

# Resolutions to Become a Sage: An Annotated Translation of the *Chagyŏngmun*

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The learner needs to immediately get away from Buddhist teachings as if from licentious music and beautiful women.

Zhū Xī 朱熹, *Jinsilū* 近思錄 13.5<sup>1</sup>

## *Introduction: Yulgok's Quest for Meaning*

The Koryŏ 高麗 (918–1392) literati-scholars An Hyang [Hoehŏn] 安珦 [晦軒] (1243–1306) and Paek Ijŏng [Ijae] 白頤正 [彝齋] (1247–1323) were instrumental

Notes on Romanization and Style: Korean terms and names are romanized using the McCune-Reischauer system. The phonetic transcription of Chinese is given according to the *Hànyǔ Pīnyīn* 漢語拼音 system including tone marks. Japanese is romanized using the Hepburn system. The original notation—*hanja/hanzi* 漢字 or *han'gŭl* 한글—is added to romanized terms and names where they are mentioned first or when deemed necessary. Korean and Chinese names are written according to the East Asian custom: family name precedes personal name. To romanize Korean given names, hyphens are included between syllables. Pen names or courtesy names are given in brackets.

1 “學者于釋氏之說。直須如淫聲美色以遠之。” JSL 13.5.

in introducing the teachings of Zhū Xī 朱熹 (1130–1200) to the Korean peninsula, thereby sustainably implementing Neo-Confucian thought in a predominantly Buddhist environment. The *coup d'état* of Yi Sǒnggye [T'aejo] 李成桂 [太祖] (1335–1408, *reg.* 1392–1398), backed by the newly emerged Neo-Confucian elite, expedited the peninsula's transformation into a strictly Neo-Confucian country, then called Chosŏn 朝鮮 (1392–1910).<sup>2</sup> Over time, the *sǒngni-bak*<sup>3</sup> tradition infiltrated all aspects of society, and centuries later became a veritable »cultural grammar«, regulating »the customs and the consciousness of the Koreans«. <sup>4</sup> Despite the hegemony of Neo-Confucian ideology and the concomitant political suppression of divergent worldviews, the doctrinal rivals of Neo-Confucianism—in particular Buddhism—remained relatively vibrant during the Chosŏn dynasty.<sup>5</sup>

In particular, Buddhist and Daoist<sup>6</sup> teachings kept their appeal and charisma, even having an influence on the Neo-Confucian ruling class. As was the case with many eminent Chinese Confucians such as Zhū Xī or Wáng Shǒurén [Yángmíng] 王守仁 [陽明] (1472–1529), Korean scholars delved into Buddhism during their formative years. Similarly, one of the most significant exponents of Korean Neo-Confucianism, Yi I [Yulgok] 李耳 [栗谷] (1536–1584), ventured to learn more about the way of the *bodhisattva*, indulging in these studies while

- 2 To Hyŏn-chŏl 도현철 »Chosŏn'ui kŏn'guk'kwa yugomunhwa'ui hwaktae« 조선의 건국과 유교문화의 확대 [The Founding of Chosŏn and the Expansion of Confucian Culture], *Tongbang hakchi* 124/2004 東方學志 no 124 (2004), 189–218.
- 3 *Xìnglǐxué* 性理學 (Chinese, 'school of nature and *lǐ* 理) also *chujabak* 朱子學 (Chinese *Zhūzixué*, 'school of Master Zhū) or *chōngjubak* 程朱學 (Chinese *chéngzhūxué*, 'school of Chéng [Chéng Yí 程頤] und Zhū). Refers to the Neo-Confucian tradition according to Zhū Xī who amalgamated the teachings of several doctrinal precursors such as Chéng Yí (1033–1107), Chéng Hào 程顥 (1032–1085), Zhāng Zǎi 張載 (1020–1077), Zhōu Dūnyí 周敦頤 (1017–1073) and Shào Yōng 邵雍 (1011–1077).
- 4 Choi Youngjin, »Foreword«, in *Confucianism in Context: Classic Philosophy and Contemporary Issues, East Asia and Beyond*, ed. by Wonsuk Chang and Leah Kalmanson (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010), ix.
- 5 Robert E. Buswell, Jr., »Buddhism under Confucian Domination: The Synthetic Vision of Sŏsan Hyujŏng«, in *Culture and the State in Late Chosŏn Korea*, ed. by Ja Hyun Kim Haboush and Martina Deuchler (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 1999), 134–159.
- 6 Chŏng Chaesŏ 정제서, *Han'guk togyo'ui kiwŏn'gwa yŏksa* 한국 도교의 기원과 역사 [Origin and History of Korean Daoism] (Sŏul: Ihwa Yŏjadaehakkyo Ch'ulp'anbu 이화여자대학교출판부, 2006), 29–59.

spending a year at a Buddhist monastery. Along with his older contemporary, Yi Hwang [T'oegye] 李滉〔退溪〕 (1501–1570), Yulgok went down in history as the most brilliant and influential orthodox exegete of *sōngnibak*. However, like many before and after him, he passed through a time of intellectual experimentation, setting out on a quest for meaning as illustrated in the following poem, which he composed in 1555:

|        |   |
|--------|---|
| 學道卽無著。 | Learning the Way [to 道] is without attachment,                |
| 隨緣到處遊。 | I follow my affinity wherever it roams.                       |
| 暫辭青鶴洞。 | Leaving <i>Ch'ōngbaktong</i> for a while,                     |
| 來玩白鷗洲。 | I come and play at <i>Paekkuju</i> .                          |
| 身世雲千里。 | My body is in a cloud of thousand <i>li</i> , <sup>7</sup>    |
| 乾坤海一頭。 | The universe at the end of the sea.                           |
| 草堂聊寄宿。 | Passing the night in a thatched hut,                          |
| 梅月是風流。 | Shining moon on the plum tree: this is elegance. <sup>8</sup> |

