

Muller, A. Charles, *Korea's Great Buddhist-Confucian Debate: The Treatises of CHONG Tojon (Sambong) and Hamho Tuktong (Kihwa)*

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One preconception of modern Western philosophy that still echoes in its contemporary incarnations is the assumption that argument and debate do not occur in non-Western intellectual traditions in a properly philosophical way. Asian philosophies have been categorized as folk, mythical, mystical, and poetic wisdom traditions lacking argumentation and what Hegel designated the “labor of the concept” (“Arbeit des Begriffes,” *Phänomenologie des Geistes* [Stuttgart: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2013], p. 52). The distinction between nonconceptual and conceptual cognition was employed by Hegel and the subsequent tradition to demarcate Western and non-Western thinking.

The prejudices of Western philosophy can be placed in doubt if we look at sources beyond the confines of Western discourses and encounter and engage counter examples (compare Amartya Sen, *The Argumentative Indian: Writings on Indian History, Culture and Identity* [London: Macmillan, 2005]). Korean philosophy offers a number of intriguing cases of sophisticated and nuanced argumentation and debate involving the exchange of reasons and arguments aimed at convincing others of the truth of the matter under discussion. The best known example of a debate employing argumentation, which occurs within the context and assumptions of Sino-Korean Neo-Confucianism in the 16th century, is the Four-Seven debate between Yi Hwang 李滉 (Toegye 退溪) (1501–1570) and Gi Dae-seung 奇大升 (Gobong 高峰) (1527–1572) during the Joseon 朝鮮 dynasty. This exchange concerned nature (*seong* 性) and the emotions (*jeong* 情) through a discussion of the relationship between the “four sprouts” (*sadan* 四端) and seven emotions (*chiljeong* 七情).

A. Charles Muller’s *Korea’s Great Buddhist-Confucian Debate* includes a helpful and comprehensive introduction and lucid translation of three

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representative texts of an earlier debate between Buddhist and Neo-Confucian thinkers that took place during the historically decisive transition period from the Goryeo 高麗 to the Joseon dynasty that was established by a coup d'état in 1392. Muller has done Korean and comparative philosophy and Korean cultural, intellectual, and religious history a significant service by bringing this volume into print. This edition contains translations of two pivotal texts critiquing Buddhism and explaining the Confucian alternative by the Neo-Confucian philosopher and politician JEONG Dojeon (CHONG Tojon) 鄭道傳 (1342–1398), also known by his penname Sambong 三峰: *On Mind, Material Force, and Principle* (*Simgiri Pyeon* 心氣理篇) from 1394 and the much more detailed *Array of Critiques of Buddhism* (*Bulssi Japbyeon* 佛氏雜辨) from 1398. It also includes a systematic response to Neo-Confucian critiques and justification of Buddhism by the Seon 禪 Buddhist monk Gihwa (Kihwa) 己和 (Hamheo Deuktong [Hamho Tuktong] 涵虛得通, 1376–1433): *Exposition of Orthodoxy* (*Hyeonjeong Non* 顯正論).

The debate between Jeong and Gihwa is often analyzed in the context of the political struggles of the time in which a Confucian-influenced dynasty replaced a Buddhist-oriented one with the assistance and guidance of Confucian scholar-politicians such as Jeong, who served as an adviser to the first Joseon monarch. However, as Muller's introduction carefully portrays, this dispute does not merely represent an ideological polemic and political struggle for power and influence between Confucian literati and Buddhist monastics. This volume will serve as a distinctly valuable resource for East Asian and comparative philosophy inside and outside the classroom, as it encompasses disagreements over epistemological, cosmological, ontological, as well as ethical-political principles and perspectives.

Jeong's *On Mind, Material Force, and Principle* is a brief presentation of the primary concepts of Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism as they are understood in their Sino-Korean context. Jeong describes each philosophy through the relationship between the mind (*sim* 心), patterning principle (*ri* 理), and material force or dynamic energy (*gi* 氣). The argument is that Buddhism idealistically confuses the mind with material forces, Daoism materialistically confuses material forces with the mind, and (Neo-)Confucianism properly illuminates both mind and material force in their relationship to principle.

Jeong relies in his *Array of Critiques of Buddhism* on a broadly naturalistic or this-worldly philosophical perspective—informed by the *Yijing* 易經 (*Book of Changes*), five phases theory, and Neo-Confucian onto-cosmology—in his critique of Buddhism. He examines epistemic issues of the scope and limits of knowability in rejecting karma and reincarnation, ontological and cosmological issues of the transitoriness and seasonality of life and the continuity and discontinuity of things in contrast to Buddhist causal and karmic interconnectedness, existential issues of the finitude and immanent meaningfulness of human life given that one has only one life to live, and ethical-political concerns about the best way to live, cultivate oneself in relation to others, and contribute to social-political life given the conditions and roles of human life.

Jeong develops criticisms of the corruption and excessiveness of Buddhist monastics and, more interestingly, Buddhist ethics as such. Moral life is reduced to a vulgar calculative concern with karmic merit and retribution at the popular level, which is merely external and accordingly not genuinely ethical, or undermined by the antinomian destruction of ethical norms and practices among

elite Seon Buddhist monastics. Jeong stresses the conceptual incoherence of Buddhist ideas of mind and nature in contrast to his portrayal of the simplicity and coherence of Confucian principles.

Muller's introduction points out the underlying concepts and argumentative strategies at work in this debate, describing the particular importance of the essence/function (*che-yong* 體用) model that structures both sides of the argument. Jeong and Gihwa share a common cultural-intellectual milieu in which Buddhists and Confucians have coexisted and debated for centuries. Their exchange is part of an ongoing process such that it does not merely represent an isolated episode of opposition between two mutually incomprehensible paradigms.

