

The *I Ching* in Late-Chosŏn Thought

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The *I ching* (Book of changes) played an important role in the development of Korean thought and culture. This research examines the impact of the *I ching* on late-Chosŏn Confucianism. It attempts to deepen our understanding of late-Chosŏn Confucianism through a textual examination of its *I ching* scholarship, focusing on the Chu Hsi school in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the school of practical learning (*sirhak*) in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The characteristics of *I ching* scholarship in late-Chosŏn Korea are discussed from a comparative perspective.

The *I ching* (*Yŏkkyŏng*, Book of changes) was one of the most influential and popular Chinese classic in premodern East Asia. Korea was within the orbit of the Chinese cultural sphere and was indebted to the *I ching* for the development of its thought and culture. The Korean national flag, *t'aegukki*, consists of *t'ai chi* (Supreme Ultimate) and four trigrams, symbolizing the balance of *yin-yang*, heaven and earth, and sun and moon.¹ It serves as a reminder of the peculiar role of the *I ching* in Korean thought and culture. The *I ching* was imported to Korea no later than the fourth century and penetrated into different aspects of Korean life, including politics, economics, ethics, philosophy, art, science, and religion. It was studied at official academies and included in the civil service examinations. Sung commentaries on the *I ching* came to Korea during the twelfth century and soon replaced Han commentaries as the main reference. Following the adoption of the Chu Hsi school as the official learning, Korean Confucianism reached its apex in the Chosŏn period (1392–1910). Despite the importance of the *I ching* in Korean thought and cul-

ture, very few studies have been done. This article attempts to deepen our understanding of late-Chosŏn Confucianism through a textual examination of its *I ching* scholarship, focusing on the Chu Hsi school in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the school of practical learning (*sirhak*) in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The *I Ching* in the Chu Hsi School

In the fifteenth century, Korean scholars primarily concerned themselves with statecraft and the practical applications of Confucianism. Their *I ching* scholarship also reflected this character. For instance, King Sejong (1418–1450) applied the principles of the *I ching* to elucidate his great innovation, *hangŭl* (great letters), the Korean writing system. In the *Hunmin chŏngŭm* (An instruction of standard pronunciation for the people, 1446), he used the hexagrams to explain the phonetic characteristics of each alphabetical symbol. Serious scholarship of the *I ching* did not appear until the sixteenth century, “the golden age of Korean Neo-Confucian philosophy.”² Scholars of great caliber used the *I ching* and other Confucian texts to develop sophisticated philosophical theories on the relationship between principle (*i*) and material/vital force (*ki*) and between the four beginnings (*sadan*) and the seven feelings (*ch’ilchŏng*), among other metaphysical issues. We will examine different lineages within the Chu Hsi school of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, highlighting how they interpreted the *I ching* in the principle and material force debates.

As regards the priority of principle and material force, Chosŏn Confucians were divided into two schools: the school of principle and the school of force. In their debates, scholars from these two schools frequently cited the *I ching* to support their arguments.

Based on his reading of the *I ching* and *Chung yung* (Doctrine of the mean), Sŏ Kyŏngdŏk (Hwadam, 1489–1546) emphasized the priority of material force over principle. He treated *yin* and *yang* as omnipresent material forces that support the principle and denied the existence of a transcendental principle. In his definition, *t’ai chi* is only the principle of creation of the material forces. He wrote:

The *I ching* demonstrates the changes of *yin* and *yang*. *Yin* and *yang* are two material forces. The mixing of one *yin* and one *yang* marked the beginning of the universe. The two are the forces of creation; together they form a wonderful principle. There is no principles beyond creation. How could the two material forces give birth to everything in the universe? This is the wonder of *t’ai chi*. If someone talks about the wonder of *t’ai chi* without referring its role in the creation, they do not really understand the *I ching*.³

Like most Chosŏn scholars, his *I ching* scholarship belonged to the school of symbols and numbers.⁴ He examined some *I ching* charts and elabo-

rated the numerological and divinational theories along the line suggested by (Sung) Shao Yung (1033–1077) in the *Yuksipsa kwae pangwon chi tohae* (An illustrative explanation of the images of the sixty-four hexagrams) and the *Kwae pyŏn hae* (An explanation of the theory of changing lines in a hexagram). Yi Sik rated Kyŏngdŏk's scholarship highly:

Our nation did not have *I ching* studies [until Hwadam]. Our Confucians in the past failed to enlighten the people about the crucial points of the *I ching*. Their discussions were merely on the trivial things of the text. Only Hwadam succeeds Shao Yung and has grasped the essence [of the *I ching*]. What a man of unparalleled talents he is! His interpretations of the *I ching* have broken new ground in Korean scholarship.⁵

