

## NAMDANG'S THEORY ON THE NATURES OF HUMANS AND NON-HUMAN LIVING BEINGS AND HIS DEVELOPMENT OF ZHU XI'S THEORIES

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This article examines a thesis by Namdang, a Confucian scholar in Chosŏn Korea, on the natures of humans and non-human living beings, using Zhu Xi's *li* (理) - *qi* (氣) theory. Regarding the sameness or difference between *li* and *qi*, Zhu Xi formulated different opinions in his early and later life and was also at times inconsistent in his works of a certain period. To a certain extent, Zhu Xi's thoughts lacked coherence, which led to subsequent debates. In seeking to develop Zhu Xi's *li-qi* theory, Namdang put forward his original thesis of Trichotomous Nature, which significantly enriched Zhu Xi's ideas. The "nature transcending the appearance of things" (K. *ch'ohyŏnggi* 超形氣) refers to a pure *xing* (K. *sŏng* 性; nature), concerned with only *li* without considering the influence of *qi* from the perspective of a unitary source (K. *irwŏn* 一原; one source). At this stage, everything shares the same *li* and *xing*. The "nature originated from temperament" (K. *in'gijil* 因氣質) demonstrates the shared nature for the same species as well as the difference in nature across species, thus being an endowment-dependent *li*. At this stage, for the same species, they share the same *li*, *qi*, and *xing*, while for varying species, there is a difference in *li*, *qi*, and *xing*. The "nature mixed with temperament" (K. *chapkijil* 雜氣質) considers the *xing* of pure *qizhi* (K. *kijil* 氣質; physical temperament) in which all creatures differ. It is thus a concept that demonstrates the particularity in all things, with varying differences in *li*, *qi*, and *xing*.

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The most significant discourse of late Chosŏn Confucianism was a philosophical debate known as the Horak Debate between two Zhu Xi scholars: Oeam Yi Kan (1677–1727) a Nangnon scholar, and Namdang Han Wŏnjin (1682–1751) a Horon scholar. It was a bicentennial debate on the original nature of humans and that of non-human living beings, which was taken up and continued by other Chosŏn Confucian scholars. The core issue was whether the original nature of humans and that of non-human living beings are the same. Oeam insisted on the sameness, while Namdang suggested otherwise. During their heated debate, Namdang put forward his own thesis on Trichotomous Nature, which attracted extensive scholarly attention. Traditional Confucianism was well-known for an inherent binarism (e.g. heavenly principle vs. human desires, original nature vs. physical temperament, and fact vs. value). For this very reason, Namdang's contemporaries initially found it difficult to accept a trichotomous theory, and for a long time this thesis was widely criticised. This theory, nevertheless, is the core of Namdang's works on the natures of humans and non-human living beings, thus being the key to understanding his ideas.

The debate over whether the natures of human and non-human living beings are the same can be dated back to Zhu Xi's *li-qi* theory. These two concepts are difficult to translate into English: *li* is generally rendered as “rational principle”, “law”, “pattern”, and “form” (cf. Dao, Dharma), while *qi* as “material energy”, “life force”, or “energy flow” (cf. Prana). Zhu Xi proposes these two as universal aspects of reality which underlie the existence of all things. Although Zhu Xi has been the most renowned among neo-Confucian scholars, his thoughts on the *li-qi* sameness/difference are far from consistent throughout his life. Zhu Xi's theories have subsequently been refined by generations of scholars, and were elaborated on in particular when they were introduced into Chosŏn Korea. Korean scholars conducted a detailed analysis of the inconsistencies and contradictions in Zhu Xi's theories, leading to the debate over the nature of humans and that of non-human living beings.

Zhu Xi's *li-qi* theory has not attracted much scholarly attention in China, where Li Cunshan is one of the major scholars on this issue.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, in Korea, in spite of the abundant research on Namdang's thesis on Trichotomous Nature and

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<sup>1</sup> Li Cunshan, “*Cong xingshan lun dao fan xingshan lun*” (From a theory of good human nature to that of good universal nature). *Kukchep'an yugo munhwa yon'gu* 7 (2002): 177–206.

his debate with Oeam,<sup>2</sup> few scholars have considered an examination of this thesis from the perspective of Zhu Xi's *li-qi* theory. This article aims to review Namdang's theory on the nature of humans and that of non-human living beings from the perspective of Zhu Xi's *li-qi* theory. To do this, we will begin with a general review of Zhu Xi's *li-qi* theory, to be followed by an analysis of Namdang's thesis on Trichotomous Nature. These shall provide a general context in which Namdang's creative development of Zhu Xi's ideas can be seen.

### 1. ZHU XI'S THEORIES ON THE SAMENESS/DIFFERENCE BETWEEN *LI* AND *QI*

Theoretically, the debate over the sameness or difference between the natures of humans and non-human living beings stems from Zhu Xi's works. In his commentary on "What Heavenly Mandate confers is called nature" (*tianming zhi wei xing* 天命之谓性) in *Zhongyong* (*The Doctrine of the Mean* 中庸), Zhu Xi says:

Life (*ming* 命) for all creatures is like the mandate (*ling* 令) [of Heaven]. The nature (*xing* 性) is *li* (理). Heaven produces and nurtures all creatures according to *yin* and *yang*, and the Five Elements (*yinyang wuxing* 陰陽五行), during which *qi* is for the embodiment of all creatures with *li* as their endowment, as if this were mandated [by Heaven]. Therefore, as far as the life of all creatures is concerned, the *li* is endowed by Heaven, forming the Five Virtues (C. *jianshunwuchang*, K. *könsunosang* 健順五常, i.e. benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and fidelity). This is what is called nature (*xing* 性).

