

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CONCEPT OF *MIBAL* 未發 IN THE HORAK DEBATE

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The eighteenth-century Neo-Confucian scholars in Korea were deeply concerned with two questions, namely, whether human nature and non-human nature are the same or not and whether all human nature is the same or not. In answering the second question, they focused on the moral nature of *mibalsimche* 未發心體 by asking whether the state of the mind or mind-substance before the arousal of feelings (or thoughts) is morally good or not.

As noted, in Neo-Confucianism the unaroused state of feelings *chông* 情 is generally identified with a state of nature *sông* 性 which is pure and clear, and which is therefore characterized as morally good. However, Korean Neo-Confucian scholars noticed that this characterization could be controversial since the account of the unaroused state given by the Chinese Neo-Confucian, Zhu Xi, was not clear enough, but ambiguous. The problem of *mibal* was a matter of interest since the Four-Seven Debate in the sixteenth century in Korea, and it once again became the subject of intense contention in the eighteenth-century debate between Yi Kan and Han Wŏn-jin, who endeavored to reveal the exact moral characteristics of human nature in terms of the qualities of human constituents, i.e. *li* and *ki*.

In what follows, I shall begin by examining Zhu Xi's diverse accounts of *mibal*, show the emergence of the problem of *mibal* in the Four-Seven Debate between Yi Hwang and Yi I, and, finally, discuss the moral nature in the state of *mibal* presented by Yi Kan and Han Wŏn-jin.

Keywords: Horak Debate, Yi Kan (Oeam), Han Wŏn-jin (Namdang), Zhu Xi, Yi Hwang (I'oegye), Yi I (Yulgok), the Chungghwa theory 中和論, the unaroused state (*mibal*), the *kiballsüngilto* theory 氣發理乘一途說, the *litonggiguk* theory 理通氣局說

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There were three consecutive debates between the sixteenth century and the eighteenth century in the Korean Neo-Confucian academic world, i.e. the Four-Seven Debate on the feelings, the Human-Moral Mind Debate on the mind, and the Horak (or Ho-Rak) Debate on nature, as they are generally referred to.¹ There was a time gap of about two hundred years between the first two and the third, but they were still consecutive in the sense that they dealt with the most important and core Neo-Confucian psycho-physical² concepts, i.e. the mind *sim* (C. *xin*) 心, nature *sōng* (C. *xing*) 性, and feelings *chōng* (C. *qing*) 情, which have a close theoretical and conceptual connection.³ The debates over the concepts were provoked partly due to Zhu Xi's (1130–1200) indecisive and inconsistent remarks⁴ and partly due to the socio-political environment of the time.⁵ Most scholars agree that it was the thoroughness and profoundness of these debates that enabled Korean Neo-Confucianism at the time to reach such a high standard.⁶

The eighteenth Horak Debate focused in particular on two questions, i.e.

¹ Cf. Choi (2011), 5. He includes “the theory of the mind (*simsōl*) debate in the nineteenth century” instead of “the human mind-moral mind debate” as one of the major debates in the Chosŏn dynasty.

² As is often the case, they are characterized as “psycho-physical” rather than “psychological.” This is because nature refers not only to the psychological side but also to the physical or physiological side. See e.g. Yao (2003) (ed.), the account given under the heading of “Xin 心” on page 686.

³ To some extent, it was only a matter of time before the concept of nature became the center of the attention since the other two concepts had been previously discussed in close detail, and it was the last one to be dealt with.

⁴ The Four-Seven Debate was due to Zhu Xi's seemingly indecisive and inconsistent remarks since it was not only about the exact relationship between the Four Beginnings and the Seven Feelings, but also about the explanation of their ontological status in terms of *li* 理 and *ki* 氣, which Zhu Xi did not make clear. Jang (2000, 48) thus goes on to criticize this as Zhu Xi's theoretical incompleteness. In contrast, the Human-Moral Mind debate was initially raised by his inconsistent remarks on the characteristics of the related terms at issue (see Chung, 1995, 85–97), as was the Horak Debate (see below).

⁵ It is sometimes pointed out that the Horak Debate was initially raised to clarify and determine the value of human beings in order to decide whether to accept or reject the new power of China, the Ch'ing dynasty. In relation to this, Kalton et al. trans. (1994, xix) state that “When the “barbarian” Manchus overwhelmed the Ming and established the Ch'ing dynasty in the mid-seventeenth century, the intellectual divide became even more marked: the Koreans self-confidently pronounced themselves the sole guardians of the True Learning. In no other East Asian society did the Ch'eng-Chu school of thought enjoy such exclusive attention or intensive development.” For more diverse reasons for the background of the Horak Debate, see Choi (2011), 6–7.