Yi T'oegye (Hwang, 1501–1570), perhaps the most important Confucian in Korean history, was a serious student of the *I Ching*. The *T'oegye sŏnsaeng yŏnbo* (The annals of Master Yi T'oegye) describes how hard T'oegye studied the text: "When the master turned twenty, he read the *I ching* and investigated its meanings. He was so immersed that he forgot to sleep and eat. As a result, he caught an illness and became fragile and tired."⁶ In his last years, he focused his study and teaching on Chu Hsi's (1130–1200) *I-hsüeh ch'i-meng* (Instructions to the young on the learning of the *I ching*).⁷ At the age of fifty-six, he wrote one of the most important commentaries in the East Asian tradition, *Chuyŏk kye-mong chŏnŭi* (A critical review of the *I-hsüeh ch'i-meng*, 1557), to systematize the philosophical framework of Sung learning. Arguing that the true learning of Chu Hsi stressed the priority of principle over material force, he criticized many of the commentaries on Chu Hsi's *I-hsüeh ch'i-meng* for deviating from this premise.⁸ Like Kyŏngdŏk, T'oegye studied the symbols and numbers of the *I ching*. However, his examination of the *Lo-shu* (Writings from the River Lo), *Ho-t'u* (Yellow River map), *T'ai-chi t'u* (Chart of *t'ai chi*), and divination led him to the opposite conclusion. He attacked Kyŏngdŏk for misreading the *I ching* and for improperly inverting the relationship between principle and material force. He stated: "I would suggest that Confucius [in the *Book of Changes*] and Chou Tun-i (1017–1073) clearly say that *yin* and *yang* are given rise to by the Supreme Ultimate. If one says that principle and material force are fundamentally one thing, then the Supreme Ultimate is the same as the two forms, in which case how could it give rise to them?"⁹ Condemning the school of force, which regards everything as material force, T'oegye maintained that things like gods and the spirit are principles, and not material forces. He was also critical of two Ming commentaries: Ts'ai Ch'ing's *I-ching meng-yin* (An introduction to the *I-hsüeh ch'i-meng*) and Hu I-kui's *I-t'u* (Charts of the *I ching*).¹⁰

The *Chuyōk kyemong chōnūi* was reprinted in 1657 and 1669 in Japan and exerted considerable influence on Tokugawa scholarship.¹¹ Muro Kyūsō (1658–1734) praised this work as a faithful transmission of Chu Hsi's scholarship of the *I ching*. T'oege's idea of separating Chu Hsi's *Chou-i pen-i* (The original meanings of the *I ching*) from Ch'eng I's (1033–1107) *I chuan* (A commentary on the *I ching*) influenced Yamazaki Ansai (1618–1682) to restore the original Chu Hsi commentary.

Aside from metaphysical discussions, T'oege also stressed the political implications of the *I ching*. For instance, he lectured to the emperor on the hexagram *ch'ien* (creation):

It has the image [showing] that “an arrogant dragon will have cause to repent.” [It refers to] an emperor who is satisfied with his supreme position and distances himself from gentlemen. He uses his own wisdom to govern and does not consult his retainers. This situation matches the image and will produce disasters. The emperor should modestly consult and be compatible with his retainers who have the same morality. By doing this, the misfortune of the arrogant dragon can be avoided.¹²

Some Chosōn scholars adopted an eclectic stance between the school of principle and the school of force. Yi Yulgok (I, 1536–1584), influenced by both Yi T'oege and Sō Kyōngdōk, attempted to narrow the differences between these two schools. Like his mentor T'oege, Yulgok attacked Kyōngdōk for misreading the *I ching* as stressing the priority of material force over principle. He also pointed out, however, that T'oege was wrong to uphold the priority of the transcendental principle. He said: “When the sages investigated the ultimate truth, they only regarded *t'ai chi* as the origin of *yin-yang*. Indeed, the state of lone *t'ai chi* before the birth of *yin-yang* has never existed.”¹³ Yulgok's discussions of the principle were less speculative and abstract than T'oege's. For instance, he considered the environment a crucial factor for the principle to actualize or express itself. In other words, the principle in Yulgok's philosophy was circumstantial and empirical. He used the famous story in the *Meng Tzu* (The sayings of Mencius) to explicate his philosophy of the principle:

The *I ching* reads: “Silence and motionless. A touch and getting through.” Even the heart of the Sages shall not be moved without reason, and must be moved by external stimulation. . . . Seeing a child falling into the well will bring [the thought of benevolence] to our hearts. The stimulant is the child. Isn't the child an external thing? Can anyone stimulate the thought of benevolence inwardly without seeing the child falling into the well?¹⁴

Yulgok expressed his views on the *I ching* in the *Yōksoch'aeng* (The numerology of the *I ching*), stressing that the principle-force relationship is a principal theme of the *I ching*. He remarked: “The formation of a

monistic principle and the circulation of the two material forces can explain the change of everything in this whole wide world. Everything is subject to the wonderful application of principle and material force. We can only discuss the *I ching* with people who understand this idea."¹⁵ He criticized scholars from Han to T'ang times who "only limited themselves to the *I ching* and failed to look for the principle from it. They only knew what had happened, but did not understand why it happened. As a result, they missed the essence of the *I ching*."¹⁶ He praised Shao Yung, Chu His, and other Sung scholars for restoring the real meaning of the *I ching* by studying its numbers and symbols. By defining principle as merely a natural or physical principle, Yulgok questioned the existence of a transcendental principle that was around before the beginning of the universe. He said: "Metaphysics is the principle of nature; physics is the material force of nature. Material force exists as long as there is a principle. A thousand things exist as long as there is a material force."¹⁷ He believed that principle and material force are interrelated and they have no beginning or end.

Like T'oegye, Yulgok also stressed the practical uses of the *I ching*. In his advocacy of political, social, and military reforms, he frequently cited this famous sentence from the *I Ching*: "When things come to a standstill, they need changes. Changes will bring the solution." In his famous *Memorial in Ten Thousand Words* (1574) to King Sŏnjo (1567–1608), he quoted Ch'eng I's *I chuan* to urge for timely reforms:

Master Ch'eng, when discussing the *Book of Changes*, said: "To know time and to recognize the timely circumstances are the great method of learning the *Book of Changes*." He also said: "Changes according to time is the constant rule." In general, laws are established according to a particular time; as times change, the laws do not remain the same.¹⁸