In this comment, Zhu Xi suggests that humans and non-human living beings are both endowed by *li* the heavenly principle, namely the Five Virtues comprising

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<sup>2</sup> Please refer to Hong Chönggün, *Horak nonjaeng e kwanban Im Söngju üi pip'anjöke chiyang yön'gu* (A critique on the Horak debate by Im Söngju), Sönggyun'gwan taehakkyo, PhD dissertation, August 2002; "Chaoxian xuezhe han yuazhen de xing sanceng shuo yiji ren shengzhou dui ci de guandian," (The theory of trichotomous nature of a Chosön scholar, Han Wönjin, and the comments of Im Söngju). *Qilu wenhua yanjiu* 6 (2008): 172–181; "Zhongyong yu Mengzi de xing gainian chongtu" (Conceptual conflicts on human nature in the *Doctrine of the Mean* and *Mencius*). *Ruxue simeng xuepai lunji* (An anthology of essays on Confucian Zi Si and Mengzi Schools), Jinan: qilu shushe, 2008, 287–297; "Is the Morality of Human Beings Superior to the Morality of Non-Human Beings: Debate over Human versus Animal Nature in the Joseon Period." *Korea Journal* 51, no. 1 (2011): 72–96; Ch'oe Yöngjin, "Namdang Oeam mibal nonjaeng üi chaegömt'o" (Re-examination of the debates of unlaunchedness between Han Wönjin and Yi Kan), *Tongyang ch'örhak* 29 (2008): 98–115.

our nature. This nature is the one in the phrase “*xing* is *li*”, meaning “original nature” (C. *benxing*, K. *ponsŏng* 本性).

However, there is a turn in Zhu Xi’s thoughts. When interpreting “Life is what is called nature” (*sheng zhi wei xing* 生之謂性) in his *Commentary on Mencius* (*Mengzi ji zhu* 孟子集注), Zhu Xi points out differently:

Regarding the life of humans and non-human living beings, they both have this *xing* and this *qi*. In the case of *qi*, both are the same in senses and movements (*zhibjue yundong* 知覺運動). In the case of *li*, for such endowments as benevolence, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom, how will it be possible for non-human living beings to have all [of these endowments] as humans do? This is why human nature is good and is the supreme among all creatures.

Here Zhu Xi offers the opinion that in terms of senses and movements, humans and non-human living beings (e.g. dogs and cattle) are the same. By way of comparison, regarding the heaven-endowed *li* (namely our original nature), the essential nature of non-human living beings and that of humans are different, since humans are endowed with the five virtues, whereas non-human living beings are not. Therefore, humans are superior to all other creatures and the nature of humans differs from that of non-human living beings. In this sense, the original natures of humans and non-human living beings cannot be considered to be equal.

From the two quotations above, we can see that initially (in *Commentary on the Doctrine of the Mean*), Zhu Xi believes that the natures of humans and non-human living beings are the same, while later (in *Commentary on Mencius*), he emphasises otherwise. These and other contradictory comments give rise to later debates. In addition, Zhu Xi was inconsistent from some works to others on the natures of humans and non-humans. By the same token, since he asserts that “*xing* is *li*”, due to the close tie between *xing* (nature) and the endowment of *qi*, the issue of nature eventually will boil down to the relationship between *li* and *qi*.

In his early years, Zhu Xi tends to believe that the nature of humans and that of non-human living beings are the same, arguing that “one being, one *taiji*” (C. *yi wu yi taiji* 一物一太極) and “the same *li* and different *qi*” (C. *litong qiyi* 理同氣異), a view which was apparently inspired by Li Tong his teacher. This view is clearly expressed in his *Interpretation of the Taiji Symbol* (C. *Taijitu shuojie* 太極圖說解): “The whole of intact *taiji* is contained in each and every being. It can also be seen that nature (*xing*) is ubiquitous.” Furthermore, “the life of humans and non-human living beings invariably has the Way of *taiji*” (C. *taiji zhi dao* 太極之道). Here he argues that both humans and non-humans contain the whole of *taiji* without exception, albeit with varying manifestations of *taiji* due to the difference in *qi* (e.g.

lucid/turbid, partial/complete, pure/impure, open/closed). Zhu Xi further argues that the original natures (C. *benyuan zhi xing* 本源之性) of humans and non-human living beings are the same, with manifest differences in their temperamental natures (C. *qizhi zhi xing* 氣質之性).

Zhu Xi also expresses the view “the same *li* and different *qi*” in his *Commentary on the Great Learning* (Daxue zhangju 大學章句), which is not different from his *Commentary on the Doctrine of the Mean*. For instance, there is one text in *The Doctrine of the Mean*,

Able to give its full development to his own nature, he can do the same to the nature of other men. Able to give its full development to the nature of other men, he can give their full development to the natures of animals and things. Able to give their full development to the natures of creatures and things, he can assist the transforming and nourishing powers of Heaven and Earth. Able to assist the transforming and nourishing powers of Heaven and Earth, he may with Heaven and Earth form a ternion.<sup>3</sup>

Zhu Xi comments that “the nature of humans and non-humans is the nature of mine, albeit with differences due to the variations in the endowed physical form (*xing* 形) and *qi*”.

Although Zhu Xi firmly believes in “the same *li* and different *qi*”, this does not suggest that he would uphold this view consistently throughout the corpus of his works. For one thing, this view contradicts the Confucian belief that humans are superior to all other creatures. Confucian scholars in general agree that only humans have the Five Virtues. For this very reason, Zhu Xi’s faith in “the same *li* and different *qi*” does not rest on an unshakable ground.

As a matter of fact, by the time he wrote his *Commentaries on Mencius*, for one text in *Mencius* (11.3), “Is the nature of a dog like the nature of an ox, and the nature of an ox like the nature of a man?”<sup>4</sup> Zhu Xi comments that “[i]n the case of *qi*, both are the same in senses and movements (C. *zhi jue yundong* 知覺運動). In the case of *li*, for such endowments as benevolence, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom, how will it be possible for non-human living beings to have all [of these endowments] as humans do?” The former points to “the same *qi*”, while the latter to “different *li*”, which now amounts to “the same *qi* and different *li*”, an exact reversal of his previous thesis.

<sup>3</sup> This translation is in James Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, Vol. 1, Taipei: SMC Publishing Inc., 1991, 416.

<sup>4</sup> This translation is in James Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, Vol. 2, Taipei: SMC Publishing Inc., 1991, 397.

