



# The Idea of *Gyeong/Jing* 敬 in Yi Toegye’s Korean Neo-Confucianism and Its Availability in Contemporary Ethical Debate

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## 3.1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this chapter is to examine the meaning of the word *gyeong/jing* 敬 within Korean Neo-Confucian philosophy, especially that of Toegye Yi Hwang (退溪 李滉 1501–1570), to discuss its implication for his ethics of *gyeong/jing* and emotions (*jeong/qing* 情) and self-cultivation, and to incorporate it into contemporary debates on emotions, moral virtues, and actions. The idea of *gyeong/jing* is a key concept of Zhu Xi’s “new view of equilibrium and harmony (*jungbwasinseol/zhonghexinshuo* 中和新說)” and Toegye inherits and re-consolidates Zhu Xi’s thought into his own *gyeonghak* 敬學 (learning of *gyeong/jing*).

For the topic of this volume, emotions in Korean philosophies and religions, I intend to highlight two points that are mutually related to each

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other: (1) while this chapter will not directly analyze *gyeong/jing* as an emotion such as joy, anger, sorrow, pleasure, and so on, it should be noted that an accurate analysis and understanding of *gyeong/jing* is required to advance discussion on the Korean interpretation of emotion; (2) Korean philosophy should be considered and accepted as a meaningful contribution to the history of both world philosophy and East Asian philosophy.

One can critically argue that Toegye's *gyeonghak* is, after all, no different from Zhu Xi's and/or other Chinese Neo-Confucian ideas of *gyeong/jing*. However, as I discussed elsewhere (Choi 2019), although there is no doubt that one of the major and common concerns of Korean Confucians was to understand Zhu Xi's Neo-Confucianism (*Jujahak* 朱子學), Korean Confucians have had numerous debates in their own ways, through which they analyzed, extended, and clarified Neo-Confucian philosophical ideas. In doing so, they advanced Zhu Xi's Neo-Confucianism with novelty and nuance. Although the scope of this chapter will not fully discuss such nuances,<sup>1</sup> I hope that the passages I select, translate, and introduce, mainly from Toegye's work *Seonghaksipdo* 聖學十圖 (*Ten diagrams on sage learning*),<sup>2</sup> can demonstrate, within certain limitations, how Toegye contributed to Korean Neo-Confucianism through his re-affirmation and re-emphasis of the idea of *gyeong/jing* in his own delicate and systematic approach. This is one of the reasons why I must first introduce Zhu Xi's understanding of *gyeong/jing* which was accepted and quoted by Toegye.

The word *gyeong/jing* has been translated as "seriousness" (Bruce 1922; Chan 1966), "composure" (Graham 1958), "reverential concentration" (Munro 1988), "mindfulness" (Kalton 1988), "inner mental attentiveness" (Gardner 1990), "concentration" (Wittenborn 1991), "reverential seriousness" (Chung 1992), "reverential attention" (Ivanhoe 2000), and "reverence" (Ching 2002; Angle 2009; Chung 2016). As the varying translations by different commentators suggest, addressing the question of how to interpret *gyeong/jing* is far from simple, not only because this single term embraces many connotations, but also because it demands the understanding of Zhu Xi's and Toegye's Neo-Confucian

<sup>1</sup> Further and advanced reflections upon the question of Toegye's meaningful contribution is definitely required.

<sup>2</sup> My attempt to translate Toegye's work was completed while keeping in mind that an introduction to Korean philosophy should be intelligible and accessible to participants in contemporary discussions in the field of philosophy. I also learned much from Michael Kalton's translation and commentary on Toegye's *Seonghaksipdo*, *To Become a Sage: The Ten Diagrams on Sage Learning by T'oegye* (1988).

framework of human nature, mind-heart, and self-cultivation. It seems that many commentators share the views that (1) there is a difference between the meaning of the word *gyeong/jing* in Classic Confucianism and that in the Neo-Confucian philosophical system<sup>3</sup>; and (2) the meaning of *Gyeong/jing* is closer to a state of mind of both concentration on one thing, which was presented in Cheng Yi's doctrine, and the emotion of reverence, which means "respecting something like another person or a set of moral rules." However, while I agree that this interpretation is almost appropriate for some passages of Zhu Xi's and Toegye's works, it fails to adequately explain what they intended to claim with the notion of *gyeong/jing*.