Chang Hyŏngwang (Yŏhŏn, 1554–1637), a specialist of the *I ching*, constructed a theory of metaphysics similar to that of Yulgok in his two works on the *I ching*: *Yŏkhak tosŏl* (An illustrative explanation of *I ching* charts, 1609) and *Yŏkkwae ch'ongsŏl* (A complete explanation of the hexagrams of the *I ching*, 1621). He narrowed the gap between the school of principle and the school of force by suggesting the theory of *i-gi kyong-wi* (interrelationship between principle and material force). It means principle and material force are two aspects of the same truth; they are inseparable and omnipresent. He explained the main idea of his *Yŏkhak tosŏl*: "The sages of the past seldom addressed the issue of principle and material force. They did not mention the separation of principle and material force. Although they are classified as two terms, principle and material force are one."¹⁹ According to Hyŏngwang, the differences between things cannot be explained in terms of the principle-force dualism but

exist only in terms of the quantity and purity of material forces. Applying this idea, he even denied that there is a qualitative difference between the sages and the ordinary people:

The circulation of *ch'i* is not even. Thus, in the numerology of the *Ho-t'u* and *Lo-shu*, only number one has no pairs, and all numbers from two are made impure through their interactions with others. [Likewise], in the eight trigrams, only *ch'ien* is pure *yang*, and all trigrams from *tui* have *yin*. This explains why the sages are few and the ordinary people are plentiful. However, we should know that the sages and the ordinary people share the same principle and material force.²⁰

Hyōngwang's lectures for the emperor on the political ethics of the *I ching* became the *Simyukhwe paechin* (An explanation of the sixteen hexagrams), a text which elucidates the principle of change through an examination of the sixteen hexagrams. He remarked: "The reasons for reform can be found in the sixteen hexagrams. . . . The methods of reform can also be grasped by investigating the sixteen hexagrams. . . . Your Majesty, if you can test the principles written in the main text on the trigrams and lines [of the *I ching*] in your daily decision-making, you will come to understand them."²¹

During the seventeenth century, the intellectual atmosphere was filled with a spirit of fanatic orthodoxy. In *I ching* scholarship, this was an anticlimactic period, especially after the creative and vigorous scholarship of the sixteenth century. Scholars blindly followed Chu Hsi's interpretations, and few dared to express their own opinions. Song Siyōl (1607–1689) was one such scholar. Boasting that he was the inheritor of Confucian orthodoxy, he spent most of his life annotating Chu Hsi's writings. He preferred the *Chou-i peng-i* to the *I chuan*:

The *I ching* is indeed a book of divination. Ch'eng I's *I chuan* only discusses its textual meanings and has no passion for the *I ching*. Chu Hsi wrote the *Chou-i pen-i* and focused on divination. For example, the first line of the hexagram *ch'ien* is the image of "Hidden dragon. Do not act". If you obtain this image of hidden dragon, you should not act. By doing this, you not only feel the passion, but also acquire actual benefits. Although Chu Hsi respected Ch'eng I very much, in many places he did not adopt the ideas of the *I chuan*. If students of later generations know this, they will know the difference in importance between these two texts.²²

Siyōl was obsessed with orthodoxy to the extent that he imitated Chu Hsi in every detail. For example, Siyōl asked his friend Min Chōngjung (1628–1692) to consult the *I ching* on the propriety of submitting a memorial to the emperor. The result was the hexagram *chien* (obstruction). Following Chu Hsi's precedent, he burned his draft to ashes.²³ In this suffocating intellectual climate, any slight deviation from the official defi-

nition of Chu Hsi's philosophy could lead to accusations of heterodoxy.²⁴ No wonder the seventeenth century did not produce significant *I ching* scholars.

In brief, *I ching* scholarship of the Chu Hsi school in Chosŏn Korea had several features. It favored metaphysical discussions and studied the symbols and numbers of the *I ching*. The *I ching* was not an area of intellectual focus and its scholarship was imbued with the spirit of orthodoxy. As a result, with the exception of Yi T'oegye, Chu Hsi scholars lacked originality and failed to produce important commentaries.

The *I Ching* in the School of Practical Learning

In terms of intellectual vitality and influence, it is no exaggeration to call the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the era of the Chu Hsi school and the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the era of the school of practical learning. *Sirhak* scholarship is characterized by its practicality and rationality. Its scholars were enthusiastic about the *I ching* and broke new ground in interpretation, application, and textual criticism. Unlike Chu Hsi scholars, they were less interested in metaphysical discussions. They used sophisticated research methods to study the *I ching* and applied their *I ching* scholarship to enrich the cultural and material life of late-Chosŏn Koreans.

The change of intellectual climate can be seen in Kim Sŏkmun (1658–1735), an astronomer who attempted to use the symbols and numbers of the *I ching* to explain Western scientific ideas.²⁵ In his *Yŏkhak tohae* (An explanation of *I ching* diagrams, 1697), he argued that all natural phenomena can be represented by the symbols and numbers of the *I ching*. His most original idea was to put *I ching* charts and Western science together, for he believed that they could explain each other. For example, he used his favorite Sung commentary, Chou Tun-i's *T'ai-chi t'u-shuo* (An explanation of the *t'ai chi* chart) to explain the Western theories of the rotation of the earth and the Ptolemaic global theory.²⁶

Yi Sŏngho (Ik, 1681–1763) is commonly remembered as the founding father of *sirhak*. As a great scholar of the *I ching*, he wrote three books on its numbers and symbols: *Sikkwae ko* (A historical investigation of the divination of the *I ching*), *Kyemong ikjŏn* (A commentary on the *I-hsüeh ch'i-meng*), and *Huch'ŏn tosŏl* (An illustration of the *hou-t'ien* chart). The first two books discuss two Chu Hsi's commentaries: *I-hsüeh ch'i-meng* and *I-kua k'ao-wu* (A critical investigation of *I ching* divination), whereas the third book explains a famous chart. He studied the *I ching* from a philological and historical perspective and used it to advocate reforms and Western scientific ideas.