This reversal notwithstanding, even in his *Commentaries on Mencius*, Zhu Xi fails to remain consistent. In annotating the text “[t]hat whereby man differs from the lower animals is but small”,<sup>5</sup> he writes that “[t]he life of both humans and non-human living beings is endowed with the heaven-and-earth principle of *li*, which constitutes their nature. Likewise, both are endowed with the heaven-and-earth *qi*, which constitutes their form. The difference lies in that only humans in the midst are endowed with the propriety of form and *qi*, enabling them to have a complete nature”. This amounts to a suggestion of “the same *li* and different *qi*”.

Indeed, before the publication of his commentaries on the Four Classics, neither the statement “the same *li* and different *qi*” nor its reverse was clearly articulated. Afterwards, when faced with questions from his disciples, Zhu Xi had to give further explanations. After finishing *Commentary on Mencius*, in a reply letter to Cheng Zhensi, Zhu Xi’s interpretation of “Life is what is called nature” was changed into “different *qi*, different *li*”. As he remarks, “But the nature of a dog is like that of an ox? Be it a dog, an ox, or a man, they all have form and *qi*. The reason for them to have senses and the ability to move around is life. Although they are the same in having life, they differ in form and *qi*, for which reason the endowment of the heavenly *li* in their life also differs from one another”.<sup>6</sup> Later on, perhaps it is the difficulty of explaining “Life is what is called nature” that was the reason why Zhu Xi did not include this interpretation in his *Essentials of Mencius* (*Mengzi yaolue* 孟子要略). In fact, Zhu Xi encountered a dilemma in interpreting “Life is what is called nature”, which is not to suggest that the original text in *Mencius* is obtuse and resists an easy interpretation. On the contrary, Zhu Xi’s dilemma lies in his inability to maintain consistency between his thesis on “the one source of *li*” (*C. li zhi yiyuan* 理之一原) and Mencius’s own meaning in “Life is what is called nature”.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> *Mencius* 8.19; this translation is in James Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, Vol. 2, Taipei: SMC Publishing Inc., 1991, 325.

<sup>6</sup> Zhu Xi, “Da Cheng Zhengsi” (A reply to Cheng Zhengsi), in *Zhu Xi wenji* (Literary collection of Master Zhu). Taipei: Defu wenjiao jijinhui, 2002, 186.

<sup>7</sup> Why did Zhu Xi have difficulty in annotating Mencius’s “Life is what is called nature” (*sheng zhi wei xing* 生之謂性)? Li Cunshan believes that it was because of the development of the “good human nature” thesis in traditional Confucianism into a “universal good nature thesis” in the studies on *li* and nature during the Song dynasty. In other words, the distinction between the original nature (*ben yuan zhi xing* 本源之性) or the natural nature (*ben ran zhi xing* 本然之性) on the one hand, and the temperamental nature (*qi zhi zhi xing* 氣質之性) on the other, led to difficulties for Zhu Xi in annotating the text of *Mencius*. Mencius holds that although a good human nature is mandated by heaven, it is not the origin of living beings in the world. The two Chengs, in their studies of nature and *li*, included the Mencian thesis on good human nature into the original nature, while at the same time, they criticised Gaozi for merely making some general remarks (*zhi dao yi ban* 只道一般) in “Life is what is called nature.” According to Chengzi, the Mencian thesis on

From the evidences above, it can be seen that Zhu Xi encountered difficulty when interpreting “Life is what is called nature” in *Mencius*. In his other commentaries, the dominant opinion is “the same *li* and different *qi*”. In spite of this general impression, he can be vague in other works. At one time, he claims that “*li* cannot be discussed in terms of in/completeness” (C. *pianquan* 偏全), while at other times he will suggest otherwise. In his later years, when confronted by doubts over “the same *li* and different *qi*” or the reverse, his answers were markedly ambiguous. For instance, he suggests that “there is a sameness in difference, and *vice versa*” (C. *tong zhong you yi, yi zhong you tong* 同中有異, 異中有同). “The nature is the most difficult topic to discuss. It will be all right to say ‘sameness’, and it will be all right to say ‘difference’”.<sup>8</sup>

Evidently Zhu Xi was fully aware of the dilemma in the sameness/difference between *li* and *qi*. Regardless of this, he attempted in no way to systemise his arguments, which inevitably gave rise to confusions.<sup>9</sup> To some extent, this reveals a lack of logical consistency in Zhu Xi’s theories. Afterwards, when they were introduced into Chosŏn Korea, scholars conducted detailed studies to scrutinise the logic and coherence in his theories.<sup>10</sup>

The debate over the natures of humans and non-human living beings in Chosŏn Korea was primarily a continuation of and development from the issue of sameness/difference between *li* and *qi*. Oeam-led scholars argue that the nature of humans and that of non-human living beings are the same, as they base their arguments upon “What heavenly mandate confers is called nature” (C. *tianming zhi*

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good human nature should be elevated to the level of original nature (generality), while Gaozi’s “Life is what is called nature” should be limited to the temperamental nature (particularity) as the distinguishing feature between human beings and other non-human living beings (e.g. dogs or cattle). Only thus can it be reconciled with the prevailing thoughts in the studies of *li* and nature. Nevertheless, in the text of *Mencius*, it is Mencius who emphasises the particularity of human nature as being distinct from the nature of a dog and an ox, whereas Gaozi’s “Life is what is called nature” emphasises “generality.” “Is the nature of a dog like the nature of an ox, and the nature of an ox like the nature of a man?” Zhu Xi’s difficulty in interpreting “Life is what is called nature” comes from his attempt to fill the gap between the original text of Mencius and the philosophy in the studies on nature and *li*. See Li Cunshan, *ibid.*, 200–201.

<sup>8</sup> Zhu Xi, *Zhuzi yulei* (Selected dialogues of Master Zhu). Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986. 39.

