it is faith (信), and finally, it is the sincerity (誠) to continue the work.”[[31]](#endnote-31)

We can see that the thoughts of Jung Hagok can correspond well with today's new cognitive science inquiry in the West. Chilean neurobiologist Francisco J. Varela tries to combine contemporary neuroscientific results with traditional spiritual languages that explored to figure out what the subject in the human action of thinking really is. There, he points out that “life is sense-making” from his basic viewpoint that ‘life is cognition’. I think this recognition can be very well unified with the meaning of 誠. And his view lets us know that subjectivity of us is not any fixed entity, rather it exists and manifests in our action of 'embodying' (體化, selfless selfness). And the world or the environment also is not given in advance as any fixed form, but through our ethical choices and actions (擇善固執), they are in forming. But here, Varela points out further that our action in "just being there", which happens naturally and immediately in an unexpected situation in our lives, is the most "hard work", because such an immediate responding action took a long time to evolve into that present state.[[32]](#endnote-32) In this sense, we can know that the presence of varied proprieties and rituals arranged in various etiquette in our lives is truly precious, and we can understand them as very secular condensations of the transcendence and diverse algorithms (誠).

Some of Confucius's words are as follows;

“The Master said, when a man's knowledge (知) is sufficient to attain, and his virtue (仁) is not sufficient to enable him to hold, whatever he may have gained, he will lose again. When his knowledge is sufficient to attain, and he has virtue enough to hold fast, if he cannot govern with dignity (莊/泣), the people will not respect him. When his knowledge is sufficient to attain, and he has virtue enough to hold fast; when he governs also with dignity, yet if he tries to move the people contrary to the rules of propriety (禮), full excellence is not reached.”[[33]](#endnote-33)

I think this statement of *the Analects* suggestes us many things in our contemporary life situation. It first teaches that, even if we have so much knowledge and wisdom, it becomes useless unless it is distributed in generosity, tenderness, and emotion of humanity. In order for that knowledge to be directed further to the people and to continue to influence the general life of the people, it must be expressed in the manner of rituals and proprieties (禮). Here I think Confucius taught us how to integrate intelligence (知性), humane personality (人性), and spirituality (靈性) well. That is to say that even though we may acquire extraordinary knowledge, it can’t continue to be viable without being reinterpreted into human language of human emotions and practical lives. And, in order to be able to be transformed into action and practice in daily life of the people, they should be made aware of spiritual 'holiness' (聖/敬/禮) of it. It is also true that when the teachings of those teachers are not just words but also their attitudes must bring forth pride and awe, then the teachings invoke the awe of the people and let them embody and continue to live and practice in their communal life. I believe that in this case Confucius emphasized in relation with the learning of the body that true human wisdom and the power of judgment can’t be obtained by any theory or knowledge. That is to say that in order for the teaching to become a lasting 'tradition' of the community, it must be done continuously, in a long period of consistency, until the teaching of the body and mind is achieved as its natural "habit". To do so, the teaching must be linked to the level of spirituality, that is, the politics, education, and culture of a community, that is, traditions can’t work properly if they all deviate from the religious and spiritual dimension. That is because the teachings at such a vulgar secular level can’t draw awe and respect from the people, and thus do not stand for authority, and in such cases, people do not try to learn with a long effort until they learn from the body.