Yulgok accentuates his sincere desire for a knowledge that overcomes any prejudice or intellectual dependence. To grasp *to* 道<sup>9</sup> one implicitly needs to overcome the limiting boundaries of blind doctrinal obedience. Yulgok's free-spirited and unattached mind sought a profound understanding of *to* 道, unhindered by any intellectual restraints. The youthful Yulgok wittingly delved into *sānjiào* 三教,<sup>10</sup> rambling from *Ch'ōngbaktong* 青鶴洞 (Buddhism and Daoism) to *Paekkuju* 白鷗洲 (Confucianism) and back.<sup>11</sup>

Yulgok was born on December 26, 1536,<sup>12</sup> into a well-established *yangban*<sup>13</sup> family in today's *Kangnŭng* 江陵. He was raised in a staunchly Confucian milieu,

7 The *li* 里 (Chinese *li*) is a traditional unit of distance. Its exact length has varied in the course of time, lying roughly between 300 and 600 meters.

8 *Yōsan'in poŭng hasan, chip'ung'am yikwangmun (chiwōn) ka, sukch'odang* 與山人普應下山。至豐巖李廣文(之元)家。宿草堂。(With Poŭng I came down the mountain, arrived at the home of P'ung'am Yi Kwang-mun (Chiwōn) and passed the night in the thatched hut), YC 1 1.23a, 13.— For full bibliographical information, see List of Sources in the end of this article.

9 Chinese *dào*, i.e. the overarching principle of Being.

10 Korean *samgyo* 三教, i.e. 'three teachings', comprising Buddhism, Confucianism and Daoism.

11 Han Hyōng-jo 한형조, »1554nyōn kŭmgangsan, ch'ōngnyōn yulgok'kwa ōnŭ nosŭng'ui taehwa 1554년 금강산, 청년 율곡과 어느 노승의 대화 [Mount Kŭmgang 1554: Conversation of Young Yulgok and an Old Monk], in *Pulgyo p'yōngnon* 불교평론 [The Buddhist Review] <www.budreview.com/news/articleView.html?idxno=249> (last retrieval Aug 16, 2011).

12 Detailed biographical information on Yulgok can be found in YC2 35.2a–35.51b, 342–366. For a brief outline, see Lukas Pokorny, *Ontologische Parallelen im Neuplatonismus und Neokonfuzianismus*:

receiving comprehensive education from childhood on, in particular through his mother *Sin Saimdang* 申師任堂 (1504–1551), who was later extolled as the epitome of Confucian womanhood. At an early stage, he constantly amazed the people around him owing to his outstanding perspicacity and wide reading. Despite keen interest in Buddhist and Daoist thought as an adolescent, Yulgok became a dedicated and rigorous proponent of *sōngnibak*, entering officialdom in 1564. Until his untimely death on January 16, 1584, at age 47, he held a number of influential ministerial offices and produced a considerable amount of literature. His *œuvre* contains a plethora of seminal writings, a great many of which are not yet translated into Western languages. The paper at hand meets a *desideratum*, providing a first annotated translation of a well-known and frequently cited but—oddly enough—untranslated text. The so-called *Chagyōngmun* 自警文<sup>14</sup> (Written to Alert Myself) is relatively brief, yet marks a watershed in Yulgok's intellectual development. It represents his written resolution to henceforth wholeheartedly adhere to Confucian teachings while keeping any 'false doctrines' (*wibak* 僞學) at distance. The authoring of the *Chagyōngmun* concludes his year-long sojourn in a Buddhist monastery at *Kūmgangsan* 金剛山. Yulgok, severely struck by the death of his beloved mother in 1551, mourned at her gravesite for three years,<sup>15</sup> experiencing an existential crisis. Longing for answers and to ease his bitterness, he decided to retreat to seclusion,<sup>16</sup> setting off to *Kūmgangsan* in the spring of 1554. Before entering the *sōn*-Buddhist<sup>17</sup> monastery, he prepared another piece of poetry, which again echoes his intellectual curiosity:

|        |   |
|--------|---|
| 乾坤孰開闢。 | Who has opened heaven and earth?                  |
| 日月誰磨洗。 | Who has polished and washed the sun and the moon? |
| 山河既融結。 | Mountains and rivers are already entwined,        |

*Salomon ibn Gabirol und Yi Yulgok* (Wien: Praesens Verlag, 2008), 30–35.