<sup>9</sup> Xing Liju, “Zhu Xi de li qi tongyi lun yu hanguo ruxue shi shang de renwu xing tongyi lunzheng” (Zhu Xi’s thesis on the sameness and difference between *li* and *qi* and the debate on the sameness/difference between human nature and the nature of things in the history of Korean Confucianism), *Kukchep’an yugo munhwa yŏn’gu* 14 (2010): 102.

<sup>10</sup> The best of this work may be seen in *An Examination of the (Non) Contradiction in the Dialogues of Master Zhu* (朱子言論同異考), which provides detailed studies of the contrary, contradictory or inconsistent arguments in the dialogues of Zhu Xi. This book was initiated by Yi Kan (1607–1689) and was completed by Han Wŏnjin.

*wei xing* 天命之謂性) in *The Doctrine of the Mean* and Zhu Xi's interpretations; whilst Namdang-led ones suggest otherwise. The latter derive their position from the text, "Is the nature of a dog like the nature of an ox, and the nature of an ox like the nature of a man?" (*Mencius* 11.3) and Zhu Xi's corresponding comments. More specifically, these two scholarly camps seek intellectual support from *The Doctrine of the Mean* and *Mencius* respectively.

## 2. NAMDANG'S *LI-QI* THEORY

Similar to his contemporaries, Namdang believes that both *li* and *qi* are the supreme categories of existence, concerned with substance.<sup>11</sup> His work *To the Contemporaries* (K. *sidongji söl* 示同志說) follows Zhu Xi's thoughts closely, and on the *li-qi* relationship, he agrees with Zhu Xi's views regarding "the inseparable" (C. *buli* 不離) and "non-mixture" (C. *buza* 不雜) between *li* and *qi*. "For reason of 'inseparability', *li* and *qi* can be discussed concurrently. Due to 'non-mixture,' they can be discussed separately".<sup>12</sup> He proposed a methodology of distinguishing a "concurrent discourse" (K. *kyömön* 兼言) from a "separate one" (K. *punön* 分言), thus accommodating both the synthetic perspective (K. *hapkan* 合看) and a separate *vis-à-vis* (K. *igan* 離看).

When *li* and *qi* are seen from a separate perspective, they are two different things, under which circumstance there is a lexical order between *li* and *qi*, with difference in *qi* and the sameness in *li*. If seen from the synthetic perspective, they are one thing, where there exists neither a lexical order nor difference between them. The core of this term 'perspective' lies in the difference in angles humans employ. Be it either a synthetic or separate perspective, both are angles within human agency, for which reason this is not to suggest either a synthesis or separation of *li* and *qi*.<sup>13</sup>

In the light of this statement, because of the difference in the synthetic and separate perspectives, there is a distinction in both *li* and *qi* and in the lexical order in which they occur. In other words, the relationship between *li* and *qi* can vary in accordance with the perspective one employs. Therefore, Namdang divides *li* into three levels: the "*li* transcending the appearance of things" (K. *ch'obyönggi* 超形氣), the "*li* originated from temperament" (K. *in'gijil* 因氣質), and the "*li* mixed with temperament" (K. *chapkeijil* 雜氣質).

<sup>11</sup> "Sidongji söl" (示同志說), in Han Wönjin, *Namdang chip* (Collected works of Namdang). Seoul: Kyöng'in munhwa sa, 1986, 130.

<sup>12</sup> "Shu" (書), in Han Wönjin, *ibid.*, 92.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*



Namdang categorises and classifies Zhu Xi's theories on *li* and *qi*. Firstly, on the sequence of *li* and *qi*, Zhu Xi has three arguments, namely “originally no order between *li* and *qi*” (C. *li qi ben wu xianhou* 理氣本無先後), “*li* prior to *qi*” (C. *li xian qi hou* 理先氣後), and “*qi* prior to *li*” (C. *qi xian li hou* 氣先理後). Namdang suggests that these arguments are formulated respectively in terms of flows (C. *liuxing* 流行), origin (C. *benyuan* 本原), and endowment (C. *bingfu* 稟賦). In spite of their difference in the signified, at the level of “flows” they can be united into one.<sup>14</sup> It is important to note here that although *qi* is originally derived from *li*, the reason that *li* acquires its name (C. *deming* 得名) is due to *qi* (C. *yin qi er li* 因氣而立). “Therefore, although *yin* and *yang* are derived from *taiji*, the name of *könsun* (健順, leading and conforming) cannot be established outside *yin* and *yang*. ... The name of *osang* (五常 five constancies) cannot be established outside the Five Elements”. From this, the idea of the *in'gijil* nature is derived.

Secondly, regarding the sameness/difference between *li* and *qi*, in spite of the variety of opinions expressed by Zhu Xi, fundamentally it will be up to the “one source” (C. *yiyuan* 一原) of all things to decide. Namdang adopts this point of view and discusses the sameness/difference between *li* and *qi* from a wider perspective. He offers a classification within the frame of source (C. *benyuan* 本原) and branches (C. *molu* 末流). “Generally speaking, at the level of source/origin, the same *li* and different *qi*; along branches, then different *qi* and different *li*”.<sup>15</sup> This logical structure, through the *li-qi* relationship, links the existence of the ultimate substance with the individual beings of phenomena, thus constituting a metaphysics of *xing* and *li*.

The oneness of *li* (C. *liyi* 理一) and the particularity of differentiations (C. *fenshu* 分殊) underlie the existence and form of all creatures. To Namdang, *liyi* is “the whole of *taiji*, intact without anything missing”,<sup>16</sup> while *fenshu* is the variation in the *qi*-dependent flows. In Zhu Xi's theories, both *liyi* and *fenshu* refer to *li*, while Namdang's understanding is different: *liyi* is specifically concerned with *li*, whereas *fenshu* involves both *li* and *qi*. If *li* remains the same at the origin, then why does *fenshu* arise? According to Namdang, “The reason lies in *qi*. At its origin, *li* remains the same. Differentiations are due to the particularity of *qi* on which *li* rides”.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, it is impossible to talk about *fenshu* outside the influence of *qi*.

<sup>14</sup> Han Wönjin, “*Li and Qi*,” in *Chuja öllon tong'igo* (An examination of the theory of sameness and differences in the dialogues of Master Zhu). Seoul: Somyöng, 2002, 19.