Gihwa received a traditional Confucian education before his Buddhist conversion experience and his *Exposition of Orthodoxy* and other writings reveal a classical literary style and familiarity with Confucian teachings. While Jeong focused on the conceptual inconsistencies and incoherence of Buddhism, Gihwa stresses the performative contradictions between Confucian theory and practice. Confucians are also motivated to respond to suffering, as the discourse in the *Mencius* (*Mengzi* 孟子) concerning the inherent goodness of human nature, and the examples of spontaneously responding to others in danger and in need, makes evident.

Gihwa maintains that Confucianism contains similar ideas to Buddhism about respecting and not harming life through an argument that proceeds through examples of abstaining from harming human and animal life from the *Mencius* and other Confucian sources. However, the Confucians fail to consistently achieve and maintain this ethical stance in life and practice. Confucian principles are not so much epistemically false or morally wrong as they are incomplete and fragmentary reflections of the truth. Buddhist teachings, in Gihwa's estimation, realize the ideals of the sage-kings and Confucian philosophers more coherently and cogently than Confucianism can.

Gihwa's response to Jeong and Neo-Confucian criticisms of Buddhism engages a broad range of philosophically thought-provoking questions, including the central issue of the nature of suffering and evil that compelled him, and should compel us, to the more comprehensive Buddhist ethical perspective in which karma, afterlives, and other apparently non-naturalistic phenomena receive an ethical justification (on the problems of suffering and evil in this debate, see Eric S. Nelson, "Suffering, Evil, and the Emotions: A Joseon Debate between Neo-Confucianism and Buddhism," *국제고려학 [International Journal of Korean Studies]*, vol. 16 (2016): 447–462).

Jeong rejects the consistency and validity of Buddhist concepts and the usefulness of Buddhist institutions and practices for society. Gihwa employs a different argumentative strategy: he reconstructs a conception of *humaneness* (*in* 仁) and the mutual interconnectedness that allows for the comprehension of the underlying unity of the three teachings of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism and orders them according to their capacity to disclose and extend this intrinsic humaneness toward all beings. Gihwa's conception of humaneness has a universal conceptual scope that is not restricted by binary oppositions between civilized and barbarian, East and West, or—as he argues in other sections of the *Exposition of Orthodoxy*—human and animal:

“East” and “West” are nothing more than names applied to this or that place according to the situation. There is no such thing as occupying the center and determining East and West. If we do not respect the Way of the Buddha because he

is a barbarian, then shall we also not respect the ways of Shun, who was born among the eastern tribes, and King Wen, who was born among the western tribes? Can we disparage a person's Way just on the basis of his being foreign? (104)

Unlike the Sino-Korean Confucians who denigrated the foreignness of the Buddha, and who only perceived the ancient Chinese sage rulers such as the legendary Emperor Shun 舜 (22nd–21st century BCE) and King Wen 文 (1152–1056 BCE) as exemplary models to emulate, Jeong argued for a universal conception of humaneness best understood through the Confucian-Mencian account of the inherent goodness of human nature and its appropriate cultivation and education into a virtuous way of life. The problem for Jeong was not the Buddha's foreignness as such; it is his failure to realize the appropriate humaneness and ritual propriety (*ye* 禮)—in particular toward parents, family, and the kingdom—which is inherent in human nature: “Even though the Buddha was a foreigner, he was still a human being. So how could he alone lack this heart-mind [*sim*]?” (65) Jeong contests the adequacy of the Buddhist idea of compassion (*jabi* 慈悲, *mettā*, loving-kindness) based on his Neo-Confucian interpretation of Mencius and interprets the exemplary case of the Buddha's abandonment of his parents, wife, and child in search of awakening as egotistical and morally problematic.

Jeong contends that Buddhism is in principle incompatible with and in practice destabilizes the ethical flourishing of the community. Gihwa addresses such Confucian concerns by presenting Buddhism as a more perfect teaching that promotes individual and social flourishing through monastic and lay practices and institutions. The differentiation of levels of understanding through skillful means allows the Buddhist to defuse inconsistencies between different Buddhist and non-Buddhist teachings while recognizing that each teaching has its own truth with its own appropriate conditions, scope, and limits. Gihwa's approach in the *Exposition of Orthodoxy* reflects the long established Buddhist strategy of accommodation, appropriation, and hierarchical classification in which higher Buddhist teachings surpass and can elucidate lower Buddhist and non-Buddhist teachings. The exemplary model of this strategy in East Asia is the *Inquiry into the Origin of Humanity* (Ch. *Yuan Ren Lun* 原人論) by Guifeng Zongmi 圭峰宗密 (780–841).

Just as Gihwa's interpretive strategies can be traced back to Zongmi, Jeong's arguments have sources in the critiques of Buddhism articulated by HAN Yu 韓愈 (768–824) and Song Neo-Confucianism: namely, the Cheng brothers (CHENG Hao 程顥 [1032–1085] and CHENG Yi 程頤 [1033–1107]) and ZHU Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200). There is some controversy in the literature over the originality of their positions. Jeong and Gihwa presuppose an existing context of argumentation and borrow and reconstruct older arguments. The richness and comprehensiveness of their argumentation is made possible by occurring in this discursive context of previous arguments and counter-arguments. Jeong and Gihwa rely no doubt on the argumentative and interpretive strategies of earlier Chinese and Korean thinkers, even as they crystallize previous arguments in their own way.

One might disagree with particular translation choices that are more informed by Buddhist than Neo-Confucian scholarship. This edition is an excellent translation of three pivotal primary sources that will allow them to receive the greater attention they deserve in English-language discussions of Korean, East Asian, and

comparative philosophy. These texts clearly illustrate how concepts with universal import can be found in East Asian texts if we read them as we read Western texts and not as merely limited to particular local contexts.