⁶ See e.g. Choi (2011), 5 and Hong (2002), 405. Choi says that the debates contributed to “the development of Korean Neo-Confucianism in distinction from its Chinese counterpart, the Zhu Xi school of thought.”

whether human nature and non-human nature are the same or not and whether all human nature is the same or not. The debate began with the first question and moved on to the second.⁷ The concept of *mibal* (C. *weifa*) 未發, on which we shall focus in this article, was originally introduced in an attempt to answer the second question. The problem of *mibal* was not new, but it had indeed been a matter of interest as well as contention since the Four-Seven Debate between Yi Hwang (T'oegye, 1501–1570) and Ki Tae-sŭng (Kobong, 1527–1572) in the sixteenth century. It once again became the subject matter of intense contention in the eighteenth century in the Horak Debate between the two representative opposing figures of the time, Yi Kan (Oeam, 1677–1727) and Han Wŏn-jin (Namdang, 1682–1751).⁸

The eighteenth-century debate concerning the second question primarily focused on the moral nature of *mibalsimch'e* 未發心體. The term *mibal* 未發 signifies “the unaroused state” or “the state before arousal” (presumably, of feelings or thoughts),⁹ and the term *simch'e* 心體 (i.e. the mind or mind-substance, substance of the mind). In Neo-Confucianism, the unaroused state of feelings is understood as a pure state without any impurity or contamination, which refers to the morally good state. However, Korean Neo-Confucian scholars noticed that this characterization could be controversial since the account of the unaroused state given by the Chinese Neo-Confucian, Zhu Xi, which should be explained in terms of the characteristics of human constituents, i.e. *li* and *ki*, was not clear enough. The question about the moral nature of *mibalsimch'e* was thus whether the state of the mind before the arousal of feelings or thoughts is morally good only or whether it can be both good and evil.

⁷ The reason for the change of the subject is not clear, but considering the socio-political situation at the time (see note 5 above), it is reasonable to suppose that the debate was originally intended to give an answer to the second subject.

⁸ As is well known, the Horak debate refers to the scholarly debate between the Neo-Confucian scholars residing in the Hosŏ 湖西 region, Ch'ungch'ŏng province located to the southwest of Seoul, and those in the Rakha 洛下 (or Nakha) region consisting of the capital city, Seoul, and its surrounding area, Kyŏnggi province. Those from the Hosŏ region happened to back up Han Wŏn-jin's theory and those from the Rakha region Yi Kan's theory. They are thus called the Ho School and the Rak School, respectively, and the term Horak (Ho-Rak) is the abbreviation of the two regional names and so of the two names of the schools. One might find it interesting to see that, although the schools came into opposition with each other, both were originally composed of disciples of the same master, Kwŏn Sang-Ha (Suam, 1641–1721) who belonged to the Yulgok School (or Kiho School) composed of the followers of Yi I, which at the time rivalled the T'oegye School (or Yŏngnam School) composed of the followers of Yi Hwang.

⁹ I shall not discuss the question about the subject of *mibal*, i.e. what it is that is in the unaroused state, but it is to be noted that the relevant Chinese texts in which the concept appeared do not clearly state its subject on many occasions.

In what follows, I shall begin by examining Zhu Xi's (1130–1200) diverse accounts of the concept of *mibal*, often characterized as the Chunghwa theory 中和論, show in what contexts the problem of *mibal* emerged in the Four-Seven Debate between Yi Hwang and Yi I, and, finally, clarify the moral characteristics of *mibal* presented by Yi Kan and Han Wŏn-jin.

ZHU XI'S THEORY OF *CHUNGHWA* 中和論¹⁰

As noted, Zhu Xi's theory of Chunghwa (C. Zhonghe) 中和 was raised in relation to the statement in the first chapter of the *Zhongyong* 中庸 (*The Doctrine of the Mean*) that “Before joy, anger, sorrow, and pleasure are aroused, it is called equilibrium *chung* (C. *zhong*) 中; when they are aroused and all attain due measure and degree, it is called harmony *hwa* (C. *he*) 和.” His views are generally divided into two, i.e. the old theory formulated when he was thirty seven years old, called the enlightenment in the year of 1166, *pyŏngmujio* (C. *bingxuzhivu*) 丙戌之悟, and the new theory formulated when he was forty years old, called the enlightenment in the year of 1169, *kichukjio* (C. *jichouzhivu*) 己丑之悟. Although it is less known, there is also a third and, presumably, final view of Zhu Xi formulated about twenty years later.

Let us see the variation of his views. In the old theory of Chunghwa (hereafter, the old theory), Zhu Xi thinks that what has been aroused is the mind *sim* 心, whereas what has not been aroused is nature *sŏng* 性.¹¹ In other words, he clearly distinguishes the unaroused state of feelings from the aroused state of feelings *chŏng* 情 and identifies the former state with nature and the latter state with the mind. The criterion here is whether feelings are aroused or not.

In contrast, in the new theory of Chunghwa (hereafter, the new theory), Zhu Xi takes thoughts (or consciousness) *saryŏ* (C. *sili*) 思慮¹² as the subject of both states. That is, the criterion is whether thoughts, not feelings, are aroused or not. Moreover, he now calls both states the mind. In other words, he appears to think that the mind is somehow involved in both states. To be precise, he calls the unaroused state the substance of the mind *sim chisoi wirye* (C. *xin zhisuoyi weiti*) 心之所以爲體, and the aroused state the function of the mind *sim chisoi wiyong* (C. *xin zhisuoyi weiyong*) 心之所以爲用. In particular, he uses the expression in describing the unaroused state that “thoughts are not yet initiated *saryŏ mimaeng* (C.

¹⁰ For a more detailed analysis of the relevant texts, see Yoo (2009b), 258–263.

¹¹ Zhu Xi, *Zhu Xi quanshu* (Collected works of Zhu Xi), Book 32.

¹² Ibid.

siliu weimeng)” 思慮未萌.