<sup>15</sup> Han Wönjin, *ibid.*, 22.

<sup>16</sup> Han Wönjin, “Chapch'ö i'il punsu söp” 雜著·理一分殊說 (Miscellaneous works—On *liyi* and *fenshu*), in *Namdang chip* (Collected works of Namdang). Seoul: Kyöng'in munhwa sa, 1986, 138.

<sup>17</sup> Han Wönjin, “Chapch'ö najöng amgonji pyön” 雜著·罗整庵困知记辨 (Miscellaneous works—A debate on Kunzhiji by Luo Zheng'an), *ibid.*, 142.

It is in this sense that Namdang suggests “*fenshu* concerning both *li* and *qi*”. Moreover, the methodology of synthetic and separate perspectives is also applicable here: an examination of *qi* from the synthetic perspective of the inseparability of *li* and *qi*, *liyi* can be seen; while looking at *qi* from the separate perspective of mutually exclusive *li* and *qi* (non-mixture), *fenshu* can be seen. *Liyi* embodies the inseparability between *li* and *qi*, while *fenshu* embodies their non-mixture.

*Liyi* and *fenshu* are the key concepts in understanding the nature of both human and non-human living beings. Zhu Xi’s idea of *liyi* and *fenshu* was creatively developed into “the universalising *li* and the particularising *qi*” (K. *it’ong kiguk* 理通氣局) by Yulgok Yi I (1536–1584). Yulgok elaborates on the universalising *li* and the particularising *qi* through the presence or absence of physical form. “Since *li* is without form and *qi* has form, *li* universalises while *qi* particularises”.<sup>18</sup> Although there is no clear difference between *it’ong kiguk* and *liyi fenshu*, Yulgok points out their differences:

Generally speaking, *li* does not have a form, while *qi* does. Therefore, *li* universalises while *qi* particularises. “The universalising *li*” (*it’ong* 理通) means that there is one universally shared *li* in the world; while “the particularising *qi*” (*kiguk* 氣局) means that there are multiple forms of *qi* from one thing to another. For the so-called *liyi* and *fenshu*, at the origin there is only one *li*. Due to the multiplicity in *qi*, *li* in its multiple residences manifests differentiations, which leads to *fenshu*. It is not because *li* is not the same at the origin.<sup>19</sup>

In this quote, it can be seen that Yulgok, in his thesis, uses *it’ong* to explain that *li* as inherent in all things has a universal oneness in spite of the flows of different *qi*. On the other hand, *kiguk* aims to account for the particularity of *qi* on individual beings. Yulgok also points out that Zhu Xi’s thesis on *liyi* and *fenshu*, in spite of its emphasis on the oneness of *li*, fails to give sufficient consideration to the influence of *qi* on *li*. In this context, Yulgok’s thesis attempts a supplementary account on the influence of *qi*.

In Namdang’s view, Yulgok’s particularising *qi* includes more than the *qi* of all things and forms. It should include the various forms of *kiguk* dependent on the various levels of nature.<sup>20</sup> Namdang believes that nature is the *in’gijil li*, for which

<sup>18</sup> Yi I, *Yulgok chönsö* (Complete works of Yulgok Yi I). Seoul: Sönggyun’gwan taehakkyo munhwa yön’guso, 1971, 120.

<sup>19</sup> Yi I, *ibid.*, 183.

<sup>20</sup> Xing Liju, “Namdang Han Wönjin inmul söng iron e taehan yön’gu” (A study on the sameness and difference between the natures of humans and things by Han Wönjin,” *Tongyang ch’örhak* 56

reason, nature is not *it'ong*, but *kiguk*. From this, it can be seen that Namdang changes Yulgok's *it'ong kiguk* into *it'ong sŏngguk*, where he distinguishes *xing* (nature) from *li*. These form the foundation for Namdang's theory of trichotomous nature.

### 3. NAMDANG'S THEORY OF TRICHOTOMOUS NATURE

This theory is Namdang's innovative development, thus being the key to understanding his thesis on the natures of humans and non-human living beings:

Wŏn-jin [the author himself] humbly believes that there are three levels of nature: a level which humans and non-humans have in common, a level at which humans differ from non-humans but share with other humans, and a level at which no two things are the same.<sup>21</sup>

He repeatedly emphasises that there is only one nature, which divides into three levels simply because of the varying perspectives one employs. The theory of trichotomous nature derives its foundation from *li*. There is only one *li* at the origin. Nevertheless, there is a *taiji* (*ch'ohyŏnggi*), a *kŏnsunosang* (*in'gijil*), and a good/evil nature (*chapkijil*), for which reason, there are three corresponding natures, namely *ch'ohyŏnggi*, *in'gijil*, and *chapkijil*. Namdang explicitly suggests that the former two belong to the original nature (C. *benran zhi xing* 本然之性), while the last one to the temperamental nature (C. *qizhi zhi xing* 氣質之性).

Namdang uses the *ch'ohyŏnggi* nature to explain the sameness in the natures of humans and non-humans at the level of "one source". The *ch'ohyŏnggi* nature refers to the nature "not constrained by physical form" (C. *bu youyu xingqi*, K. *pul yu hyŏnggi* 不囿於形氣).<sup>22</sup> On the basis of this argument, he proposes a theory of "heavenly mandate [contained within] all things, and with which each and every thing is endowed" (C. *tianming quanti, wuwu bu fu* 天命全體, 無物不賦).<sup>23</sup> Upon careful reading, it can be seen that the *ch'ohyŏnggi* nature fails to consider the existence of form and *qi* theoretically. It stops short of offering a full explanation of this point. The *ch'ohyŏnggi* nature refers to the *li* within temperament, not outside it. It refers only to the *li* within temperament without considering temperament *per se*.

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(2008): 109.

<sup>21</sup> "Sang simun" 上師門 (Letter to disciples), in Han Wŏnjin, *Namdang chip* (Collected works of Namdang). Seoul: Kyŏng'in munhwa sa, 1986, 63.