For an accurate interpretation of this notion, I will first explore the meaning of *gyeong/jing* within the texts of Zhu Xi's philosophy, especially selected to advance to examine Toegye's understanding of the idea in his *Seonghaksipdo*. *Gyeong/jing* is not only a means of self-cultivation that is demanded for an appropriate control of emotions, which is closely related to other methods of cultivation. It is also a virtue as a basis of action, although it operates differently from other Confucian core virtues such as *in/ren* 仁 (human-heartedness), *eui/yi* 義 (righteousness), *ye/li* 禮 (propriety), and *ji/zhi* 智 (wisdom) do.

Secondly, I intend to demonstrate that the notion of *gyeong/jing* plays a distinctive role in contemporary debates on virtue and action. It can be interpreted as a mental state which embraces both the moral will to do what is morally right and the emotion of reverence to honor and maintain the human moral nature (*deokseong/dexing* 德性). Although it is not simply a disposition to issue in a pattern of action, it can always make inner desires and emotions virtuous.

<sup>3</sup> Although it may be claimed that in most passages in ancient Confucian texts, *gyeong/jing* means "respect" or "reverence," A. C. Graham interprets that *gyeong/jing* in the *Analects* also has multiple meanings. See Graham (1992: 68–69). Kwong-loi Shun (2013) claims that the idea of *gyeong/jing* is closer to the contemporary concept of traits such as modesty and humility than that of respect for others. See Shun (2013). Recently, Sin Yee Chan examines the concept of *jing* mainly from early Confucian texts such as the *Analects*, *Mencius*, and *Xunzi*. Chan deals with *jing* as a frame of mind and an intentional state, and compares it with the Western ethical concept of respect. Chan's analysis on the difference between respect in the Western ethical discourses and *jing*, while insightful, is mostly limited to the concept in early Confucian texts. It cannot work with the concept of *jing* in the Neo-Confucian tradition, and does not extend far enough to analyze the relationship between the idea and its importance for self-cultivation. See S. Y. Chan (2006).

### 3.2 ZHU XI AND THE NEO-CONFUCIAN CONNOTATIONS OF THE WORD *GYEONG/JING*

This single word *gyeong/jing* is understood to have multiple meanings. There are numerous passages that include Zhu Xi's notion of *gyeong/jing* and thus different commentators may have different lists of the meanings of *gyeong/jing*. Below are selected interpretations of the word *gyeong/jing*, mainly to demonstrate later on how Toegye actively inherits and supports the Neo-Confucian understanding of the notion, especially that of Zhu Xi.

*Gyeong/jing* means "to remove any selfish desire and to concentrate on single-mindedness and freedom from distraction (*juilmujeog/zhuyiwushi* 主一無敵)" (*Zhuzi yulei*: 371<sup>4</sup>). Zhu Xi understood that Cheng Yi used the word *gyeong/jing* to interpret Zhou Dunyi's statement, "Singleness means to be free of desires (*yok/yu* 欲)," so that people could work it out and have a pretty firm grasp of it (*Zhuzi yulei*: 209; Gardner 1990: 169–170). As Zhu Xi said, it is to be "apprehensive and careful and to dare not give free rein to oneself. In this way both body and mind-heart will be collected and concentrated as if one is apprehensive of something" (Zhu Xi 2002, *Zhuzi quanshu* 2: 22a; Chan 1966: 607).

*Gyeong/jing* means "to always keep mindful alertness (*sangseongseong/changxingxing* 常惺惺)" (*Zhuzi yulei*: 1503). It is a state in which the mind-heart is always attentive and observant. In this state, the mind-heart is always clear from obscurity. This means to keep one's moral perception consistent and clear. The notion of *seongseong/xingxing* comes from Chan Buddhism, but Zhu Xi criticized that Chan Buddhists simply alert and awaken the mind without any goal of doing something (*Zhuzi yulei*: 373).