To sum up, the two theories are different from each other. The old theory concerns feelings, distinguishes two states according to whether they are before or after the arousal of “feelings,” and identifies the unaroused state with nature and the aroused state with the mind. In contrast, the new theory involves thoughts, distinguishes two states according to whether they are before or after the arousal of “thoughts,” and identifies both states as the mind, though different in kind.

However, according to his commentary to the first chapter of the *Zhongyong* which he wrote at the age of sixty, Zhu Xi appears to return to the old view.

Zi Si says that “Before joy, anger, sorrow, and pleasure are aroused, it is called equilibrium *chung* (C. *zhong*) 中; when they are aroused and all attain due measure and degree, it is called harmony *hwa* (C. *he*) 和.” ... In general, when the human mind is not yet aroused, it is called the nature; when it is aroused, it is called the feelings.

There are a number of things we can learn from the above passage.¹³ First, the passage divides two types of states, i.e. “the unaroused state of feelings such as joy, anger, sorrow, and pleasure” *mibal* (C. *weifa*) 未發 and “the aroused state of feelings” *ibal* (C. *yifa*) 已發. Second, it distinguishes the unaroused state of feelings from the aroused state, that is, equilibrium from harmony. This suggests that we now have to distinguish three states, i.e. the unaroused state of equilibrium *chung* (C. *zhong*) 中, the aroused state of harmony *hwa* (C. *hua*) 和, and the aroused state of disharmony *pullhwa* (C. *bube*) 不和.¹⁴ Third, it identifies the first state with the state of nature *sŏng* 性 and the last two states with the states of feelings *chŏng* 情.

¹³ For a more detailed analysis of the passage, see Yoo (2016), 809.

¹⁴ The term “*pullhwa* 不和” does not appear in the original text, but it can be easily inferred from the text. It is to be noted that the distinction between “*chung* 中” and “*hwa* 和” is not quite to distinguish the unaroused state of equilibrium from the unaroused state of non-equilibrium, but rather to distinguish the unaroused state from the aroused state. That is, the state of feelings before they are aroused is always in the balanced state and so it is called equilibrium 中, whereas the state of feelings after they are aroused can be divided into two sub-states, i.e. the harmonious state 和 and the disharmonious state 不和. There is no such state as the state of non-equilibrium because the unaroused state is always identified as the state of equilibrium and so it always has the moral characteristic of goodness. On the contrary, the aroused state can be either harmonious or disharmonious according to the appropriateness of the feelings. When they are balanced, they are said to be in the state of harmony, but when they are not, they are presumably said to be in the state of disharmony. In consequence, the state of equilibrium is the same as the state of harmony in the sense that human beings are to have the moral characteristic of goodness in both cases, though there is a clear and fundamental difference in that the former refers to the unaroused state, whereas the latter refers to the aroused state.

The distinction between nature and feelings is according to whether they are aroused or not. And feelings are also distinguished according to whether they are in harmony or not. The criterion of distinction between nature and feelings in the third theory sounds almost the same as Zhu Xi's old view. However, there are two significant differences between them. Firstly, Zhu Xi identifies the aroused state with the mind *sim* 心 in the old view, but with feelings in the third theory. Secondly, the introduction to the two concepts, equilibrium and harmony, was only mentioned in the third theory, and this enables him to distinguish different states of feelings.

The differences between the three versions of the Chunghwa theory can be summarized as follows:

- (1) The old theory:
 - (1a) the unaroused state (of feelings) = nature *sǒng* 性
 - (1b) the aroused state (of feelings) = the mind *sim* 心
- (2) The new theory:
 - (2a) the unaroused state (of thoughts) = nature *sǒng* 性 = (the substance of) the mind *sim* 心
 - (2b) the aroused state (of thoughts) = feelings *chǒng* 情 = (the function of) the mind *sim* 心
- (3) The third theory:
 - (3a) the unaroused state (of feelings) = nature *sǒng* 性 = equilibrium *chung* 中
 - (3b) the aroused state (of feelings) = feelings *chǒng* 情 = harmony *hwa* 和
 - (3c) the aroused state (of feelings) = feelings *chǒng* 情 = disharmony *pullwa* 不和

In general, Zhu Xi identifies *li* with nature,¹⁵ but, strictly speaking, for him *li* should be referred to as such only before it is embodied in any concrete things, and it is to be referred to as nature after it is embodied.¹⁶ Elsewhere, he also brings about the concept of mind and relates it to nature. Indeed, he claims that “the substance of the mind is nature, and the function of the mind feelings. And the mind commands nature and feelings.”¹⁷ It is true that, considering (1)–(3) above, there is surely a confusion and so the relationships between the mind, nature, and feelings are unclear. For all the unaroused states in (1)–(3) refer to nature, but the subject of the arousal is not always the same. The subject of the arousal in (1) is feelings, the subject in (2) thoughts, and the subject in (3) feelings.

¹⁵ Zhu Xi, *Zhuzi yulei* (Classified conversations of Master Zhu), 4:39, 4:43, 4:45, 4:49, 4:50 etc.

¹⁶ Ibid., 4:49. Cf. 4:40.

¹⁷ Ibid., 5:55.

In fact, the subject of the arousal in (2) is in a sense the mind and its state can be called the substance of the mind.