- 13 The *yangban* 兩班 denote the aristocracy in the Chosŏn dynasty.
- 14 For a Korean translation including scarce but auxiliary notes, see Kim Ik-su 金益洙, »Yulgok'ui chagyōngmun'gwa ipchiron« 울곡의 자경문 (自警文) 과 입지론(立志論) [Yulgok's Chagyōngmun and the Discussion on Acquiring Determination], *Han'guk'ui ch'ōngsonyōn munbwa* 10/2007 韓國의 靑少年文化 vol 10 (2007), 19–27.
- 15 “十六歲。丁內憂。廬墓三年。一遵家禮。不脫衰絰。躬執祭饌。雖洗滌之事。不使僮僕任之。” YC2 35.3a–b, 342.
- 16 For a succinct discussion why Yulgok sought isolation, see Kim Hak Ze, »Two Neo-Confucian Perspectives on the Way: Yi Yi's and Li Zhi's Commentaries on the Laozi« (PhD thesis National University of Singapore, 2008), 36. Kim underlines Yulgok's earnest inclination towards Buddhism.
- 17 Chinese *chán* 禪, Japanese *zen*.

|        |   |
|--------|---|
| 寒暑更相遞。 | Cold and heat alternately take turns.   |
| 吾人處萬類。 | We humans are placed among the ten-thousand kinds,                            |
| 知識最爲巨。 | Our knowledge is the most immense.  |
| 胡爲類匏瓜。 | Why are we like gourds, <sup>[18]</sup>                                       |
| 戚戚迷處所。 | Pitifully and astray [tied to] a place?                                       |
| 八荒九州間。 | Between the eight wilds <sup>[19]</sup> and the nine regions, <sup>[20]</sup> |
| 優遊何所阻。 | What hinders us from roaming freely?  |
| 春山千里外。 | Vernal mountains thousand <i>li</i> beyond,                                   |
| 策杖吾將去。 | With a cane I am about to depart.   |
| 伊誰從我者？ | Who will be the one following me?   |
| 薄暮空延佇。 | In the evening in vain I am waiting. <sup>21</sup>                            |

In the poem Yulgok articulates his overwhelming inquisitiveness and candid readiness to plunge into any doctrine, that might facilitate a deeper understanding of the cosmic principle *to* 道.<sup>22</sup> Finally, he donned a monk's habit, striving to dwell upon afflicting existential issues, and to allay his poignant grief at *Kūmgangsan*. It is not recorded what exactly happened during his retreat, but it is assumed that while reflecting on his existential dilemmas and dealing with his grievance over his mother, Yulgok also engaged in intense reflection on the doctrines Buddhism itself.<sup>23</sup> For example, the *Yulgok chōnsō* 栗谷全書 (Complete Works of Yulgok) relate a dialogue between Yulgok and an old monk, whom he met during one of his woodland strolls at a small hermitage. A part of the conversation reads:<sup>24</sup>

余曰。佛家妙處。不出吾儒。何必棄儒求釋乎。  
僧曰。儒家亦有卽心卽佛之語乎。

- 18 Yulgok refers to a passage in the *Lányū* 論語 (Korean *Non'ō*). Kōngzǐ 孔子 (Korean: *Kongja*, tr 551–479 BCE) states: “吾豈匏瓜也哉。焉能繫而不食。” LY 17.7, 321.
- 19 *Bābuāng* 八荒 (Korean *p'albwang*) denotes ‘every direction’ or ‘everywhere’.
- 20 *Jiūzhōu* 九州 (Korean *kuju*) usually signifies China's ancient nine provinces (‘China’), occasionally the ‘nine continents’ (‘world’), denoting ‘every place’ or ‘everywhere’.
- 21 »Ch'ultongmun« 出東門 [Departing from the East Gate], YC1 1.19b, 11.
- 22 For an elaborate discussion on Yulgok's quest for the ‘absolute’, also taking into account his engagement with Buddhism, see Yi Sang-ik 이상익, »Yulgog'e issōsō kunggükcha'wa kunggük-chök kwansim« 율곡에 있어서 궁극자(窮極者)와 궁극적 관심 [The Ultimate Being for Yulgok and His Ultimate Interest], *Yugyo munbwa yōn'gu* 儒教文化研究 vol 13 (2009), 29–46.
- 23 For a discussion on Yulgok's stance toward Buddhism, see Yi Heejae, »Yulgok's Perspective on Buddhism«, *International Journal of Buddhist Thought & Culture* vol 6 (2006), 265–289.
- 24 »P'ungak chūng soam nosūng« 楓嶽贈小菴老僧 [Presented to an Old Monk of a Small Hermitage at P'ungak], YC1 1.20b–1.21b, 12—Autumnal *Kūmgangsan* is called *P'ungaksan* 楓嶽山.

余曰。孟子道性善。言必稱堯舜。何異於即心即佛。

I said: The subtleness of Buddhism does not surpass our Confucianism. What need is there to abandon Confucianism and seek [to 道] in Buddhism?

The monk said: Does Confucianism also have the saying »mind is Buddha«<sup>[25]</sup>?

I said: [Whenever] Mengjia 孟子<sup>[26]</sup> stated that [human] nature is good, he certainly mentioned Yo 堯 and Sun 舜.<sup>[27]</sup> What is the difference between this and [the saying] »mind is Buddha«?