*Gyeong/jing* means "to always examine yourself." To elaborate this idea, Zhu Xi made a distinction between dead *gyeong/jing* and living *gyeong/jing*:

There is a dead *gyeong/jing*, and there's a living one. If you simply hold on to *gyeong/jing*, concentrating on one matter, but fail, when some other matter arises, to rescue it with righteousness and to discriminate between right and wrong—this isn't living *gyeong/jing*. Once you are good at it, *gyeong/jing* will always be accompanied by righteousness and righteousness always by *gyeong/jing*. In quiescence, you'll examine whether you're mentally

<sup>4</sup>This number 371 is a page number as indicated in the Zhonghua shuju 中華書局 edition of Zhu Xi (1986), *Zhuzi yulei* 朱子語類 (*Classified conversations of Master Zhu Xi*).

attentive or not; in activity, you'll examine whether you are righteous or not. (*Zhuzi yulei*: 216; Gardner 1990: 174–175)

Although *gyeong/jing* is a necessary mental state for dealing with moral questions, it is not sufficient alone. It should always be kept with the sense of righteousness (*Zhuzi yulei*: 216). In this sense, *gyeong/jing* is a process in which inner mental states issue in proper actions. Thus, “to be *gyeong/jing* does not mean to sit still like a blockhead, with the ear hearing nothing, the eye seeing nothing, and the mind thinking of nothing, and only then it can be called *gyeong/jing*” (*Zhuzi quanshu* 2: 22a; Chan 1966: 607).

*Gyeong/jing* means “to be attentive.” Zhu Xi said, “Don't think of it as some matter (outside of yourself). It is simply to collect your own mental energy and concentrate it on a certain spot. Now it seems to me the reason none of you are making progress is that you only know how to talk about ‘investigating things (*gyeokmul/gewu* 格物)’ but are lacking in the fundamentals” (*Zhuzi yulei*: 215; Gardner 1990: 174).

*Gyeong/jing* means “an attitude to be orderly and solemn (*jeongjaecom-suk/zhengqiyansu* 整齊嚴肅).” Zhu Xi said:

We don't need many words about the idea of holding on to *gyeong/jing* (*jigyeong/chijing* 持敬). One can thoroughly appreciate and practice these sayings (of Cheng Yi), “Be orderly and solemn,” “Be grave and austere,” “Be correct in movement and appearance and be ordered in thoughts and deliberations,” “Be correct in your dress and dignified in your gaze,” and make real effort. Then what Cheng called straightening the inner part of oneself and concentrating on one thing will naturally need no more manipulated method, one's body and mind-heart will be serious, and the inner and the outer part of oneself will be unified. (*Zhuzi yulei*: 211; *Zhuzi quanshu* 2: 22a-b; Chan 1966: 607)

More concretely, he advised:

Sit as though you were impersonating an ancestor, stand as though you were performing a sacrifice. The head should be upright, the eyes looking straight ahead, the feet steady, the hands respectful, the mouth quiet and composed, the bearing solemn—these are all aspects of *gyeong/jing*. (*Zhuziyulei*: 212; Gardner 1990: 172)

*Gyeong/jing* is an inner mental state, but that is not to say that a way of achieving it is not related to an external bodily attitude. Inner mental states and external bodily attitudes are interdependent.

*Gyeong/jing* means “to stand in awe (*oe/wei* 畏)” (*Zhuzi yulei*: 211). Confucius said, “there are three things of which the exemplary men stand in awe. He stands in awe of the ordinances of Heaven (*cheonmyeong/tienming* 天命), he stands in awe of great men. He stands in awe of the words of the sages” (*Analects*, 16: 8; Legge 1972: 313). According to Zhu Xi’s commentary on these statements, what is meant by “to stand in awe” is “to be strictly cautious and to fear.” Here the ordinance of Heaven means the very moral nature of human beings conferred by Heaven. In the sense that the exemplary men are the ones who understand the human moral nature as the ordinance of Heaven, it is natural for them to stand in awe of great men and the words of the sages, who demonstrate a complete realization of the moral nature. By this state of standing in awe of the three, we could, in turn, keep our moral nature as the right *li*.

To preface the next section where I introduce Toegye’s idea of *gyeong/jing* in his *Seonghaksipdo*, Zhu Xi’s idea of *gyeong/jing* needs to be understood in the context of his philosophical system of *i/li*, *gi/qi*, human nature, mind-heart, and emotion. Zhu Xi, in one of his letters, cited Cheng Yi’s claim that “self-cultivation requires *gyeong/jing* and the pursuit of learning depends on the extension of knowledge” (*Zhuzi wenji* 64: 28b–29b; Chan 1966: 600–602). He also claimed that this *gyeong/jing* is of greatest importance to the Confucian school (*Zhuzi yulei*: 210; Gardner 1990: 171). What is this claim based on? What is the significance of *gyeong/jing* as a mental state within Zhu Xi’s philosophical system? How does this single term *gyeong/jing* come to have such rich connotations, and what is the relationship between *gyeong/jing* and other emotions?