<sup>22</sup> "Yŏ Ch'oe Songjung pyŏlchi" 與崔成仲別紙 (A separate note to Ch'oe Chŏngjong), in Han Wŏnjin, *ibid.*, 82.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

Namdang's *in'gijil* nature assumes a non-mixture (*buz'a*) between *li* and a good/evil temperament. The difference from one living being to another is due to the Five Elements, which then generate further variation in the Five Constancies. "Humans are complete in the endowment of *qi*, for which reason their nature is complete, whereas non-humans are incomplete in the endowment of *qi*, thus with an incomplete nature. This is the difference between humans and non-humans. It is a nature humans share together".<sup>24</sup> For Namdang, this *in'gijil* original nature is similar in meaning to Zhou Lianxi's suggestion that "Every entity has its own nature" (C. *ge yi qi xing* 各一其性), Mencius's text on the nature of a dog, an ox and a man, and Zhu Xi's "in/complete *li*" (C. *pianquan zhi li* 偏全之理). In the light of this statement, the focus of Namdang's thesis on the natures of humans and non-humans lies not in the original nature being good or evil, but in its in/completeness.<sup>25</sup> The nature of humans is complete, while that of non-humans is not, which is where the difference lies. In his suggestion that the natures of humans and non-humans differ, this nature is the *in'gijil* original nature.

If the *ch'ohyōnggi* nature belongs to the category of "one source", and the *in'gijil* nature to *fenshu*, then the *chapkijil* nature belongs to the category of double differentiation. It refers to the pure temperamental nature that one man/dog/ox differs from another. For each temperament, there exists an individuality in its strength, suppleness, good, or evil—all these differences are to be used to discuss the *chapkijil* temperamental nature. For Namdang, the *in'gijil* nature mixed with temperament shall produce a *chapkijil* nature. Theoretically, the *chapkijil* nature is based on an *in'gijil* one, which aims to explain the individuality from one man/dog/ox to another—an individuality that both the *ch'ohyōnggi* nature and the *in'gijil* one cannot explain.

The Theory of Trichotomous Nature is closely related to Namdang's ideas on the relationship between *li* and nature. There is both sameness and difference between nature and *li*. When we say that nature is *li*, it means that nature is a reduction of *li*, and in this respect, nature and *li* are the same. Nevertheless, one is called *li*, while the other nature (*xing*), where the difference in terminology entails a variation conceptually. Their difference results from the interrelationship between *li* and temperament. At the existential level, *li* can exist without temperament as its prerequisite, while for nature, it has to be premised on temperament.<sup>26</sup> When we discuss nature without considering temperament, then nature and *li* are the same, while with reference to temperament, then the

<sup>24</sup> "Sang simun" 上師門 (Letter to disciples), in Han Wōnjin, *ibid.*, 69.

<sup>25</sup> Xing Liju, *ibid.*, 112.

<sup>26</sup> "Sōng" (Nature), in Han Wōnjin, *Chuja ōllon tong'igo* (An examination of the theory of sameness and differences in the dialogues of Zhuxi). Seoul: Somyōng, 2002, 89.

difference between nature and *li* can be seen.<sup>27</sup>

This is the background for Namdang to propose his Theory of Trichotomous Nature. However, throughout the history of Confucianism, binarism remained dominant, for which reason Namdang's theory prompted vehement criticism from Oeam. Of the three levels of nature, both agree on the *chapkejil* nature, while on the other two (i.e. the *ch'obyŏnggi* and *in'gijil* natures), there arises the main controversy. We shall consider in detail their disagreement in the following paragraphs.

Namdang states that nature (*xing*) and life (*ming*) are not two different ideas, albeit the latter referring to the transcendent *li*, and hence it is not incomplete. By way of comparison, nature varies with temperament and thus can be in/complete. For this very reason, nature and life should be treated differently. Oeam's criticism of Namdang on this point is based on the chapter, "What heavenly mandate confers is called nature" in *The Doctrine of the Mean*:

Zi Si the great Confucian in his works was parsimonious with words. Once he opened his mouth to speak, he would utter invaluable sayings. For instance, for the phrase "What heavenly mandate confers is called nature", concise as it is with only five [Chinese] characters, it has contained some profound insights. Deogso knows that even though Zi Si has already mentioned "life" (*ming*) in this phrase, he nonetheless continues to discuss nature and to divide it into two. He argues that one belongs to completeness (life), while the other to incompleteness (nature). By the same token, one belongs to sameness (life), while the other to difference (nature). If seen in this way, then Deogso really knows nothing of argumentation and logic. How will he be able to distinguish nature from life?<sup>28</sup>

For Oeam, from "What heavenly mandate confers is called nature", he suggests that heavenly mandate is nature. Namdang's distinction of nature from life by regarding them as two separate entities apparently does not accord with this line of argumentation. Moreover, Zi Si maintains that the heavenly mandate is the original nature of man, in which the former is not separate from or lying outside the latter. For Oeam, heavenly mandate, the Five Constancies, *taiji*, and the original nature—all these terms are the difference signified by *li*. They are merely names of the same existential being. With this, he polemically criticises

<sup>27</sup> Hong Chŏnggŭn, "Chaoxian xuezhe han yuazhen de xing sanceng shuo yiji ren shengzhou dui ci de guandian" (The theory of trichotomous nature of a Chosŏn scholar, Han Wŏnjin and the comments of Im Sŏngju), *Qilu wenhua yanjiu* 6 (2008): 173.

<sup>28</sup> "Osang pyŏn" 五常辨 (An interpretation of five constancies), in Yi Kan, *Oeam yugo* (The posthumous works of Yi Kan). Seoul: Kyŏng'in munhwa sa, 1982, 52.

Namdang's distinction of heavenly mandate from the Five Constancies by regarding them as two separate entities. For Oeam, Namdang is wrong to suggest that the heavenly mandate is complete, while *osang* (the "Five Constancies") is incomplete.