In this short passage, Yulgok poses a provocative question with the aim to initially contrast both teachings' doctrinal foundations. He proceeds to indicate apologetically that the Confucian precept of *sōngsōn* 性善<sup>28</sup> ('[human] nature is good'), in fact, conveys the core Buddhist ethical tenet of *chŭksim chŭkpul* 即心即佛 ('mind is Buddha'). By comparing Buddhism and Confucianism, Yulgok expects to gain more refined insight into the nature of *to* 道. For Yulgok, the conversation evidently served a learning purpose in the existential search for meaning that first led him to *Kŭmgangsan*. In the spring of 1555, Yulgok decided from then on to follow the Confucian way only, and he returned home. A post hoc account in the *Yulgok chōnsō* reads:

Now this learning [i.e. Buddhism] is not something particularly mysterious. It only strives to cut off the path of distracting the heart-and-mind<sup>[29]</sup> and condensing the spirit in order to create a condition of supreme serenity, emptiness and brightness. Hence [Buddhist teachings] deceptively establish *hwadu* 話頭,<sup>[30]</sup> causing [people] to

25 The phrase *jīxīn jífō* 即心即佛 (Korean *chŭksim chŭkpul*, 'mind is Buddha') is central to *sōn*-Buddhist thought, and bears upon the notion that the human mind in its primordial condition equates to 'Buddha-nature' (Chinese *fōxìng* 佛性, Korean *pulsōng*).

26 Chinese Mèngzǐ 孟子 (tr 372–289 BCE).

27 Tradition holds that the sagely rulers Yáo and Shùn (Chinese) were preceding the legendary founder of the prehistoric *Xià* dynasty (tr 21c–16c BCE) Yǔ 禹. Confucian scholars idealized Yáo and Shùn, highly esteeming their rulership as an era of utmost virtue.

28 Chinese *xìngshàn*.

29 *Sim* 心 (Chinese *xīn*) designates the heart, which according to the Confucian tradition is the center of cognitive, emotional, and volitional capacities. The most appropriate rendering is thus »heart-and-mind«, combining the human faculty of reflection and feeling.

30 *Hwadu* (Chinese *huàtóu*) investigation was the most prevalent technique in *sōn*-Buddhist meditation practice during the Chosōn dynasty. »*Hwadu* literally means 'the head of the word' but actually implies 'the head of the thought'. A *hwadu* is the quintessential part of a *kongan*, i.e., the real object of contemplation.« See Henrik Hjort Sørensen, »Mirror of Emptiness: The Life and Times of the Sōn Master Kyōnghō Sōngu«, in *The Makers of Modern Korean Buddhism*, ed. by Jin Y. Park (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010), 138.

greatly rely on it in their efforts. And fearing that, if people first become aware of this thought they will certainly not concentrate on making efforts and in the end getting nothing whatsoever, [the Buddhist teachings] thus establish these commandments, deceiving [the people]. Consequently, I suspected this learning's wickedness and again took hold of the books of the sages and worthies, savoring them. I realized that the truth of their teachings did not defraud me. Then for the first time I greatly understood, packed up [my possessions] and returned home.<sup>31</sup>

Shortly after, Yulgok put his resolution down in writing in the *Chagyŏngmun*, Yulgok's personal manifesto, in which he admonishes himself to remain on the true path leading to sagehood. It signifies a turning point of his intellectual ripening. Yulgok later reported to King Sŏnjo 宣祖 (1552–1608, *reg* 1567–1608):

When young I was very much fond of *sŏn*-teachings thoroughly investigating every sutra. But perceiving that they lacked a stable place I returned [to Confucian teachings] to seek [knowledge] in our Confucian books.<sup>32</sup>

### *Text and Annotated Translation*

自警文

Written to Alert Myself

先須大其志。以聖人爲準則。一毫不及聖人。則吾事未了。

[1] At first I need to set my aspirations high and make the sage the standard. If I do not attain sagehood by even a hair, my task is not completed.

心定者言寡。定心。自寡言始。時然後言。則言不得不簡。

[2] One whose heart-and-mind is settled<sup>33</sup> is [a person of] scanty words. Settling the heart-and-mind begins by reducing words. If one talks only at the right time the words cannot but be concise.

31 “蓋其學無他奇妙。只欲截斷此心走作之路。凝聚精神。以造靜極虛明之域。故假設話頭。使之依靠下功。而又恐人先知此意。則著功必不專精。卒無所得。故又設此禁而誑之也。遂疑其學之邪。復取聖賢書而溫繹之。知其說之真不我欺也。始乃大悟。束裝而歸。” YC2 33.14a–b, 282.

32 “少時頗好禪學。泛觀諸經。覺得無着實處。反以求之吾儒之書。” SJS 8/6/24.

33 The rectification of the heart-and-mind (*chŏngsim* 正心, Chinese *zhèngxīn*) rests upon making one's intentions sincere (*sŏngüi* 誠意, Chinese *chéngyì*) by extending knowledge (*ch'iji* 致知, Chinese: *zhìzhī*) through the investigation of things (*kyŏngmul* 格物, Chinese: *gévù*). For a succinct discussion, see Huang Siu-chi, *Essentials of Neo-Confucianism: Eight Major Philosophers of*

久放之心。一朝收之。得力豈可容易。心是活物。定力未成。則搖動難安。若思慮紛擾時。作意厭惡。欲絕之。則愈覺紛擾。倏起忽滅。似不由我。假使斷絕。只此斷絕之念。橫在胸中。此亦妄念也。當於紛擾時。收斂精神。輕輕照管。勿與之俱往。用功之久。必有凝定之時。執事專一。此亦定心功夫。

[3] How can it be easy to obtain the power to immediately gather the heart-and-mind that has been set loose for so long? The heart-and-mind is a living thing. If the power of stabilizing [virtue] is not completed, putting at rest the tremor [of the heart-and-mind] will be difficult. When thoughts and considerations are agitated and disturbed<sup>[34]</sup> I consciously detest it, and if I intend to cut this I am all the more aware of agitation and disturbance. It suddenly arises, perishes abruptly and seems not to have been caused by myself. Even if I sever [these thoughts and considerations] only this ‘severing thought’ will be obstructing in my chest.<sup>[35]</sup> This is also a delusive thought. When agitating and disturbing [thoughts arise], I [must] harvest the spirit, effortlessly control it and not go along [with any agitating and disturbing thoughts]. If I make efforts for long, [the heart-and-mind] must have time to settle firmly. Handling business while being focused: this is also the study of settling the heart-and-mind.