Sŏngho's philological and historical studies produced some very

thought-provoking ideas. For instance, he traced the origins of the term *shih-i* (“Ten Wings” or the ten oldest commentaries) to the *K’un tsaio t’u*, an early Han apocrypha, arguing that the order and content of the Ten Wings had been changed several times.²⁷ Moreover, he accepted the view that the famous phrase in the *Hsiang chuan* (Commentary on the images), *t’ien hsing ch’ien* (literally, “the movement of heaven is full of power”) is in fact *t’ien hsing ch’ien* (“The sky is moving from above at the position of *ch’ien*”).²⁸ Elsewhere, he identified 130 mistakes in (T’ang) Kuo Ching’s *Chou-i chü-cheng* (A rectification of the *Chou-i*).²⁹

Sōngho emphasized the political implications of the *I ching*, believing that “the Way of the *I ching*, in general, is the way of administration and of governance of the people.”³⁰ He treated the *I ching* as a political manual that could help the emperor keep his throne, the government implement a sound fiscal policy, and the nation maintain peace and prosperity. He even speculated that a portion of the *Ta hsüeh* (Great learning) was derived from the *I ching*:

The sages wrote the *I ching* to discuss the fundamental way to govern the nation. It reads: “The great virtue of heaven and earth is life. The big treasure of the sages is position. The key to keep the position is benevolence. The method to attract people is financial administration. Righteousness means managing finances properly, having the right language, and forbidding the people from making mistakes.” Tsang Tzu understood this idea and developed it in the *Ta hsüeh*. In chapter ten, . . . every sentence and paragraph is derived from the text of the *I ching*. Readers will benefit by comparing these two books carefully.³¹

The *I ching* also became a tool for spreading rational and scientific ideas. In contrast to the common practice of using the *I ching* to argue for the existence of gods and ghosts, Sōngho reinterpreted the *I ching* to deny the indestructibility of the soul:

People get old and die, and their living energy disappears. This is the meaning of “the change of the moving soul” in the *I ching*. This so-called change means the change from life to death. The living energy of the dead is still in the universe. It is like a stove in the house. Even though the fire is extinguished, the heat is still in the house. It will die out gradually. When its density is high, the cooling process will be slow. When its density is not high, it will fade quickly. There is no way that it will last forever.³²

Moreover, he cited the phrase *t’ien hsing ch’ien* from the hexagram *ch’ien* to prove that Western ideas like the Ptolemaic global theory and the rotation of the earth had already existed in ancient China.

Sōngho’s scholarship on the *I ching* was passed on to his son, Yi Pyōnghyu, who wrote the *Yōkkyōng chisō* (A quick explanation of the *I ching*). Sōngho’s two disciples, Yun Tonggyu (1695–1773) and Chin Hui (1702–1761) represented a turning point in *I ching* studies in late-Chosōn

Korea. Unlike their predecessors in the Chu Hsi school or the school of practical learning, they shifted their attention from numbers and symbols to the text. Yun Tonggyu did a textual study of the *Hsi Tz'u* (Commentary on appended judgments) in the *Yŏkkye kaesŏl* (An explanation of the *Hsi Tz'u*). Influenced by (Sung) Ou Yang-hsiu's (1007–1072) *I t'ung-tzu wen* (Questions about the *I ching* from a child), he was critical of the school of symbols and numbers. In particular, he attacked the adulterating presence of *yin-yang* thought in Han scholarship and Taoism in Sung scholarship.³³ Chin Hui wrote two books to explain the textual meaning of the *I ching*: *Sangsa sipŏn* (A new arrangement of the great image commentary) and *Yŏk tongŭi* (The general meaning of the *I ching*).

The new approach of using textual analysis gained currency among Chosŏn scholars after Chŏng Yagyong (Tasan, 1762–1836). Yagyong was the greatest *I ching* scholar in *sirhak* and perhaps in late-Chosŏn Korea. He made a breakthrough in methodology and thought. His methodology was similar to that of Ch'ing *k'ao-cheng* (Chinese philological tradition of evidential research) and Tokugawa *kogaku* (ancient learning) scholars. The first method he employed was philology. He said: "In order to grasp the meaning of Confucian classics, we have to know the meaning of their words first. This principle is applicable to [the study of] all classics, in particular the *I ching*."³⁴ The second method was phonetics. He wrote: "The phonetic rule of the words in the *I ching* is the strictest and most precise. Its patterns are rich and versatile, and thus are most difficult to find. . . . If you are good at investigating its rhymes, you will make no mistakes in rhymed sentences. If you make no mistakes in rhymed sentences, you can understand the meaning of the classics."³⁵ In order to improve one's ability to understand the words and sounds of the *I ching*, Yagyong recommended the study of the *Shih ching* (Book of songs), maintaining that "If we do not study the *Shih ching*, there is no way for us to read the *I ching*."³⁶ Using philological and phonetic methods, Yagyong developed some stimulating ideas about the *I ching* in his three important works: *Chuyŏk sajŏn* (Four chapters on the *Chou-i*, 1808), *Yŏkhak sŏŏ* (Miscellaneous discussions of the *I ching*, 1820), and *Chuyŏk ch'ongnon* (A general discussion of the *I ching*).