Although there still remain many other doubts, it is at least natural to accept the third theory as Zhu Xi's established final theory if only for the reason it was the one presented at a later stage of his life. In relation to this, Hong summarizes thus: "Zhu Xi regards the unaroused state as the state in which 'consciousness is not activated yet' and there is only the capacity for perception without any actual perceiving activity and the aroused state as the state in which the actual perceiving activity of consciousness is present" (Hong 2003, 194). In general, the above proposition that nature is the substance of the mind and feelings the function of the mind is taken as the standard and basic conception of the Neo-Confucian psycho-physical theory, which most, if not all, Korean Neo-Confucians would accept.

This is not the right place to try to view the problems raised in relation to the three theories in a larger context and to solve them. For our purpose, it is sufficient merely to remember that there was inconsistency between them and to see how it was influenced, changed, and dealt with by Yi Hwang and Yi I and, later, by Yi Kan and Han Wŏn-jin, whom we shall examine in turn. Indeed, most, if not all, of them accepted Zhu Xi's third and final theory of *Chunghwa* on the conception of, and the relationship between, the mind, nature, and feelings, but interpreted it in different ways.

YI HWANG AND YI I ON THE CONCEPT OF *MIBAL*

As is well known, of the two major debates in the sixteenth century, the Four-Seven Debate between Yi Hwang and Ki Tae-sŭng was to explain the moral characteristics of the Four and the Seven in terms of *li* and *ki*,¹⁸ whereas the Human Mind-Moral Mind Debate between Yi I and Sŏng Hon (Ugye, 1535–1598) focused on the nature of the two types of mind, i.e. the human mind and the moral mind, in relation to their origins. Sŏng Hon accepted Yi Hwang's view, whereas Yi I was rather sympathetic to Ki Tae-sŭng. As noted, Yi Hwang and Ki Tae-sŭng focused on the problem of the relation between the Four and the Seven and left out the problem of the relation between the Human Mind and the Moral Mind, whereas Yi I and Sŏng Hon mainly dealt with the latter problem. However, they were basically concerned with the same sort of questions, in particular, about

¹⁸ This view was suggested by Yoo (2016, 805) who claims that the purpose of the debate was not to explain the origin of the feelings themselves, but to explain the origin of the moral characteristics of the feelings.

the moral characteristics of the unaroused state.

The purpose of the Four-Seven Debate was to explain the moral characteristics of feelings, and, since the moral characteristics depend on the characteristics of components that make up humans, it is a primary task for the debaters to analyze the characteristics of human constituents, i.e. *li* and *ki*. In the course of the Four-Seven Debate, Yi Hwang formulated the so-called *ligihobal* theory 理氣互發說 in which he ascribes an active characteristic not only to *ki*, but also to *li*. The important thing to note here is that he explicitly ascribes activeness to *li*, which was necessary for him to explain the goodness of the Four Beginnings, but which was hardly acceptable to Korean Neo-Confucian scholars.

The contention between Yi Hwang and Ki Tae-sŭng was whether the Four denote being in a state of equilibrium or harmony. That is, if the Four are understood as nature, then their goodness is due to their being in a state of equilibrium, whereas if they are feelings, then their goodness is due to their being in a state of harmony. Furthermore, if the Four are feelings, then they can be in a state of disharmony, too. In fact, Ki Tae-sŭng who treats the Four as feelings once claims the possibility that the Four can be not only in a state of harmony, but also in a state of disharmony,¹⁹ whereas Yi Hwang does not acknowledge such a possibility (Chŏn 1995, 159). As noted, this is highly disputed because the Four are generally understood to have the moral characteristics of goodness.

There is no doubt that their understanding of the moral characteristics was closely related to their understanding of *li* and *ki*. Since Yi Hwang thinks that the Four are always good, whereas the Seven are either good or evil, he cannot accept that the Four and the Seven have the same origin. Indeed, he believes that the Four originated from nature are not to be aroused, whereas the Seven are aroused by perceiving the surrounding objects. In this way, he goes on to claim that the Four originate from *li*, whereas the Seven originate from *ki*. However, Ki Tae-sŭng considers this explanation hardly acceptable and criticizes Yi Hwang for severing too starkly the relationship between the Four and the Seven and, also, that between *li* and *ki*.

Ki Tae-sŭng's objection is backed up by Yi I, who characterizes the relationship between *li* and *ki* as follows:

Li and *ki* are originally inseparable and seem to be a single thing; that in which they are different is that *li* has no concrete form but *ki* does, *li* is non-active, but *ki* is active. ... *Li* is formless, and *ki* has form; therefore, (1) ***li* pervades, and *ki* delimits.** *Li* is non-active, and *ki* is active; therefore,

¹⁹ For the possibility of equilibrium and harmony of the Four Beginnings, see Yoo (2016), 805–817.

(2) *ki* issues, and *li* mounts it. (Kalton et al. trans. 1994, 175)²⁰

In the above passage, we can see that Yi I's two famous theories which are closely related: (1) is known as the theory of *litonggiguk* 理通氣局說 which implies that only *li* is pervasive everywhere, whereas (2) is known as the theory of *kiballisung* 氣發理乘說 which implies that only *ki* is active.