常以戒懼謹獨意思。存諸胸中。念念不怠。則一切邪念。自然不起。萬惡。皆從不謹獨生。謹獨然後。可知浴沂詠歸之意味。

[4] If thoughts that always caution and fear, and restrain themselves when alone<sup>[36]</sup> are preserved in my chest, and if I am mindful and not negligent, naturally wicked thoughts will not arise. The ten-thousand vices emerge from all

*the Song and Ming Periods* (Westport, CT; London: Greenwood Press, 1999), 114-117 and 138-140.

34 See ZZYL 6.1, 114.

35 See ZZYL 15.1, 308.

36 See ZY 33, 430-434 and Zhū Xī's commentary in ZYZJX 33: “詩曰。衣錦尚綢。惡其文之著也。故君子之道。闢然而日章。小人之道。的然而日亡。君子之道。淡而不厭。簡而文。溫而理。知遠之近。知風之自。知微之顯。可與入德矣。衣。去聲。綢。口迴反。惡。去聲。闢。於感反。前章言聖人之德。極其盛矣。此復自下學立心之始言之。而下文又推之以至其極也。詩國風衛碩人。鄭之丰。皆作“衣錦褻衣。褻。綢同。禪衣也。尚。加也。古之學者為己。故其立心如此。尚綢故闢然。衣錦故有日章之實。淡。簡。溫。綢之襲於外也。不厭而文且理焉。錦之美在中也。小人反是。則暴於外而無實以繼之。是以的然而日亡也。遠之近。見於彼者由於此也。風之自。著乎外者本乎內也。微之顯。有諸內者形諸外也。有為己之心。而又知此三者。則知所謹而可入德矣。故下文引詩言謹獨之事。詩云。潛雖伏矣。亦孔之昭。故君子內省不疚。無惡於志。君子之所不可及者。其唯人之所不見乎。惡。去聲。詩小雅正月之篇。承上文言。莫見乎隱。莫顯乎微。也。疚。病也。無惡於志。猶言無愧於心。此君子謹獨之事也。”



who do not restrain themselves when alone. [Only] after restraining myself when alone, I am able to know the meaning of »bathing in the Ki [river] and returning home singing«.<sup>[37]</sup>

曉起。思朝之所爲之事。食後。思晝之所爲之事。就寢時。思明日所爲之事。無事則放下。有事則必思。得處置合宜之道。然後讀書。讀書者。求辨是非。施之行事也。若不省事。兀然讀書。則爲無用之學。

[5] Rising at daybreak I reflect on business that has to be done in the morning. After breakfast I reflect on business that has to be done during daytime. When I retire to rest I reflect on business that has to be done the next day. If I have no business, I put it down,<sup>[38]</sup> if I have business, I need to reflect. I [must] obtain the way to appropriately manage [affairs] and thereupon I will read books. By reading books, I [must] seek to distinguish right and wrong and to carry it into practice. If I do not examine business and solely read books, this is useless learning.

財利榮利。雖得埽除其念。若處事時。有一毫擇便宜之念。則此亦利心也。尤可省察。

37 Reference to “點。爾何如。鼓瑟希。鏗爾。舍瑟而作。對曰。異乎三子之撰。子曰。何傷乎。亦各言其志也。曰。莫春者。春服既成。冠者五六人。童子六七人。浴乎沂。風乎舞雩。詠而歸。夫子喟然歎曰。吾與點也。” LY 11.25 [11.26], 248. In a conversation with four of his disciples Kōngzǐ asks what they were to do when in power. His senior disciple Zēng Diǎn [Zēng Xī] 曾點 [曾皙] went last, saying after a while: »At the end of spring, with the spring dress being completed, along with five or six capped men, and six or seven boys, [I would like to] bathe in the Yí, [enjoy] the breeze by the rain altar, and return home singing«. “莫春者。春服既成。冠者五六人。童子六七人。浴乎沂。風乎舞雩。詠而歸。” LY 11.25 [11.26], 248. Kōngzǐ thereupon spoke after a heavy sigh that he sided with Zēng Diǎn. Zēng Diǎn’s response signifies his superior contentedness and humility, being in utmost harmony with *to* 道. For a detailed discussion of Zēng Diǎn’s sagely character and different interpretations, see Sophia Katz, »The Tradition of Ruist Unrestrainedness: Zeng Dian, Shao Yong and Chen Xianzhang (6th c. BCE–15th c. CE)«, in *At Home in Many Worlds: Reading, Writing and Translating from Chinese and Jewish Cultures. Essays in Honour of Irene Eber*, ed. by Raoul David Findeisen & al. (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz Verlag, 2009), 69–79.

38 The passage recalls an account about Kōngzǐ: »When the master was sitting at leisure, he was distended, he was cheerful«. “子之燕居。申申如也。夭夭如也。” LY 7.4, 196. If unoccupied with business, Yulgok enjoys his rest, putting aside any compulsion.