Yagyong stressed two facets of the *I ching*: First, he regarded it as a book of moral guidance that helped people correct mistakes and live a perfect life. He wrote: "Confucius said: 'Give me a few more years so that I can study the *I ching*, then perhaps I will make no major mistakes.' This statement is very true. Repentance is [needed] to correct one's mistakes; Stubbornness means not correcting mistakes. [To] repent and [not to be] stubborn is the major teaching of *I ching* masters."³⁷ His emphasis on sin, repentance, and rebirth may have been influenced by Christianity. For

instance, the following moral lecture on the *I ching* has a strong Christian flavor:

The teaching of Ch'eng I is intended to help people empty their minds. It is like the repentance of a sin. In order to forget, people cry over their mistakes. They never forget their repentance, and thus never repeat their mistakes. Their hearts become pure. What else can be better? The *I ching* focuses on repentance and stubbornness. Repentance means correcting one's mistakes; stubbornness means not rectifying them. Repentance will lead to good results, and stubbornness to bad consequences.³⁸

Second, he believed that it is a book of natural principles. He saw the *I ching* not only as a divinational and metaphysical text but also as a book of science. He argued: "Generally speaking, in the universe, the change of day and night, the shift of the four seasons, the growth and death of plants, and the movement and reproduction of animals and insects are all natural phenomena based on the principle of change of the *I ching*."³⁹ His philosophy only recognized the existence of material force and physical principle and denied the existence of a metaphysical principle. He used the *wu-hsing* theory to explicate the Aristotelian theory of the four elements, but rejected any metaphysical interpretation of the theory of *yin-yang wu-hsing*.⁴⁰ He said: "The term *yin-yang* is named to describe the sun-receiving surface and shade of the sunlight. The shade is *yin*, and the sun-receiving surface is *yang*. They do not refer to substance, but brightness. Hence, they should not be regarded as the origins of things. . . . *Wu-hsing* are only five of ten thousand substances."⁴¹

Yagyong attempted to achieve a balance between the school of textual meaning and the school of symbols and numbers in his scholarship. Although his main interest was in the use of textual analysis, he did not completely deny the value of interpretations that focused on symbols, numbers and divination.⁴² He pointed out that King Wen, the Duke of Chou, and Confucius seldom referred to symbols, numbers, and divination and insisted that these elements should not be discussed without referring to the text.

His textual study of a large number of Chinese commentaries on the *I ching* provided him with a comprehensive and insightful overview of Chinese scholarship. His views on the Ten Wings were influenced by Ou Yang-hsiu's *I t'ung-tsu-wen*. Yagyong only admitted that four of the Ten Wings—*T'uan chuan* (the first and second wings) and *Hsiang chuan* (the third and fourth wings)—were the works of Confucius.⁴³ As for the rest of the Ten Wings, he liked the ethical value of the *Hsi tz'u* (the fifth and sixth wings). The *Wen yen* (the seventh wing), he alleged, was a work written before Confucius, because people before Confucius and Confucius himself had cited it. He praised the *Shuo kua* (the eighth wing): "Ex-

plaining the *I ching* without referring to the *Shuo kua* is like studying music without using the six tones."⁴⁴ He did not rate the *Hsü kua* (the ninth wing) and *Tsa kua* (the tenth wing) highly.

Yagyong was very critical of Han scholarship for containing many incorrect theories. He blamed Cheng Hsüan (127–200) for spreading ideas that misled later generations: "Only the theories [concerning the numbers of the universe] by Cheng Hsüan, in addition to being the most ridiculous of all schools of thought, were solely adopted by later generations. . . . People who engage in geomancy, facial reading, fortune-telling, and the choice of auspicious days all base their practices on Cheng's ideas. Scholars of science and medicine all take his ideas for granted. What a shame!"⁴⁵ He also speculated that Cheng Hsüan himself was the author of the *I ch'ien tsao tu*, a Han apocrypha that Cheng annotated.⁴⁶

His criticisms of Six Dynasties scholarship were equally strong. According to Yagyong, (Wei) Wang Pi's commentary was the worst ever: "Wang's *I ching* commentary not only lacks the images of the hexagrams, but its words and sentences have no textual relationship [to previous texts] to trace. . . . From the beginning of the commentary [on the *I ching*], there has been no other work as ridiculous as his."⁴⁷ Wang disciple, Han Kang-po, was no better in Yagyong's view because his commentary "did not have any new ideas, and its purpose was to use the *I ching* to accommodate the teachings of Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu."⁴⁸

In general, Yagyong did not like T'ang scholarship either, which he criticized as trivial and dry. For instance, he criticized Kuo Ching's *Chou-i chü-cheng*: "The *I ching* did not go through the burning of books in the Ch'in dynasty, and therefore it should have no problems of pagination or misuse of words. T'ang people liked to change the texts of the classics. . . . Kuo Ching's alteration of the *I ching* is an example."⁴⁹

Sung scholarship drew his particular attention. His favorite commentaries were Chu Hsi's *Chou-i pen-i* and *Hua pien t'u*, which he believed had settled the controversy over the theory of changing trigrams and restored the original divinational method. He did not rate Ch'eng I's *I chuan* highly because it was influenced by Wang Pi's commentary. Shao Yung's study of symbols and numbers sounded too strange to him.