According to the general teaching of Neo-Confucianism, *li* cannot exist apart from *ki* and, *ki* cannot exist apart from *li*. This suggests that all creatures are composed of *li* and *ki*. *Li* and *ki* have different characteristics: *li* is non-active and formless, whereas *ki* is active and with form. The statement (2) signifies that although *li* cannot act by itself, it can be said to act by residing in *ki*. The activity of *li* here is of course not of its own, but of *ki*. The activity of *li* can be assimilated to the case in which a man rides on a horse. In this case, the man on a horse does not really move even though he travels from A to B: he moves by riding on a horse. The movement is that of the horse, not the man. In the same way, passengers in a vessel can be said to move because they are in the moving vessel, but the movement that occurs is not of the passengers. This represents one of Yi I's famous theories, i.e. the *kibal lisungilto* theory 氣發理乘一途說, meaning that there is only one way of activity of *ki* issuing and *li* mounting it. That is, only *ki* acts, and the seeming activity of *li* is through its mounting of *ki*.

On the other hand, (1) emphasizes not only the non-activeness of *li* and the activeness of *ki*, but also the diversity and difference of individuals. The pervasiveness of *li* signifies that *li* is common to all the myriad things and that all the myriad things share one and the same *li*.²¹ In contrast, their *ki* can be diverse since it has different degrees of clearness or turbidity. *Li* itself has no such different qualities but is always clear and pure. However, the revelation of its original qualities can be obstructed because of *ki*'s qualities.²² Again, one might say that the incompleteness of *ki* can affect *li* in the sense that the original characteristics of *li* might not be manifested because of the turbidity of *ki*. In a sense, *ki* has twofold functions: it can allow the manifestation of the original characteristic of *li*, but it can also obstruct it. *Li* is a metaphysical and abstract concept and has no physical characteristics at all, but it is only a figure of speech even to say that *li* is pure and clear. That is, *li* itself is neither pure nor turbid, and

²⁰ Numbers and bold letters are my emphasis.

²¹ Yi I claimed that the term was his own, but the theory basically delivers the same sort of idea as Zhu Xi's theory of *lil bunsu* (C. *liyifenshu*) 理一分殊 (i.e. one *li* and many manifestations).

²² As noted, *ki* can be understood as the *li* of individuation in the sense that things are individualized because of the diversity that *ki* has. In other words, there would not be any individuals in our world if there were no diverse degrees of purity and turbidity in *ki*.

its purity and turbidity in fact refers to the purity and turbidity of *kei*. In effect, *li* remains the same without any change at all.

Yi Hwang's debate with Ki Tae-sŭng concerns feelings and treats the Four as purely good and the Seven as either good or evil. Moreover, he relates the Four with the moral mind and the Seven with the human mind. This means that he takes the moral mind to be good only, but the human mind to be either good or evil. However, he does not provide a sufficient explanation for such a view and so there remains room for further discussion. It was indeed only a matter of time before Yi I's debate on the origin and the characteristic of the mind with Sŏng Hon was provoked by that controversial problem. Yi I focuses on the mind and divides it into two types, i.e. the moral mind *tosim* 道心 (or Dao mind) and the human mind *insim* 人心. He characterizes them as follows:

In general, the unaroused state is nature and the aroused state is feelings. ... The mind is the master of nature, feelings, and will. Therefore, the unaroused state, the aroused state, and the state of calculating can be called mind. What is aroused is *kei*, and what makes it aroused is *li*. ... The arousal of the mind from the right *li* without the interference of *kei* is the moral mind, which is the good part of the Seven. The arousal of the mind with the interference of *kei* is the human mind, which is the combination of good and evil. ... Although both the human mind and the moral mind originate from nature, that which is disrupted by *kei* is the human mind and that which is not disrupted by *kei* is the moral mind.²³

As opposed to Yi Hwang who considers the unaroused state and the aroused state as the states of feelings, Yi I relates them to the mind. Moreover, the mind is now said to be involved in both states and to include nature as well as feelings. Its division into two types, i.e. the moral mind and the human mind, is according to whether it is disrupted by *kei* or not, though both types of minds originate from nature. He also describes it in a different way by saying that the moral mind originates from the correctness of Heaven and destiny, whereas the human mind originates from the personal orientation of the physical form." This is to secure both the goodness of the moral mind and the goodness and the evilness of the human mind.

Although the sources of the two minds are said to be different, and the minds are said to have different moral characteristics, Yi I claims that the two types of mind are originally one and the same mind. It is true that he sometimes says that

²³ *Yulgok chŏnsŏ* (Complete works of Yulgok) 14:33b. Cf. Zhu Xi, the preface to *Zongyong zhangju jizhu* (Collected commentary on the *Doctrine of the Mean*).

both minds are the arousal of *kei*, but what he really means to say is that they are the arousal of both *li* and *kei* since he believes that “the mind cannot be aroused in the absence of either *li* or *kei*.”²⁴ Therefore, we are to conclude that, when Yi I identifies the mind with nature (and with the moral mind), he means to refer to the substance 體 of the mind, whereas, when he identifies the mind with feelings (and with the human mind), he means to refer to the function 用 of the mind.