[6] [Aiming at] property and fame: even if I sweep this thought away, if I just slightly think of picking out the convenient while conducting business this also [displays] a greedy heart-and-mind. I must still more carefully examine myself.

凡遇事至。若可爲之事。則盡誠爲之。不可有厭倦之心。不可爲之事。則一切截斷。不可使是非交戰於胸中。

[7] Generally speaking, when meeting the business, if it is business that can be done I will exhaust my sincerity when conducting the task and my heart-and-mind will not be weary no matter what. If it is business that cannot be done I will cut it off completely and right and wrong cannot be caused to strive against each other in my chest.<sup>[39]</sup>

常以行一不義。殺一不辜。得天下不爲底意思。存諸胸中。

[8] The thought of not committing one act of unrighteousness and putting to death one innocent person in order to obtain the throne<sup>[40]</sup> is always preserved in my chest.

39 Yulgok addresses a key issue of *sōngnibak*, namely the constant struggle between *insim* 人心 or the human heart-and-mind (Chinese: *rénxīn*), and *tosim* 道心 or the heart-and-mind of the Way (Chinese: *dào xīn*). The *locus classicus* of this concept can be found in the *shàngshū* 尚書 (Korean: *sangsō*): “人心惟危。道心惟微。惟精惟一。允執厥中。” SS 2.2.15, 61–62. Zhū Xī’s famous interpretation of this passage sets the tone for the orthodox Neo-Confucian understanding of the relationship of *insim* and *tosim*: “心之虛靈知覺。一而已矣。而以為有人心。道心之異者。則以其或生於形氣之私。或原於性命之正。而所以為知覺者不同。是以或危殆而不安。或微妙而難見耳。然人莫不有是形。故雖上智不能無人心。亦莫不有是性。故雖下愚不能無道心。二者雜於方寸之間。而不知所以治之。則危者愈危。微者愈微。而天理之公卒無以勝夫人欲之私矣。精則察夫二者之間而不雜也。一則守其本心之正而不離也。從事於斯。無少閒斷。必使道心常為一身之主。而人心每聽命焉。則危者安。微者著。而動靜云為自無過不及之差矣。” ZYZJX 1. Zhū Xī points out the sublimity of *tosim*, which one is exhorted to uphold in action in order to thwart any interference by *insim*. *Tosim* indicates man’s primordial excellence that is consistent with *to* 道, while *insim* epitomizes the psychophysical endowment that is prone to selfishness and other negative human traits. The Southern Sòng dynasty (1127–1279) scholar Zhēn Déxiù 真德秀 (1178–1235) included Zhū Xī’s commentary right at the beginning of his well-known treatise *Xīnjīng* 心經 (Korean *Simgyōng*), which circulated widely in 16th century Chosŏn, making Korean Confucian literati even more acquainted with this particular passage.

40 Reference to “伯夷。伊尹於孔子。若是班乎。曰。否。自有生民以來。未有孔子也。曰。然則有同與。曰。有。得百里之地而君之。皆能以朝諸侯有天下。行一不義。殺一不辜而得天下。皆不為也。是則同。” MZ 2.1.2, 194–195. In a conversation between Mèngzǐ and his disciple Gōngsūn Chōu 公孫丑, the latter asks whether Kōngzǐ and the two admirable men Bó

橫逆之來。自反而深省。以感化爲期。一家之人不化。只是誠意未盡。

[9] If [one's] perversity and unreasonableness befalls me, I will naturally turn back and deeply examine myself with the intention to make it an inspiration.<sup>[41]</sup> That a man of a single family does not influence others is merely because his sincerity is unexhausted.

非夜眠及疾病。則不可偃臥。不可跛倚。雖中夜。無睡思則不臥。但不可拘迫。晝有睡思。當喚醒此心。十分猛醒。眼皮若重。起而周步。使之惺惺。

[10] Apart from sleeping at night and being ill I cannot lie down and lean against [something]. Even at midnight, if I do not become sleepy, I do not lie down. I cannot be restrained [from sleeping] solely by force. At daytime, when I am sleepy I will properly arouse the heart-and-mind and fiercely stir up myself for ten minutes. Even if my eyelids are heavy, I rise and walk around all over to become clear.

用功不緩不急。死而後已。若求速其效。則此亦利心。若不如此。戮辱遺體。便非人子。

[11] Making efforts is neither slow nor quick, first at death it will cease.<sup>[42]</sup> Even if I quickly seek efficacy, this also [means to have] a greedy heart-and-mind. Even if it does not appear as such, I punish and am a disgrace to my parents. I will instantly not be a son anymore.

Yí 伯夷 and Yī Yīn 伊尹 of Shāng dynasty (tr 17c–11c BCE) were alike. Even though Bó Yī and Yī Yīn did not reach up to Kǒngzǐ's sageliness, Mèngzǐ praises their virtuousness. He replies that they would have reached agreement in that none of them would have committed even one act of unrighteousness or put to death one single innocent person to seize power, ascending the throne of a great empire.

41 Reference to “有人於此。其待我以橫逆。則君子必自反也。我必不仁也。必無禮也。此物奚宜至哉。其自反而仁矣。自反而有禮矣。其橫逆由是也。君子必自反也。我必不忠。自反而忠矣。其橫逆由是也。” MZ 4.2.28, 333–334. In this passage Mèngzǐ refers to the demeanor of a *jūnzǐ* 君子 (Korean *kunja*) when facing someone, who treats him in a perverse and unreasonable manner. In such a situation the *jūnzǐ* would immediately examine himself, striving to be even more virtuous to be a positive influence on the person in front of him.