Yagyong did not regard post-Sung scholarship highly and seldom referred to it. When he mentioned post-Sung writings, his comments were mostly negative. For example, he pinpointed numerous mistakes in (Ming) Lai Chih-te's *I-ching chi-chu* (Collected commentaries on the *I ching*). His criticism of (Ch'ing) Li Kwang-ti's (1642–1718) *Chou-i che-chung* (A synthesis of *I ching* interpretations, 1715) was very harsh. He said: "Li thought he was faithful to Chu Hsi. He did not believe in the theory of changing trigrams. Hence, he actually betrayed Chu Hsi's teachings. He

thought he had included scholarship from the past to the present, but he excluded everything concerning the changing trigrams and symbols. He only used empty words and trivial theories to explain the meaning [of the *I ching*].⁵⁰

Yagyong's critical overview of Chinese scholarship more or less reflects the nationalist attitude prevalent among Chosŏn Confucians that legitimate Confucianism could no longer be found in China but was preserved in Korea. Another form of cultural pride was expressed in Chi Tzu (Kija) worship. Korean Confucians worshipped Chi Tzu, a Shang prince, as a patriarch of ancient Koreans along with Tan'gun, the legendary ancestor of the Korean race.⁵¹ Yagyong frequently discussed the hexagram *Ming i* (Darkening of the Light) in which Chi Tzu had a special position. He cited the *T'uan chuan* to praise the virtue of Chi Tzu: "In adversity it furthers one to be persevering: this means veiling one's light. Surrounded by difficulties in the midst of his closest kin, nonetheless keeping his will fixed on the right—thus was Prince Chi."⁵² His explanations of this hexagram focused on Chi Tzu, believing that Chi Tzu had transmitted the Way of the Sages to Korea so that it would not matter what happened in China. He said: "Chi Tzu embraced the Way of the Early Kings. As he failed to shine in China, he went eastward to Korea and spread the Way to this alien nation. As long as the Way did not die out, his will could not be forgotten. This was the thoughtful intention of the sage [Chi Tzu]."⁵³ He even alleged that a portion of the main text of the *I ching*, including the *Ming i* hexagram, might have been written by Chi Tzu.⁵⁴

In summary, *sirhak* scholarship of the *I ching* is characterized by its sophisticated research methods, rational and critical thinking, use of Western ideas, practical uses and stress on national identity. *I ching* scholarship reached its apex in Yagyong. *Sirhak* scholars after Yagyong were influenced by his ideas and methodology. They included his brother Chŏng Yakchŏn (1758–1816) and student Yŏn Kyŏngjai (1760–1839).

The Chu Hsi school produced a larger number of scholars and writings on the *I ching* during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but few could match the quality of their predecessors. For instance, even the most famous late-Chosŏn Chu Hsi scholar, Yi Hangno (1791–1868) developed few original ideas, and his *Chuyŏk haeüi* (An explanation of the *I ching*, 1856) followed Chu Hsi's and Yi T'oebye's views closely.

The *I ching* provided clues to the Koreans on how to go about solving practical problems in late-Chosŏn Korea. For example, Yi Wŏngwi (1750–1820), an *I ching* scholar, used it to justify commercial and industrial activities. Kim Hang (1826–1898) suggested political and social reforms based on his reading of the *I ching*.⁵⁵ Sin Ch'aeho (1880–1936), a renowned historian, promoted patriotism and anti-imperialism using ideas

he had acquired through his historical survey of the *I ching* in ancient Korea.⁵⁶

Characteristics of *I Ching* Scholarship

From a comparative perspective, *I ching* scholarship in late-Chosŏn Korea had the following characteristics:⁵⁷

First, the *I ching* was not the focus of scholarly and political attention. While *I ching* scholarship reached its apex in Ch'ing China and Tokugawa Japan, the *I ching* was not among the most popular and influential Confucian classics in Chosŏn. Chu Hsi scholars were more interested in the Four Books and the *Li chi* (Book of rites).⁵⁸ Although the school of practical learning put emphasis on the *I ching*, it was merely an undercurrent in the entire late-Chosŏn Confucian scholarship. Chosŏn scholars, in general, produced few fine commentaries on the *I ching*. With perhaps the exceptions of Yi T'oegye and Chŏng Yagyong, they lacked originality and influence in *I ching* scholarship.

Second, this scholarship had a strong preference for Sung commentaries. Although the governments in Chosŏn Korea, Ch'ing China, and Tokugawa Japan favored Sung commentaries, the attitudes of their intellectuals were different. Ch'ing *kao-cheng* and Tokugawa *kogaku* scholars favored Han commentaries. In Chosŏn Korea, both the Chu Hsi school and the school of practical learning adopted Sung commentaries as the major reference. The majority of Chosŏn writings on the *I ching* were interpretations of Chu Hsi's, Ch'eng I's, and Chou Tun-i's commentaries. In particular, Chu Hsi's teachings became orthodox, and few dared to challenge them. The high-handed intellectual policy of the Chosŏn regime was the main reason for the hegemony of the Chu Hsi school.

Third, Korean scholarship was strong in the study of numbers and symbols. Unlike Ch'ing China and Tokugawa Japan, where the major approach to *I ching* scholarship was textual analysis, the school of symbols and numbers was the mainstream in Chosŏn Korea. Hence, the works of Chu Hsi and Chou Tun-i were rated much higher than Ch'eng I's *I chuan*. Moreover, Chosŏn scholars were more tolerant of Taoist *I ching* charts and *yin-yang* numerology than Wang Pi's textual studies.

Fourth, *I ching* scholarship in Chosŏn Korea was philosophical, whereas it was textual and historical in Ch'ing China and was eclectic and practical in Tokugawa Japan. Unlike Ch'ing and Tokugawa Confucians, Chosŏn Confucians were fond of abstract thinking and further developed Neo-Confucian metaphysical issues in their interpretations of the *I ching*.

I believe the uncompromising spirit, strong faith in orthodoxy, interest in metaphysical and mathematical ideas, deep ethical and political concern, and lack of originality found in *I ching* scholarship, to a certain

extent, also characterize some distinctive features of Confucian studies in late-Chosŏn Korea.