YI KAN AND HAN WŒN-JIN ON THE MORAL NATURE OF *MIBAL*

As seen, Yulgok’s term *litong* means “the pervasiveness” of *li*, and his term *keiguk* “the delimitation” of *kei*; they entail universality and particularity, respectively. Although both Yi Kan and Han WŒn-jin were members of the Yulgok School, they put an emphasis on different parts of Yulgok’s theory of *litonggiguk* 理通氣局說. As we shall see below, Yi Kan emphasizes *litong* and claims the sameness of human nature and non-human nature, whereas Han WŒn-jin emphasizes *keiguk* and claims the difference of their nature. The discussion between the two scholars began with their exchange of correspondence in 1709 and continued for about five years. In those years, their topics included not only the question of whether human nature and non-human nature are the same or not, but also such questions as whether the sages and ordinary people share the same nature or not, and whether the *mibalsimch’e* (i.e. the mind-substance in the unaroused state) is purely good or not.

As we have seen from Zhu Xi’s texts, the term *mibal* means “the unaroused state,” but the subject of the arousal appears to be different in different contexts: the subject of the arousal is sometimes feelings and sometimes thoughts. Nonetheless, the unaroused state is unanimously called nature without any exception and so there seems to be no question to be asked about its status. However, there are a number of questions to be raised in regard to it: one might ask whether the unaroused state refers to (a) the state in which there is no activity of consciousness at all, (b) the state in which no perceiving activity has occurred, or (c) the state in which *kei* is not in action.²⁵ Having these various denotations of the

²⁴ For Yulgok, “the moral mind is described as referring “principally to *li*” and the human mind as referring “principally to *kei*.” Such expressions as “principally to *li*” and “principally to *kei*” suggest that, although both types of the mind are aroused in the composite of *li* and *kei*, the moral mind has the characteristic of *li*, whereas the human mind has the characteristic of *kei*” (Yoo, 2012, 155–156).

²⁵ Hong (2003, 197) suggests that (c) was also used to refer to the unaroused state. However, since both (a) and (b) entail the activity of *kei*, (c) cannot be used as a separate criterion of distinguishing the unaroused state and the aroused state (see below).

unaroused state in mind, let us have a look at the views on nature *sŏng* 性 in turn as they were presented by Yi Kan and Han Wŏn-jin.

(1) Yi Kan's Division of the Unaroused State

In his “Discussion on the Good and the Evil of the Unaroused State” (*Mibal yusŏnak pyŏn* 未發有善惡辨) written in 1713, Yi Kan reviews his master Kwŏn Sang-Ha's view that “Since human beings obtain their physical qualities from birth, they can be good or evil even before the arousal,” and comments that “it is right to say that human physical qualities are obtained from birth,” but that “the harmony in the unaroused state of pleasure, anger, sorrow, and joy is the same in the sage as well as in the ordinary person.”²⁶ Yi Kan also distinguishes two ways of talking about the unaroused state. He says that in a shallow sense the sages' nature can never be the same as the ordinary people's because the quality of the ordinary people is originally turbid, whereas in a deep sense all people have the same nature.

Elsewhere in the “Discussion on the Unaroused State” (*Mibal pyŏn* 未發辨) written in 1714, he also explains the two senses in terms of *pujungjŏ mibal* 不中底未發, i.e. the unaroused state in a shallow sense, and *taebonjŏ mibal* 大本底未發, i.e. the unaroused state in a deep sense.²⁷ Now, *pujungjŏ mibal* refers to the unaroused state which all the people can have before contacting external objects. However, since the physical quality of ordinary people is different from that of sages, their unaroused states must be different from each other from the beginning. The ordinary people's unaroused state is still called nature insofar as it is the unaroused state. However, it is incomplete and imperfect since the physical quality of the ordinary people may be chaotic or unstable even in an unaroused state. However, Yi Kan does not acknowledge this sort of unaroused state as referring to the nature he has in mind.

As seen earlier, in the *Zhongyong* the unaroused state of feelings is in general called equilibrium, whereas the aroused state in which they attain due measure and degree is called harmony. That is, all the unaroused state is called equilibrium. However, according to Yi Kan's account, it is possible for a man to reach not only the level of equilibrium but also the level of non-equilibrium even in the unaroused state of feelings. And, by *pujungjŏ mibal*, he refers to the unaroused state of non-equilibrium. That is, the state of *pujungjŏ mibal* surely refers to the unaroused state and as such to nature. However, since it is the state of non-

²⁶ *Oeam yugo* (Posthumous works of Oeam), Book 12, “Discussion on the Good and the Evil of the Unaroused State” (未發有善惡辨).

²⁷ *Ibid.*, “Discussion on the Unaroused State” (未發辨).

equilibrium, it is not really nature in a proper sense of the term. In characterizing this, by referring to some of Zhu Xi's remarks Yi Kan tries to make it clear that the idea of non-equilibrium in the unaroused state is somehow related to Zhu Xi's accounts of *mibal* we have seen earlier. However, it does not fit into any of them since all the concepts of Zhu Xi's *mibal* refer to the state of equilibrium.