*Gyeong/jing* is clearly part of Zhu Xi’s philosophy of *i/li* 理 (principle) and *gi/qi* 氣 (material force). Human emotions and desires as *qi* do not always realize their *li* to the fullest. The mind-heart may be moral, but is not necessarily so. This is the reason why the practice of *gyeong/jing* is necessary.

In terms of human beings and especially the human mind-heart, *li* is considered to be the human nature conferred by Heaven, and *qi* constitutes human psycho-physical form. For him, the nature (*seong/xing* 性) is the same as *li*. In relation to the mind-heart, it is called the nature, and in relation to events, it is called *li* (*Zhuzi quanshu* 42: 6a; Chan 1966: 614).

This way of identifying human nature with *li* is a result of his attempt to find the foundation of moral goodness, not in externally developed moral rules, but within human nature. Human nature as *li* necessarily implies that it is complete with Confucian virtues such as *ren* (human-heartedness), *yi* (righteousness), *li* (propriety), and *zhi* (wisdom).

The mind-heart itself originally contains moral goodness. However, as Zhu Xi's distinction between *dosim/daoxin* 道心 (moral mind) and *insim/renxin* 人心 (human mind) implies, the mind-heart has the potential for being morally wrong, or evil, because for Zhu Xi, the mind-heart is *qi*. On the other hand, because the mind-heart is a special kind of *qi*, that is, the essential and refreshing (*jeongsang/chingshuang* 精爽) or numinous (*young/ling* 靈) part of *qi*, he couldn't charge the mind-heart for any type of moral failures.

This theoretical difficulty made him reflect extensively on the question of the *mibal/weifa* 未發 (unaroused) and *ibal/yifa* 已發 (aroused) states of the mind-heart.<sup>5</sup> Zhu Xi struggled to understand these two phases of *mibal/weifa* and *ibal/yifa* and the notions of *jung/zhong* and *hwa/he*, and thus set up to create his own theory.<sup>6</sup> In his "old view of *jung/hwa/zhong/he*" (中和舊說), he strongly believed that the *mibal/weifa* state is identified with nature and the *ibal/yifa* state with the mind-heart. However, as Zhu Xi himself examined, in this structure of the *mibal/weifa* and *ibal/yifa* states there is no found reason for why the notions of *jung/zhong* and *hwa/he* must be mentioned. He needed a solid foundation for self-cultivation by which moral goodness can be realized.

It is only after Zhu Xi set up the final version of his view on the *mibal/weifa* and *ibal/yifa* states that the notion of *gyeong/jing* emerged as a key for realizing human nature as the original mind-heart. Zhu Xi understood the *mibal/weifa* state as the substance of the mind-heart and the *ibal/yifa* state as the function of it. *Jung/Zhong* and *hwa/he* are understood to be the ideal states of the two respective phases of the mind-heart. In this

<sup>5</sup>These two terms are found in *Zhongyong* 中庸 (the *Doctrine of the Mean*): "Before the feelings of pleasure, joy, anger, sorrow, and joy pleasure are aroused, it is called equilibrium [*jung/zhong* 中]. When these feelings are aroused and each and all attain due measure and degrees, it is called harmony [*hwa/he* 和]. [This] equilibrium is the great foundation of the world; [this] harmony is its universal path. When equilibrium and harmony are realized to the highest degree, heaven and earth will attain their proper order and all things will flourish" (*Zhongyong*, chapter 1; W. Chan 1996: 98, slightly altered).

<sup>6</sup>For the question of how Zhu Xi's view on the *mibal/weifa* and *ibal/yifa* states has been changed, see Liu (1998: 131–154).

context, *jeong/jing* (情 feeling or emotion) comes to take its theoretical place as the state or condition of the mind-heart, which is manifested after the mind-heart has been stimulated and issued forth.<sup>7</sup>

It is important to note here that the mind-heart as one reality is always discussed by Zhu Xi with the dual structure of two notions; for example, nature and emotions, *mibal/weifa* and *ibal/yifa*, substance and function, what is hidden and what is manifested, tranquility and activity. Through this theoretical framework, Zhu Xi demonstrated not only the ontological structure of the mind-heart, but also the unique position of it as both a safe residence of moral goodness and a potential of being prone to error.