NOTES

1. The national flag was designed by the diplomat, Park Yŏnghyo in 1882. For its symbol meanings, see Kim Ick-dal, *Korea: Its People and Culture* (Seoul: Kakwonsa, 1970), 34–5.

2. Wm. Theodore de Bary, ed., *The Rise of Neo-Confucianism in Korea* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 43.

3. *Hwadamjip*, chapter 4, in Pae Chongho, ed., *Han'guk yuhak charyo chipsŏng* (Seoul: Yonsei Taehak, 1980), 1: 78.

4. According to Chinese traditions, *I ching* studies can be divided into two major categories: the school of textual meaning (*i-li*) and the school of symbols and numbers (*hsiang-su*). The former studies the text, whereas the latter, its symbols and numbers.

5. *Hwadamjip*, chapter 3, in *Han'guk munjip ch'onggan* (Seoul: Minjok Munhwa Ch'ujinhoe, 1991), 24: 332.

6. *T'oegye chŏnsŏ* (Seoul: Sŏnggyun'gwan Taehakkyo, 1958), 2: 576.

7. Yun Sasoon, *Critical Issues in Neo-Confucian Thought: The Philosophy of Yi T'oegye*, trans. Michael Kalton (Seoul: Korea University Press, 1990), 9.

8. In his early years, T'oegye adopted a view that neither principle nor material force is superior and prior. T'oegye later further developed Chu Hsi's ideas and defined clearly the relationship that principle is prior to material force. See Tomoeda Ryūtarō, "Yi T'oegye and Chu Hsi: Differences in Their Theories of Principle and Material Force," in *The Rise of Neo-Confucianism in Korea*, ed. Wm. Theodore de Bary (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 243–58. I think Chu Hsi's view of the relationship between principle and material force seems to be more subtle and complicated than T'oegye's understanding.

9. *T'oegye chŏnsŏ*, quoted in Yun, *Critical Issues*, 50.

10. Some point out that T'oegye's ideas may have been influenced by (Yüan) Han Pang-chi's *Ch'i-meng i-ken* (My views on the *I-hsüeh ch'i-meng*). See Pak Chonghong, *Han'guk sasangsa nongo* (Seoul: Sŏmundang, 1977), 51. I think this is debatable. T'oegye criticized Han's book severely in his writings. See *Chuyŏk kyemong chŏnūi*, in *T'oegye chŏnsŏ*, 2: 209–10.

11. See Abe Toshio, *Nihon no shushigaku to Chŏsen* (Tokyo: Tōkyō Daigaku Shuppankai, 1965), 311, 439.

12. Quoted in Pak, *Han'guk sasangsa nongo*, 591.

13. *Yulgok chŏnsŏ*, chapter 9, in *Han'guk munjip ch'onggan* (Seoul: Minjok Munhwa Ch'ujinhoe, 1991), 44: 186.

14. *Yulgok chŏnsŏ*, chapter 35, in *Han'guk munjip ch'onggan*, 45: 365.

15. *Yulgok chŏnsŏ*, chapter 14, in *Han'guk munjip ch'onggan*, 44: 306.

16. *Yulgok chŏnsŏ*, chapter 14, in *Han'guk munjip ch'onggan*, 44: 308.

17. *Yulgok chŏnsŏ*, chapter 14, in *Han'guk munjip ch'onggan*, 44: 306.

18. *Yulgok chŏnsŏ*, chapter 14, in *Han'guk munjip ch'onggan*, 44: 98. The translation is from Peter H. Lee, ed., *Sourcebook of Korean Civilization* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 1: 511. Because of his reformist and practical ideas, he is regarded as the founder of *sirhak* by modern scholars. He also used the concepts of the *I ching* to discuss the philosophy of art; see Kim

Eunghyun, "Yulgok's View of Art," in *Papers on the Third International Conference*, ed. Lew Seungkook (Seoul: Academy of Korean Studies, 1984), 584–96.

19. In *Han'guk munjip ch'onggan*, 60: 442.

20. *Yŏhŏnjip*, chapter 10, in *Han'guk yuhak charyo jipsŏng*, 1: 450.

21. In *Han'guk munjip ch'onggan*, 60: 68.

22. *Songja taejŏn*, chapter 54, in *Han'guk ūi sasang taejŏnjip* (Seoul: Tonga Ch'ulp'ansa, 1977), 21: 459.

23. Chu Hsi once burned a draft of an impeachment memorial when he acquired the hexagram *tun* (retreat). See Miura Kunio, "Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy in Seventeenth-Century Korea: Song Siyŏl and Yun Hyu," in *The Rise of Neo-Confucianism in Korea*, ed. Wm. Theodore de Bary (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 441.

24. For example, Siyŏl's archrival Yun Hyu (1617–1680), who expressed different political and metaphysical views in the *Chuyŏk sichŏn sangso hongbom sŏl* (An explanation of the *I ching*, *Shih ching*, and *Shu ching*), among other works, was killed by the political faction of Siyŏl. Hyu was a characteristic scholar who advocated the monism of *ch'i* and the use of Han commentaries.

25. Scholars usually do not group Kim with *sirhak*, but his scholarship was closer to *sirhak* than to the Chu Hsi school. He was a transitional figure illustrating the shift from the Chu Hsi school to *sirhak*.