In actuality, Namdang's distinction of the heavenly mandate from the Five Constancies is grounded in his theory of Trichotomous Nature. For Namdang, both the heavenly mandate and the Five Constancies belong to the original nature. The heavenly mandate belongs to the *ch'ohyōnggi* nature, while the Five Constancies to the *in'gijil* one. The former can become the "one source". By way of comparison, the *in'gijil* nature has a differentiation in the form of Five Constancies, for which reason it cannot become a unified, single source. This is the reason that these two should be treated separately. In other words, the heavenly mandate discusses *li* only, while the Five Constancies also touch upon *qi*. Therefore, these two are different from each other.

According to Oeam's binarism, however, he can only accept Namdang's *ch'ohyōnggi* nature and the *chapkejil* one. Oeam argues that the *ch'ohyōnggi* nature equals Oeam's own suggestion of "one source", in that the heavenly mandate, *taiji*, Five Constancies, and the original nature—all these are the same. He accepts the term *ch'ohyōnggi* suggested by Namdang, albeit rejecting Namdang's categorising the heavenly mandate as *ch'ohyōnggi*, and Five Constancies as *in'gijil*. In this distinction of the heavenly mandate from the Five Constancies, the former is hollowed out, rendered a void existence without substance. This is a "discussion of *li* in the void" (K. *hyōn'gong sōlli* 懸空說理). In particular, Namdang regards the *in'gijil* nature as the original nature, which for Oeam is an act of "mistaking *qi* as *li*" (K. *in'gi wili* 認氣爲理). This binary account of the theory of trichotomous nature can lead to nothing but disputes.<sup>29</sup>

On Namdang's *in'gijil* nature, Oeam suggests that it should be regarded as a temperamental nature, instead of the original nature. He quotes Zhu Xi's phrase that "benevolence cannot be used as righteousness, and *vice versa*" (*ren zuo yi bude, yi zuo ren bude* 仁作義不得, 義作仁不得), to suggest that Namdang's *in'gijil* nature can be reduced to absurdity. "On the part of Zhi [跖 a bandit], the *li* is arguably evil and cannot be called good; [while] on the part of Shun [舜 the sagacious king], his *li* is good and can nowhere be called evil".<sup>30</sup> For Oeam, the reason that the nature of a bandit is distinct from that of a sagacious king lies in the fact that

<sup>29</sup> Xing Liju, "Chaoxian shiqi renwu xing tongyi lunzheng de lilun laiyan jiqi chayi" (The theoretical sources and differences among the debates on the sameness and difference of the nature between human and things during the Chosŏn era). *Zhexue yanjiu* 11 (2008), 68.

<sup>30</sup> "Osang pyōn" 五常辨 (An interpretation of the five constancies), *ibid.*, 63.

such a nature is a temperamental one. By the same token, the *in'gijil* nature should be regarded as temperamental. Moreover, a temperamental nature can be good or evil. Namdang only sees the good side of it and calls it the original nature. The bad side is referred to as the temperamental nature. In the light of this statement, all temperamental natures will be evil. Then, there will be no difference between the temperamental nature of a bandit and that of a sagacious king, as both are just evil. This apparently is an absurd conclusion we can derive by following Namdang's logic.

As can be seen from above, Oeam's binarism cannot be reconciled with Namdang's Theory of Trichotomous Nature. They agree on the *chapkijil* nature as the original nature. For Oeam, it is acceptable that the *ch'obyönggi* nature be understood from the perspective of "one source", in spite of which, he rejects Namdang's distinction of it from the Five Constancies. The *in'gijil* nature is the focus of their debate. Oeam does not criticise Namdang for using the term *in'gijil* per se; instead, his criticism is centred upon Namdang's equating the *in'gijil* nature with the original nature. In a word, the point of contention between the two lies in whether the *in'gijil* nature is the original nature or a temperamental one.

Furthermore, they have different approaches towards *li* and *qi*, namely a single signification (K. *tanji* 單指) and a double one (K. *kyömjji* 兼指). The former means a discussion of *li* only, while the latter a concurrent one of both *li* and *qi*. Oeam and Namdang recognise the use of these two approaches, albeit with differences in the content signified by them respectively. For Oeam, the categories that fall within the scope of single signification include the one source, the original nature, the universalising *li*, and the immateriality, while those in the double signification include differentiated entities (K. *ich'e* 異體), temperament (K. *kijil* 氣質), the particularising *qi* (K. *kiguk* 氣局), and materiality. This shows clearly Oeam's subscription to binarism. Contextualised in his theory on nature, the natures of humans and non-human living beings are the same from the perspective of single signification, and different from that of the double one.

Namdang, however, has a different opinion:

As regards the natures of all living beings, from the perspective of *li* only, they are the same. But from the perspective of their endowed physical form and *qi*, they are different. From the perspective of mixed *li* and *qi*, nature will differ from one individual to another, be it among humans or non-humans.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Han Wönjün, *Chuja öllon tong'igo* (An examination of the theory of sameness and differences in the dialogues of Master Zhu), Seoul: Somyöng, 2002, 30.

Here, it can be seen that Namdang adopts three different approaches to *li* and *qi*, namely single signification, double signification, and multiple signification (K. *kakchi* 各指). Apart from *tanji* and *kyōmji*, there is an additional one of *kakchi*, which corresponds to his theory of trichotomous nature. For Namdang, single signification refers to the *ch'ohyōnggi* nature, multiple signification to the *in'gijil* one, and double signification to the *chapkijil* one. He further points out that “those that fall within single signification are all complete; those in multiple signification may be incomplete or complete, while those in double signification are either good or evil”.<sup>32</sup> All these demonstrate his commitment to a trichotomous way of thinking.

The methodology of separate and synthetic perspectives is closely connected with these ideas. As mentioned above, Namdang suggests that since *li* and *qi* are not mixed, they can be perceived separately; and that since *li* and *qi* are inseparable, they can be viewed synthetically. For this very reason, from the separate perspective, it will be the *ch'ohyōnggi* nature, while from the synthetic one, the *chapkijil* nature. The problem is how to perceive the *in'gijil* nature. Inspired by Zhu Xi's phrase of “neither separate nor mixed” (C. *buli buza* 不離不雜), we will suggest a combined perspective here. In the case of *in'gijil*, *li* and *qi* can be perceived from the separate perspective, by which the nature of one being will be the same as that of another within the same species. If we adopt a synthetic perspective on *li* and *qi*, then the natures across species will be different, namely the nature of humans being different from that of non-humans. This shall enable us to consider in one go the “neither separate nor mixed” relationship between *li* and *qi*.