How can the mind-heart be preserved and nature be nourished? This question is the very reason why Zhu Xi emphasized “abiding in *gyeong/jing* (*geogyeong/jujing* 居敬)”; “if one succeeds in preserving *gyeong/jing*, one’s mind-heart will be clear and Heaven’s *li* (*cheonlli/tienli* 天理) will be bright. One should not stop the slightest effort at any moment” (*Zhuzi quanshu* 2: 22a; Chan 1966: 606–607). Here we understand the role of *gyeong/jing*. *Gyeong/jing* not only keeps the substance of the mind-heart as moral goodness, but also makes itself manifest fully and properly in the activity of the mind-heart. In this respect, Zhu Xi claimed that *gyeong/jing* means “the master of the mind-heart” (*Zhuzi quanshu* 2: 22a). It can be understood as a necessary condition for achieving the moral mind-heart, so that all achieve the golden mean even when the emotions are issued forth.

### 3.3 TOEGYE ON *GYEONG/JING*

My brief description of *gyeong/jing*’s role in Zhu Xi’s philosophical system is more briefly but precisely resonated in Toegye’s explanatory Diagram of the Statement, “The Mind-Heart Embraces and Commands Nature and Emotions (*simtongseongjeon/xintongxingqing* 心統性情圖),” chapter 6 of *Seonghaksipdo*. This diagram also discusses what the statement *simtongseongjeon/xintongxingqing* means, by which Toegye claims the importance of *gyeong/jing* practice:

<sup>7</sup>In this respect, although *jeong/qing* is usually translated as “feeling” or “emotion,” this seems to be insufficient. As Lik Kuen Tong points out, *jeong/jing*, as a technical term in Zhu Xi’s philosophy, refers to all mental acts or “intentional” expressions of sensitivity. See Tong (1982).



It is the mind-heart that embraces both *i/li* and *gi/qi* and commands both nature and emotion. The time when nature is issued to be emotion is a subtle moment, which is the center of ten thousand transformations and the moment of separation between good and evil. If learners truly make their efforts to hold on to *gyeong/jing* (*jigyeong/chijing* 持敬) and are not confused between *i/li* and human desires, and if learners more cautiously preserve and nurture (the moral nature) when the mind-heart is not aroused and are well acquainted to examination and correction when the mind-heart is aroused, and if learners accumulate truth and maintain strenuous effort for a long time and do not stop, they will not need to seek elsewhere and be able to accomplish the state of sage learning which means the state of “carefully examine and hold fast to the mean (*jeoniljipjung/jingyizhizhong* 精一執中)” and the cultivation method of the mind-heart which makes possible preservation of substance and [appropriate] response when it functions. (*JITJ* vol. 11: 138; my translation)

Toegye consistently provides not only a theoretical supporting the idea of *gyeong/jing*, but also concrete teachings for his disciples. For example, in one of his letters to his disciples, he emphasizes the importance of *gyeong/jing* with an example of Confucius:

[Toegye cited a passage of the *Analects*]: When Confucius was summoned by his lord to act as usher, his face took on a serious expression and his step became brisk. When he bowed to colleagues, stretching out his hands to the left or to the right, his robes followed his movements without being disarranged.<sup>8</sup> [Toegye comments] This saying emphasizes especially “thinking to act with *gyeong/jing*.” It does not necessarily combine one’s “facial expression,” “personal appearance,” and hands and feet simultaneously, but each naturally corresponds to its “due degree and measure” while acting. This is not so for the sages only; hence we cannot say that it does not apply to “those people below average.” There are certain differences between the pure and the polluted or between the shallow and the deep depending on our inborn and *cultivated* dispositions. (*Jaseongnok*, section 13: Chung’s translation 2016: 89)<sup>9</sup>

In such a broad range of discussion on *gyeong/jing* from its theoretical support to his guideline for its external and behavioral expression, Toegye consistently and systematically constructs his philosophy of *gyeong/jing*.

<sup>8</sup> *Analects*, 10:3, Lau (1979: 101).

<sup>9</sup> Slightly altered. The *italic* is mine.