On the other hand, *taebonjŏ mibal* refers to the unaroused state which is common to both the sages and the ordinary people. Yi Kan thinks that "the unaroused state mentioned in the *Zhongyong* refers to *taebonjŏ mibal*" (Kim 2004, 86), that this kind of *mibal* refers to the unaroused state that is common to humans and non-humans, and that this state is the one Zhu Xi identified with equilibrium. The reason for his division of two types of *mibal* in the unaroused state is, presumably, to emphasize that the state of equilibrium is not something to be attained so easily, but something that is hard to attain. If the state before perceiving the external objects were to refer to the state of equilibrium, even villains would attain such a state (and presumably become sages) every time when they do not perceive any objects. However, Yi Kan does not want to call it the state of equilibrium in the proper sense of the term and claims that the state of equilibrium Zhu Xi originally meant to talk of is not *pujungjŏ mibal*, but *taebonjŏ mibal*. In this way, Yi Kan objects to the view that there can be goodness and evilness in the unaroused state and admits the goodness of the state only.

The division of the two types of *mibal* is related to his further division of the two concepts, i.e. *ilwŏn* 一原 (one origin), and *ich'e* 異體 (different bodies), which are also influenced by Yi I's theory of *litonggiguk*. That is, *taebonjŏ mibal* is viewed from the aspect of *ilwŏn* and implies that the sages and the ordinary are different because of their physical qualities, whereas *pujungjŏ mibal* is viewed from the aspect of *ich'e* and implies that they nonetheless share one and the same quality of *li* and so there is no difference in their nature.

Once again, there is no doubt that both *taebonjŏ mibal* and *pujungjŏ mibal* are two types of *mibal*. It might seem that these two types of *mibal* might well be taken to refer to the original nature and the physical nature, although Yi Kan does not appear to state it explicitly. Since he thus divides *mibal* into two types, it is only natural that he also divides the mind into two types, i.e. the original mind and the physical mind. For the arousal from the state of *taebonjŏ mibal*, i.e. the original nature, is manifested as the original mind, and the arousal from the state of *pujungjŏ mibal*, i.e. the physical nature, is manifested as the physical mind. As he himself proudly states, the division of the two types of the mind is his own ingenious idea.²⁸

²⁸ *Oeam yugo* (Posthumous works of Oeam), Book 12, "Discussion on the Unaroused State" (未發辨).

Now, since *taejonjō mibal* refers to the state before the arousal, i.e. state of the original nature, it has the moral characteristic of pure goodness, whereas, since *pujungjō mibal* refers to the state after the arousal, it has the moral characteristics of goodness as well as evilness. Yi Kan views human nature and non-human nature from the point of view of *ilwōn* and so claims that they are the same, but ignores their difference. He thus concludes that their natures are not essentially different, though they have different moral characteristics due to their variance of physical qualities. This is no different from the typical Neo-Confucian idea. What is particularly distinctive among the ideas of Yi Kan apart from the two types of the mind is his idea of *pujungjō mibal* which allows the possibility of non-equilibrium even in the unaroused state. This does seem to be quite original. However, unfortunately he does not provide us with any detailed account of it, but focuses rather on *taejonjō mibal* in the Horak Debate.

(2) Han Wōn-jin's View of the Unaroused State

Han Wōn-jin criticizes Yi Kan's division of *taejonjō mibal* and *pujungjō mibal* for dividing *mibal* into two levels. He claims that, insofar as both of them refer to the unaroused state of *mibal*, it is meaningless to distinguish them from each other.²⁹ In saying this, he appears to suggest that, if *mibal* designates the unaroused state and so the original nature,³⁰ it must have the moral characteristic of goodness only. Han Wōn-jin's criticism is more or less based on Zhu Xi's idea. However, he also claims that there is some sort of consciousness in operation in the unaroused state (Hong 2003, 195). As noted, Yi Kan objects to this view and claims that there is only the original nature, but not the physical nature, in the unaroused state and so it is inappropriate and indeed wrong to talk about the evilness of the unaroused state.³¹

The controversy between Yi Kan and Han Wōn-jin now involves the question about the presence of the physical nature in the unaroused state. Yi Kan holds the position that it is not possible to talk of the physical nature in the unaroused state, whereas Han Wōn-jin believes that it is possible to talk of the physical nature not only in the aroused state but also in the unaroused state. Yi Kan criticizes Han Wōn-jin for failing to distinguish *taejonjō mibal* from *pujungjō mibal* and for mistaking *pujungjō mibal* (which can be both good and evil) as the original nature

²⁹ *Namdangjip* (Collected works of Namdang), Book 11, "Appendix to the Discussion on the Five Virtues in the Unaroused State" (附未發五常辨).

³⁰ Cf. *Namdangjip* (Collected works of Namdang), Book 10, "Answering Yi Kong-gō" (答李公舉).

³¹ *Oeam yugo* (Posthumous works of Oeam), Book 12, "Discussion on the Unaroused State" (未發辨).

(which should be only good).³²

However, it is to be noted that, when Han Wŏn-jin allows the possibility of evilness in the unaroused state, he admits only the “possibility” of it. He does not mean that evilness will be really manifested in the unaroused state. He merely wants to point out that the unaroused state in which no consciousness is in operation should not be said to be a purely good state, but an undetermined state of goodness and evilness.³³ It seems that he merely intends to warn us not to forget that the subject of the state (which might be either the unaroused state or the aroused state) is composed of *li* and *ki*. This is to emphasize that the subject is composed of *li* as well as *ki* in both states. To put it differently, it is surely possible to talk about the goodness of the original nature not only in the unaroused state but also in the aroused state, by referring to the quality of *li* only, but in this case its goodness has nothing to do with the physical quality of *ki* (Kim 2004, 92). However, this does not mean that there is no *ki* with the physical quality in both states.