42 This part is a reference to “曾子曰。士不可以不弘毅。任重而道遠。仁以為己任。不亦重乎。死而後已。不亦遠乎。” LY 8.7, 210. Here Zēngzǐ 曾子 (tr. 505–436 BCE), a prominent disciple of Kǒngzǐ, explains that the cardinal virtue of *rén* 仁 (Korean *in*) is difficult to preserve, for at death one's efforts will cease.

*Concluding Remarks:*

*The Chagyŏngmun as the Turning Point and Seed for Yulgok's Later Works*

As seen in the introduction, the *Chagyŏngmun* marks the turning point at which Yulgok left behind his keen interest in Buddhism and affirmed his commitment to Confucian learning only. His lifelong attention to the flaws and errors of Buddhism begins here, with a critical reevaluation of his own youthful indulgence in the Buddhist way.

Moreover, the *Chagyŏngmun* lays the foundation for Yulgok's later treatises regarding self-cultivation including the *Manŏn pongsa* 萬言封事,<sup>43</sup> the *Sŏngbak chibyŏ* 聖學輯要,<sup>44</sup> and the *Kyŏngmong yogyŏl* 擊蒙要訣.<sup>45</sup> Every topic in this terse but concise work is repeated and elaborated in his later writings, which were to become an indispensable part of the self-cultivation literature of not only Yulgok and his followers but also of Korean Neo-Confucianism in general.

The first statement in the *Chagyŏngmun*, regarding setting one's aspiration for becoming a sage, is restated and developed in the first part of the self-cultivation chapter in the *Sŏngbak chibyŏ*,<sup>46</sup> the chapter on setting one's aspiration in the *Kyŏngmong yogyŏl*,<sup>47</sup> and a section of the *Manŏn pongsa*.<sup>48</sup> The notion of *sŏng* 誠<sup>49</sup> ('sincerity' or 'sincere intention'), which marks one of the salient features of Yulgok's thought appears at the first time in the *Chagyŏngmun*, being expanded into an independent section entitled *sŏngsil* 誠實<sup>50</sup> ('sincerity') in the *Sŏngbak chibyŏ*, and appearing as crucial part of the ontological background of the *Kyŏngmong yogyŏl* and the *Manŏn pongsa*.

Yulgok's self-cultivation begins with setting Confucian sages as immanent models to emulate. In his later writings, drawing upon the notion of *tot'ong* 道統,<sup>51</sup> he highlights exemplary figures, including cultural heroes, legendary rulers, and eminent scholars such as Fúxī 伏羲 and Shénnóng 神農, Huángdì 黃帝, Yáo

43 Memorial in Ten Thousand Characters (1574), YC1 5.10b-5.39a, 95-109.

44 Edited Essentials of the Learning of the Sage (1575), YC1 20.1a-23.54b, 417-527, YC2 24.1a-26.38b, 1-80.

45 Expedient Way of Smiting Ignorance (1577), YC2 27.1a-27.21b, 81-91.

46 YC1 20.3a-20.9b, 428-431.

47 YC2 27.3b-27.4b, 82.

48 YC1 5.25a-5.26a, 102-103.

49 Chinese *chéng*.

50 Chinese *chéngshí* 誠實, see YC2 21.2a-21.6a, 463-465.

51 Chinese *dàotōng* 'Transmission of the Way'.

and Shùn, Yǔ, Tāng 湯, Wén 文, Wǔ 武, Zhōu Gōngdàn 周公旦, Kǒngzǐ, Mèngzǐ, Zhū Xī and the Chéng brothers.<sup>52</sup> For Yulgok, the concrete deeds and the historical events concerning these sagely figures should become objects of emulation that guide one's self development. The term »immanent models« is appropriate to describe these sagely exemplars, because there is no dichotomy between sages and the common people, and even an ordinary person is disposed to become a sage. One of the distinctive topics in Yulgok's thought, and in Neo-Confucian literature in general, concerns how to articulate guidelines for attaining sagehood. Yulgok says: »Now, the original nature of sages and common people is alike. Realizing what is genuine and putting it into practice, and breaking through conventionalities, one is capable of returning to the initial nature. How can [the saying that] "common people may become Yo 堯 and Sun 舜" betray me?«<sup>53</sup>

According to the *Chagyǒngmun*, although one should aspire to become a sage, one's very intentions to subdue an agitated and disturbed heart-and-mind can be self-defeating. As the myriad things including the heart-and-mind consist of *ki* 氣,<sup>54</sup> sagehood is attained not by imposing one's intentions on the natural order, but by attuning oneself to one's surroundings and nourishing one's latent propensity. Yulgok writes that humans who are in tune with invigorating *ki* are able to exploit it to the utmost unless their own desires obstruct its growth.<sup>55</sup>

In Yulgok's Confucian project of »human becoming«, self-willed actions often do not produce desired consequences; rather, a single human being is an integrated part of the surrounding environment, and his or her efforts should arise spontaneously and naturally as reflections of potentialities in the larger

52 See YC2 25.57a–26.38b, 55–80. Tradition holds that Fúxī and Shénnóng are divine sovereigns and cultural heroes from the first centuries of the third millennium BCE. Huángdì is a legendary ruler who—according to tradition—has reigned in the 27th c. BCE. Tāng is the first ruler of Shāng dynasty, Wén is the founder of Zhōu dynasty (11c–256 BCE), Wǔ is the son of Wén and first ruler of Zhōu dynasty, and Zhōu Gōngdàn is the brother of King Wǔ of Zhōu.