*Zhongyong* makes a variety of narratives about the sustainable heavenly power, which is inherent in human nature: "The greatest sincerity is like God" (至誠如神), "Therefore, the greatest sincerity is ceaseless. Ceaseless, it is persistent. Persistent, it is apparent” (至誠無息 不息 則久 久則徵).[[34]](#endnote-34) This persistence is embodied in human culture as the rules and ceremonies of our life, and what Z*hongyong* applauded as "beautiful and excellent” of “the three hundred rules of ceremony, and the three thousand rules of conduct” (優優大哉. 禮儀三百 威儀三千) must have that meaning.[[35]](#endnote-35) *Zhongyong* at the conclusion regarded people’s work to follow it ultimately as the work of "faith” (信). According to *Zhongyong*, it is natural that it should be good to be universal and that people should be able to feel it concretely with their bodies and emotions first, and if they do not, they will not believe in it, so they don’t follow. It is also said that it should give them room to imagine and respect beyond what they see through their bodies, because people do not follow, if it does not give them that much higher (上焉者 雖善無徵 無徵不信 不信民不從 下焉者 雖善不尊 不尊不信 不信民不從).[[36]](#endnote-36) So, this way of becoming a universal rites and the birth of common law in human life is the work of faith, and in order to bring about that faith, we must first make the body and mind feel concrete, and at the same time, imagine and expect something higher. Then, “there will be no shame even if it is presented before the three sage-kings, no discord if established between Heaven and Earth, no doubts if introduced before the spirits of ancestors, and no confusion if we wait for a hundred generations for a sage to appear”.[[37]](#endnote-37) What a valuable lesson! In this way, 誠 as Creator, urges us to begin again each time, teaching us that we are the void self (selfless self) in the midst of constant changes of being, and teaches us that the starting point to learn all these truths truly concretely is 孝. Thus, 誠 (endurance) and 孝 (selfless selfness) are two universal heavenly Ways leading the world in every heaven and earth and in every individual mind and body.

"Only the person who has fully actualized sincerity is able to adjust the strings of the Great Net of the World; is able to establish him/herself in the Great Root of the World; is able to understand the transformations and the nurturing of Heaven and Earth. How can we depend on others for our great achievement? “[[38]](#endnote-38)

**A closing remark**

As a country of the people of the East, Korean Peninsula was said to have been the homeland of the sage king Shun of the authentic filial piety. It is said that Mencius's spirit is the best representative of the Korean people's emotions. It is especially well known as a country where family, relatives, and community are well developed, especially by serving their parents well and sharing food and pleasure. It is also well known that *Hyokyung* 孝經 was considered more important in the school curriculum in Korea than in other neighboring countries. Today, however, the reality is that the suicide rate of Korea is the highest in the world, especially the elderly suicide rate and the youth very different.

In such a situation, the "艮卦" of *I-Ching*, which is often read as "designating Korean peninsula in the Northeast, teaches us to ‘stop’ (止), not to go forward any more, with the core message of patience and endurance like mountain. I would like to read this as the message that Korean society has to now stop and retrospect the time it endeavored so hard to catch up with the modernization of the West. And to put it universally, if the life of mankind has been advanced so far and spread more widely, it should now be a time for reconciliation and unification of conflicts, and Korean Peninsula should play a role in that work. This is because the conflicts and injustices that have arisen in the modernizing process of human civilization are now concentrated around the Korean Peninsula.

In the latter part of the 19th century of Chosen, Kim Il-bu (金一夫, 1826-19 1898), a Confucian scholar of *I-Ching* suggested another *I-Ching*, so called ‘the right/true *I-Ching’*’ (正易), pointing out the importance of the feminine work of ‘gon-do’ (坤道), the earthly work of women. In today's feminist era, the roles of women and men are, of course, not determined only by apparent physical conditions. Thus, I want to read the meaning of his insight as the emphasis of the virtue of 誠 and 孝 which are well combined with the feminine ‘gon-do’ (坤道), as the universal road of all human beings. It is now urgently demanded that the persistence of self-discipline, which makes us ‘abandon ourselves and follow the universal’ (捨己從人) until the birth of a new age, even if “there is suffering such as oil dropping in the calf and spine opening”.[[39]](#endnote-39)

Today, in my view, the path to embody this feminine principle in one’s own life is a way for mankind to move forward, which even the AI itself admires and regards as its future goal. *The Appendix to I-Ching* says, “The work of continuing is good; the work of accomplishing is accomplished by the nature” (繼之者善也, 成之者性也). And *Zhongyong* says, “A filial piety is not anything else, but to correctly pass down the intentions of one’s parents and to correctly transmit their works” (夫孝者 善繼人之志 善述人之事者也). We can imagine that the nature here is our humanness, bodily subjectivity, womanhood, or motherhood. Now our human civilization is in trouble, we all are invited to make the world a place to live in. We have always been human; but we have also always been posthuman. Posthuman is now by no means an individual. Posthuman is not a slave, still less a master. Posthuman is free and “one who benefits all humans” (弘益人間). Posthuman, a free being who benefits all humans, is the idea in Korean history that a bear, who had become a woman in patience and endurance, gave birth.[[40]](#endnote-40)