Oeam criticises Namdang's Trichotomous Nature by arguing that the latter fails to see the “realness in *li* and *qi*” (K. *igi chi sil* 理氣之實), with verbosity in the “realness in nature and life” (K. *sōngmyōng chi sil* 性命之實). Namdang retorts by suggesting that by the logic of Oeam, if we regard the metaphysical origin as a single signification, then nature as in Zhu Xi's comments on “Life is what is called nature”, namely “nature is a metaphysical existence” (*xingzhe*, *xingershang zhe ye* 性者, 形而上者也), should be regarded as the original nature. This contradicts Oeam's arguments on the temperamental nature. In a word, both Namdang and Oeam participated actively in this debate, albeit neither side yielding to the other's point of view.

<sup>32</sup> Han Wōnjin, *Kyōng'i kimunnok* (The record on interpretations of Confucian classics), Photocopy edition. Seoul: Sōnggyun'gwan tachakkyo munhwa yōn'guso, 2005, 162.



#### 4. CONCLUSION

This article has examined Namdang's *li-qi* theory and his thesis on nature, which is based on Zhu Xi's *li-qi* theory. During Zhu Xi's scholarly career, his opinions on the sameness/difference of *li* and *qi* were inconsistent, varying considerably between his earlier and later years, and at times even his works of the same period. This logical inconsistency thus gave rise to debates and contentions. In Chosŏn Korea, Namdang attempted to systemise Zhu Xi's opinions on the relations between *li* and *qi*. Zhu Xi's three arguments, namely "originally no order between *li* and *qi*", "*li* prior to *qi*", and "*qi* prior to *li*", were interpreted respectively in terms of flows, origin, and endowment. Namdang also introduced a methodology of separate and synthetic perspectives, which can shed light on the nuances in the relationship between *li* and *qi*.

Regarding *liyi* and *fenshu*, Namdang suggests that *liyi* means a discussion of *li* only, while *fenshu* a concurrent discussion of both *li* and *qi*. Furthermore, *liyi* points to *li*, while *fenshu* to nature (*xing*), for which reason *li* is different from nature. In other words, the *li* as shared by all living beings on earth is the very one *li* endowed by Heaven. By way of comparison, the nature of all living beings is an *in'gijil* one that differentiates from one to another.

Upon this basis, Namdang elaborates his Theory of Trichotomous Nature. The *ch'ohyŏnggi* nature explains the natures of humans and non-humans being the same at the level of "one source". The *in'gijil* nature is the same within the same species (e.g. between humans and humans, or non-humans and non-humans), but different across species (i.e. between humans and non-humans). The *chapkijil* nature takes into account the temperamental differences from one individual being to another, thus being a purely temperamental nature. These three levels of nature are actually unified into one, albeit with a different facet if perceived from a certain point of view. This demonstrates a trichotomous approach by Namdang.

We can also use Zhu Xi's thesis on the sameness/difference between *li* and *qi* to shed some light on Namdang's theory of trichotomous nature, from where can be seen his creative development of Zhu Xi's ideas. The *ch'ohyŏnggi* nature only signifies *li* in terms of the non-mixture between *li* and *qi*. This apparently is a single signification from a separate perspective. In its argumentation, it does not consider *qi*. Moreover, regardless of sameness/difference in *qi*, *li* remains the same throughout, as an embodiment of the universality shared by all living beings in terms of "one source". In this, both *li* and nature are the same. The *in'gijil* nature considers both the non-mixture and inseparability between *li* and *qi*, on the basis of which it adopts a multiple signification. For those within the same species (e.g. between humans and humans), *qi*, *li* and nature—all are the same. For those

across species (e.g. between humans and non-humans), *qi*, *li* and nature—all are different. Therefore, the *in'gijil* nature manifests not only universality for those within the same species, but also particularity for those across species. The *chapkijil* nature is concerned with a purely temperamental nature in which all living beings differ from each other. This is a double signification of both *li* and *qi*, where no single living being shares the same nature with another, be it within the same species or across species. No one single living being is the same as another—all are different. Such difference is derived from *qi*, for which *qi*, *li* and nature—all are different from one individual being to another.

In conclusion, Namdang's innovative Theory of Trichotomous Nature embodies a fresh development of Zhu Xi's *li-qi* theory. His approach opened up a new perspective on traditional Confucianism, representing a significant contribution in the evolution of Confucianism. What is worthy of our attention in this debate is that although Namdang and Oeam debate heatedly on the sameness/difference between the original nature of humans and that of non-human living beings, indubitably they both agree that both humans and non-human living beings share one thing in common—moral sensitivity. The only point of contention between Namdang and Oeam lies in the degree of sameness. Oeam argues that the Five Constancies in humans are the same as those in non-human living beings, while Namdang suggests that humans are endowed with all the Five Constancies, and non-human living beings with only some of them. It is this common emphasis between Namdang and Oeam on moral sensitivity shared by both humans and non-human living beings that is of crucial interest for our contemporary society. Confronted by an increasingly exacerbated ecological crisis, the quest for a de-anthropocentric perspective is seemingly an urgent matter when it comes to the relationship between mankind and the natural environment.<sup>33</sup> Essentially, this de-anthropocentric perspective will urge us to move away from a predatory approach to natural resources, and instead we may be able to usher in an ecocentric outlook with emphasis on a shared, equitable, and environment-friendly use of resources in our Mother Nature.

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<sup>33</sup> See Ben Minteer A. and Robert E. Manning, "An Appraisal of the Critique of Anthropocentrism and Three Lesser Known Themes in Lynn White's 'The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis,'" *Organisation & Environment* 18, no. 2 (2005): 163–176.

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