53 “蓋衆人與聖人。其本性則一也。[...] 而苟能真知實踐。去其舊染。而復其性初。[...] 人皆可以爲堯舜。豈欺我哉。” YC2 27.3b–27.4a, 82. The saying he references reads: “曹交問曰。人皆可以爲堯舜。有諸。” MZ 6.2.2, 424.

54 *Ki* 氣 (Chinese *qi*) is the actualizing or concretizing manifestation of the metaphysical blueprint given by the ontological pattern or principle *li* 理 (Chinese *li*). In this context *ki* can be seen as the foundational matter or immanence of the heart-and-mind.

55 “天地氣化。生生不窮。無一息之停。人之氣。與天地相通。故良心真氣。亦與之俱長。惟其戕害多端。所長不能勝其所消。展轉枯亡。故心爲禽獸。氣至天札。可不懼哉。害良心者。耳目口鼻四肢之欲。而害真氣者。亦不出是欲焉。” YC1 21.19a–21.19b, 471.

whole. This is expressed in the *Sōngbak chibyō*: »The more one intends to detest futile thoughts, the more the heart-and-mind is agitated and disturbed. The intention to detest itself is a futile thought. Realizing the nature of futile thoughts, one can allow them to withdraw in a natural manner.«<sup>56</sup> Elsewhere, when asked by the young scholar Yi Kyōngjin [Sōngbo] 李景震〔誠甫〕 (1559–1594) how to deal with carnal desire, Yulgok exhibits a similar attitude. He suggests that one should let carnal desire withdraw on its own accord by virtue of self-cultivation rather than repress it.<sup>57</sup>

In the Confucian view of self-realization, a person's day-to-day affairs take on crucial importance, given that he or she is affected by many elements in the surrounding environment, including other people, various tasks, and other life events. Virtuous action such as reflection (*sa* 思), restraint when alone (*kūndok* 謹獨), and appropriate management of affairs (*ch'ōch'i hab'ui* 處置合宜) are not faculties possessed by a substantive self, but are strategies for optimizing the mutual responsiveness between selves and worlds in process. This relational aspect of virtuous action is evident in Yulgok's thought when he stresses the continuity between the internal and the external. While reverence (*kyōng* 敬) is connected to inner cultivation, and righteousness (*ūi* 義) refers to the proper execution of affairs, Yulgok deemed reverence and righteousness to be inseparable.<sup>58</sup>

The pragmatic orientation of Yulgok's thought is already evident in the *Chagyōngmun*. When reading a book, you should carry the acquired knowledge and judgments from it into practical everyday business—otherwise reading is completely in vain. Here Yulgok introduces the idea of sincerity as the transformative power to bring events to fruition. In the *Chagyōngmun* we already see one of the major characteristics of Yulgok's mature thought in which pragmatism, sincerity and efficacy are cherished. Yulgok repeatedly laments that even though there may be many ambitious discussions regarding how to govern

56 “有意厭惡。則尤見擾亂。且此厭惡之心。亦是浮念。覺得是浮念後。只可輕輕放退。” YC1 21.37a–21.37b, 480.

57 “李景震問。色慾之頻發難制。何以抑絕此念乎。栗谷曰。此也無別功夫。只是心有存主。讀書則專心窮理。應事則專心踐履。無事則靜中涵養。常使此心無忘時。則色念自不得發。雖發亦必省覺。省覺則自退矣。不然。放心忘忽。而欲與色念廝戰。雖極費力。如土壓草。愈壓愈生矣。” YC2 32.2b, 260.

58 “朱子曰。最下得夾持兩字好。敬主乎中。義防於外。二者相夾持。[...] 臣按。敬體義用。雖分內外。其實敬該夫義。直內之敬。敬以存心也。方外之義。敬以應事也。” YC1 21.32b–21.33a, 478.

the country properly, nothing is put into practice.<sup>59</sup> Yulgok pragmatically recommends institutional and political reform to keep up with changing situations. The flexibility for timely change is important—for people’s minds-and-hearts as well as for institutional structures—for once-relevant policies and principles too easily encourage a rigid adherence to convention, if they are not continually reassessed.

For Yulgok self-serving behavior, such as seeking pecuniary gain or promotion in rank, is directly contrasted with sincerity and efficacy and should therefore be critically examined and eventually eliminated. The late Yulgok elaborates this point in the light of his ontology, indicating that *tosim* 道心 should guide *insim* 人心 lest the human desire for self-benefit grow too powerful.

As is evident, the *Chagyŏngmun* is a seed, containing the kernel of Yulgok’s mature thought on self-cultivation, without the elaborate metaphysical scheme he later develops. This short treatise not only indicates his early departure from Buddhism and wholehearted dedication to Confucianism but provides a condensed introduction to the main themes of his later works.

59 See, for instance, YC1 15.15a, 320: “主人曰。終朝設食。不得一飽。空言無實。豈能濟事。今夫經席之上。章奏之閒。非無嘉謀讜論。足以治國。而未見一弊之革。一策之施者。只是不務實效故也。”

*List of Sources and Their Abbreviations*

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- LY *Lúnyǔ* 論語
- MZ *Mèngzǐ* 孟子
- SS *Shàngshū* 尚書
- ZY *Zhōngyōng* 中庸  
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