1. Theilhard de Chardin, *L’energie humaine*, Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1962, p.74. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, Penguin Book, NY, 1993, p.125. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. *Zhongyong,* Chapter 28. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Yuval Harari, *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow*, Korean Translation by Kim Myung-Joo, Seoul: Kimyoungsa, 2017, p.532. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. *Zhongyong,* Chapter 14. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. *Zhongyong,* Chapter 20. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, Chicago & London, The University of Chicago Press, 1958, p.8. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Yun Sung-Beom, *Hyo* (효/孝), Seoul: Seoul munwhasa, 1973, p.77ff. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Ibid., [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, Penguin Book, NY, 1993. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. *Zhongyong,* Chapter 19. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Yi Hwang, *Ten Diagrams to Become a sage* (聖學十圖), trans. By Lee Kwang-Ho, Seoul: Hongik Publishing House, 2001, p.171. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p.7. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. 『退溪先生文集』 Book 41, 「傳習錄論辯」, p.13-14. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Lee Un-Sunn, “How we can raise up a person who can act and be joyful-Toegye’s Learning of hsin(心) of kyung(敬) and Yang-ming’s extension of the innate knowledge of the good”, Toegyehaknonjip(退溪學論集), no.6, Youngnam Toegyehak Younguwon. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p.248. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. *Zhongyong,* Chapter 25. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Lee Un-Sunn, *Sewoel Perry and Korean Feminist Theology-in Dialogue with Hannah Arendt*, Seoul: Dongyeon, 2018, p.52; Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition,* p.236ff. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. *Mencius,* 滕文公 下, Chapter 9. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. *Zhongyong,* Chapter 18. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. *Zhongyong,* Chapter 12. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. *Mencius,* 盡心 上, Chapter 34. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. *Mencius,* 盡心 上, Chapter 15. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. *Mencius,* 萬章 上, Chapter 1. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. *Zhongyong,* Chapter 8. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. *Zhongyong,* Chapter 18. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. *Zhongyong,* Chapter 20. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. *Mencius,* 告子上, Chapter 15. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. *Zhongyong,* Chapter 27. [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. Nicolas A. Berdyaev, *Slavery and Freedom*, Korean Translation by Lee Shin, Seoul: Neulbom, 2015, p.44. [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. 其有能於此條理者謂之知，其所全體謂之仁，實此謂之信，有此謂之誠. 鄭霞谷, 『新編 國譯 霞谷集』 3, 「存言下」 ‘理者卽禮也’; Lee Un-Sunn*, Korean Education after the Seweol Perry Disaster-The Integration of Intellect, Humanity and Spirituality,* Seoul: Dongyeon, 2018, p.292. [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. Francisco J. Varela, *Ethical Know-How: Action, Wisdom, and Cognition*, Korean Translation by Yu Kweong-Jong/ Park Chung-Sik, Seoul Publishing House Galmuri, 2009, p.43. [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. *Analects,* 䘙靈公, 32: 子曰 知及之 仁不能守之 雖得之必失之. 知及之 仁能守之 不莊以涖之 則民不敬. 知及之 仁能守之 莊以涖之 動之不以禮未善也. [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. *Zhongyong,* Chapter 24. [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
35. *Zhongyong,* Chapter 27. [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
36. *Zhongyong,* Chapter 29. [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
37. *Zhongyong,* Chapter 29. [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
38. *Zhongyong,* Chapter 32. [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
39. 『周易傳義』 下, 성백효 역주, 전통문화연구소, p.345.; Lee Un-sunn*,* “Korean Confucianism and Women’s Subjectivity in the Twenty-First Century, *Korean Religions in Relation-Buddhism, Confucianism, Christianity,* edited by Anselm K. Min, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2016, p.246ff. [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
40. Lee Un-Sunn, “What Make Human Beings Still Human in our Post-human era-Confucian Feminism and the Other Christology,” *Collection of Lectures, East-West Theological Forum*, 3rd Conference, 23-25 May 2013, Seoul, Methodist Theological University. [↑](#endnote-ref-40)