As mentioned earlier, Han Wŏn-jin distinguishes three levels or different types of nature *sŏngsamch’ūngsŏl* 性三層說.³⁴ *chobyŏnggi* 超形氣 refers to the nature transcending the appearance of things, *in’gijil* 因氣質 to the nature originated from the physical temperament, and *chapkejjil* 雜氣質 to the nature mixed with the physical temperament. Since *chobyŏnggi* refers only to *li* which is said to be clear and pure, and since all the myriad things have the same sort of *li*, human nature and non-human nature have no difference on this level. On the other hand, *in’gijil* considers the physical quality to a certain extent. On this level, not only human nature is distinguished from non-human nature, but indeed all the different species are distinguished from one another. However, the members of the same species share the same nature. Finally, *chapkejjil* takes into account all the detailed differences of the physical quality. Naturally, the sages’ nature can be distinguished from the ordinary people’s nature on this level. Furthermore, all the individuals are differentiated from one another on this level. In this sense, *chapkejjil* might well be called a principle of individuation. Among these different types of nature Han Wŏn-jin takes *in’gijil* to be the original nature,³⁵ and this is consistent with “the possibility of evilness in the unaroused state” which we have discussed above.³⁶

³² Cf. An (2003), 42.

³³ Cf. *Namdangjip* (Collected works of Namdang), Book 11, “Diagram with an Explanation for a Discussion on an Appendix to the Physical Quality in the Unaroused State” (附未發氣質辨圖說).

³⁴ For a more detailed discussion on Han Wŏn-jin’s three levels of nature, see Hong (2011), 86–90 and Xing and Lin (2016), 227–232.

³⁵ See Hong (2002), 414. Cf. *Namdangjip* (Collected works of Namdang), Book 7, “Sangsamun” (上師門).

³⁶ For Yi Kan’s objection to this, see Xing and Lin (2016), 230–231.

As seen, Yi Kan distinguishes two types of nature by dividing *mibal* into two types, *taebonjō mibal* and *pujungjō mibal*, and claims that the former is the original nature that the student of self-cultivation has to endeavor to maintain and recover. He also thinks that nature in the *Zhongyong* refers to this state of *mibal*. In contrast, Han Wŏn-jin presents three types of nature, i.e. *chohyŏnggi*, *in'gijil*, and *chapkejil*. *Chohyŏnggi* seems to have the same characteristics as Yi Kan's *taebonjō mibal*, but Han Wŏn-jin takes *in'gijil* to be the original nature which may be identified with *pujungjō mibal*. The difference is that, while Yi Kan's original nature designates pure *li* which is in no way related to *ki*, Han Wŏn-jin's refers to the *li* in the combination of *li* and *ki*.

To put it differently, Yi Kan thinks that one cannot talk about the physical nature in the state of *mibal* or the unaroused state, whereas Han Wŏn-jin thinks that one can talk about it in the aroused state as well as the unaroused state. The admission of the physical state in the unaroused state implies the possibility of evilness in the state. Yi Kan faithfully abides by Mencius' idea of human nature and so rejects such a possibility. It might well be said that Yi Kan admits of the real existence of the original nature which is clear and pure and which exists apart from the physical nature, whereas Han Wŏn-jin admits of the conceptual existence of it by pointing to the side of *li* in the combination of *li* and *ki*.

CONCLUSION

The primary question for Korean Neo-Confucians in the eighteenth century was whether human nature and non-human nature are the same, but this brought about other questions such as whether all human nature is the same (or whether the sages' nature is the same as the ordinary people's) and whether human beings in the unaroused state are always good or have the possibility of evilness. The debate between Yi Kan and Han Wŏn-jin and, later on, between their followers remained irreconcilable. In particular, the question about the state of *mibal*, i.e. the unaroused state, is closely related to Mencius' theory that human nature is originally good. In general, the state at birth seems to refer to the state in which there is no activity of perception or consciousness at all. According to Mencius, human beings are born to be good in such a state. In this vein, Zhu Xi also comments on the first chapter of the *Zhongyong* that the state of equilibrium or the unaroused state of feelings is nature.

The validity of Mencius belief in human goodness still needs to be evaluated, but it is undeniable that the admission of human goodness at the time of birth might seem too idealistic. Nonetheless, Yi Kan's claim that the Sages and the

ordinary people share the same sort of nature is a desirable conclusion that can be used as a foundation of human equality, which is required in modern times. On the other hand, Han Wŏn-jin's denial of the claim is tantamount to loosing a horse in a field in the sense that nobody knows where the horse will gallop to and that one needs to break it in. In other words, his denial of Yi Kan's idealistic view calls for the necessity of education or cultivation.

As mentioned earlier, both Yi Kan and Han Wŏn-jin were the followers of the Yulgok School, but dealt with the question about human nature in different ways and reached different conclusions. As noted, their debate lasted for more than 200 years and undoubtedly became one of the symbolic scholarly debates in Korean Neo-Confucianism, along with the Four-Seven Debate and the Human-Moral Mind Debate. The occurrence of the debate was partly due to the controversial remarks of Zhu Xi and partly to the historical background of their time. However, it is fair to say to a large extent that the debaters' serious attitudes to the subject which were primarily stimulated by their interest in the truth were the starting point of the debate.

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