26. He was among the earliest Koreans to advocate Western astronomical knowledge. See Yi Nobŏm, *Han'guk kwahak sasangsa yŏn'gu* (Seoul: Tonguk Taehakkyo Ch'ulp'anpu, 1993), 274. Ptolemaic astronomy suggests that the earth is a sphere located at the center of the universe, with the sun, the moon, and stars revolving around it. The Japanese used the *yin-yang wu-hsing* (the two primal forces and the five basic agents) principle to explain the Ptolemaic system about half a century earlier. See Wai-ming Ng, "The *I Ching* and the Adaptation of Western Science in Tokugawa Japan," *Chinese Science*, No. 15 (1998): 94–117.

27. *Sŏngho saesŏl* (Seoul: Kyeonghŭi Ch'ulpansa, 1967), 2: 397–98, 409.

28. *Sŏngho saesŏl*, 2: 1, 289. This view had been suggested by some Chinese scholars before Sŏngho.

29. *Sŏngho saesŏl*, 2: 2–3.

30. *Sŏngho saesŏl*, 2: 329.

31. *Sŏngho saesŏl*, 2: 371.

32. Quoted in Kim Ch'ang Wŏn, *Chŏsen tetsugaku shi* (Tokyo: Kōbundō, 1968), trans. Song Chihak, 272.

33. See Yi Pyŏngdo, *Han'guk yuhaksa* (Seoul: Asea Munhwasa, 1987), 10.

34. *Chuyŏk ch'onnon*, in *Tasanhak jeyo*, vol. 2, ed. Yi Sŏkho, *Han'guk myŏngjŏ taejŏnjip* (Seoul: Taeyang Sŏjŏk, 1975), 250.

35. *Chuyŏk ch'onnon*, 250.

36. *Yŏkhak sŏ*, in *Chŏng Tasan chŏnsŏ*, ed. Yun Senso (Seoul: Munho Pyŏnchan Yuwomhoe, 1960), 2: 481.

37. *Chuyŏk sachŏn*, in *Chŏng Tasan chŏnsŏ*, 241.

38. Quoted in *Han'guk sasangsa nongo*, 423.

39. Quoted in *Han'guk yuhaksa*, 256.

40. See Kŭm Changtae, *Han'guk sirhak sasang yŏn'gu* (Seoul: Jipmundang, 1987), 189–97. Another *sirhak* scholar, Ch'oe Hangi (1803–1875), suggested a similar idea. Tokugawa scholars used the *wu-hsing* theory to accommodate the Aristotelian theory of the four elements about one and a half century earlier.

41. Quoted in *Han'guk sasangsa nongo*, 421.
42. Sometimes, Yagyonng even criticized people for discussing the text without considering its symbols and numbers. In addition, he believed in gods, and accepted divination as a way of worshipping gods in ancient times. However, he strongly opposed the use of divination among his contemporaries.
43. He maintained that the *Ta hsiang*, one of the *Hsiang chuan*, should be treated as an independent classic rather than a commentary on the *I ching*.
44. *Chuyōk sachōn*, in *Chōng Tasan chōnsō*, 228.
45. Quoted in *Tasanhak jeyo*, 271.
46. He praised two Han scholars, I Fang and Hsün Shuang, for their rationality.
47. *Yōkhak sōō*, 425.
48. *Yōkhak sōō*, 427.
49. *Yōkhak sōō*, 471. He praised K'ung Wing-t'a for pinpointing Wang Pi's faults and Li Ting-cha and T'ang Te-ming for preserving some fragments of ancient *I ching*.
50. *Yōkhak sōō*, 458.
51. On Chi Tzu worship, see Han Young-woo, "Kija Worship in the Koryō and Early Yi Dynasties: A Cultural Symbol in the Relationship Between Korea and China," in *The Rise of Neo-Confucianism in Korea*, ed. Wm. Theodore de Bary (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 349–74.
52. Richard Wilhelm, trans., *The I Ching or Book of Changes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 565.
53. *Chuyōk sachōn*, in *Chōng Tasan chōnsō*, 317.
54. Likewise, Yi T'oegye accepted the view that the *Hung-fan* chapter of the *Shu ching* (Book of documents) was a work of Chi Tzu's and called it the *Kibom* (Chi Tzu's *Hung-fan*).
55. Kim Hang advocated nationalism and utopianism in the *Chongyōk* (The correct explanation of the *I ching*, 1885) which later became an influential book in *Tonghak* (Eastern studies).
56. Based on some faked ancient texts, Ch'aeho suggested that ancient Chinese sages all came from the legendary Hanguk period of ancient Korea and that Fu Hsi was a Korean prince who studied the *I ching* from Hang Wong, a Hanguk emperor. Hence, the *I ching* was indeed a Korean text. He also believed that the Korean writing system had existed in ancient Korea. See *Tanjae Sin Ch'aeho chōnjip* (Seoul: Ursō Munhwasa, 1972). This view may have been influenced by Hirata Atsutane (1776–1843), a late-Tokugawa scholar of national learning. See Wai-ming Ng, "The *I Ching* in Shinto Thought of Tokugawa Japan," *Philosophy East and West*, 84, No. 4 (October 1998): 568–91.
57. Tokugawa Japan and Ch'ing China are used for comparison. For *I ching* studies in these two nations, see Wai-ming Ng, "Study and Uses of the *I Ching* in Tokugawa Japan," *Sino-Japanese Studies*, 9, No. 2 (April 1997): 24–44, and "I Ching Scholarship in Ch'ing China: A Historical and Comparative Study," *Chinese Culture*, 37, No. 1 (March 1996): 57–68.
58. For example, we cannot find any record that the crown prince studied the *I ching* from the mid-seventeenth century to the period's end in 1910. See JaHyun Kim Haboush, "The Education of the Yi Crown Prince: A Study in Confucian Pedagogy," in *The Rise of Neo-Confucianism in Korea*, ed. Wm. Theodore de Bary (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 194–96.