In this section, I will introduce a few selected passages on *gyeong/jing* mainly from Toegye's *Seonghaksipdo* to demonstrate the way he develops, re-organizes, re-affirms, and re-emphasizes Zhu Xi's discussion on *gyeong/jing*. While Toegye accepts, supports, quotes, and adds his commentary on numerous passages from Zhu Xi, he intends to claim, throughout *Seonghaksipdo*, that *gyeong/jing* is "the beginning and end of the sage learning" and that *gyeong/jing* means "the master of the mind-heart."

Toegye inherits Zhu Xi's understanding of *gyeong/jing*, which is well demonstrated in his description of *gyeonghak* in his famous essay *Cheonmyeongdoseol* 天命圖說 (*Diagrammatic Treatise on the Mandate of Heaven*), section 10:

When mind-heart is tranquil, an exemplary man preserves and nourishes (*jonyang/cunyang* 存養) its *che/ti* (substance). When emotions and intentions (*eui/yi* 意) are aroused, one [should] examines and corrects oneself (*seongchal/shengcha* 省察) and rectifies their usefulness. If one does not consider *gyeong/jing* as the first principle for learning, how one can maintain one's original mind-heart? ... Therefore, before the mind-heart is aroused, [what is meant by] the learning of exemplary men is to take *gyeong/jing* as the first principle and make strenuous effort to "preserve and nourish." After the mind-heart is aroused, one should also take *gyeong/jing* as the first principle and add one's effort to "self-examination and self-correction." (*JTJ* vol. 12: 121–122; my translation)

Toegye clarifies that even when emotions are aroused, one should take the practice of *gyeong/jing* as the first principle and additionally make an effort to "examine and correct" oneself. What Toegye means when he says "one examines and correct oneself and rectifies their usefulness" is that one can control selfish emotions and desires, which results in reducing desires. In this way of cultivation one learns the way of sagehood. In the "Diagram of the Supreme Ultimate" (太極圖), chapter 1 of *Seonghaksipdo*, Toegye cites Zhu Xi's statements:

The sage does not need to cultivate himself, but naturally becomes so as he is. The exemplary men cultivate themselves because they do not attain such a level, but cultivating themselves is the reason why they acquire good fortune. The inferior men do not know this and further violate the way, which is the reason why they will face misfortune. The difference between cultivating and violating depends only on whether one practices *gyeong/jing* or acts recklessly. When one practices *gyeong/jing*, one can reduce one's desires and

the principle will be illuminating. When one can reduce more of one's desires so that one can arrive at the state where there is no desire, one's mind-heart will be empty when it is in tranquility, and it will be corrected when it is in activity. In this way one can learn the way of sagehood. (*JTJ* vol. 11: 121; my translation)

Toegye comments on this passage that to become a sage is “to thoroughly comprehend the inscrutable and spirit-like, and know the processes of transformation, which means to become a person with the fulness of virtue.”<sup>10</sup> Regarding such a process, he emphasizes that when emotions are both not aroused and aroused, the practice of *gyeong/jing* is required and makes the way of self-cultivation for each state to properly and effectively function.

In his introduction and diagram (*cbado/zhatu* 筭圖<sup>11</sup>) for submitting the *Seongbaksipdo* (to King Seonjo), Toegye clearly concludes that *gyeong/jing* is the essential and main focus of all ten diagrams. After he recommends Shun as an exemplar for learning, he emphasizes strenuous efforts for both thinking and learning to become like him. For thinking and learning, Toegye explains *gyeong/jing* as the most significant and required practice:

Keeping the practice of *gyeong/jing* (*jigyeong/chijing* 持敬) is the way of making possible both thinking and learning, going through both active and quiet (state), combining inner and outer (state), and making what is manifested to be one with what is hidden. (*JTJ* vol. 11: 117; my translation)

Toegye continues to recommend concrete methods of practicing *gyeong/jing* as follows:

One should [1] preserve one's mind-heart by practicing strict composure and quiet recollection (*jaejangjeongil/zbaizhuangjingyi* 齋莊精一), [2] investigate principle by studying, inquiring, thinking, and discerning, [(3)] practice admonishment and caution (*gyegu/jieju* 戒懼) strictly even when one does not hear or see, and [(4)] perform self-examination and self-

<sup>10</sup>Toegye is citing this statement from the *Book of Changes*, the appendixes, part II, chapter 5. I adopted Legge's translation (Legge 1966: 390).

<sup>11</sup>The word *cha/zba* (筭) means a form of document which subjects submit to their king or officials submit to higher-ranking officials.

correction even more accurately when alone in a hidden, secretly solitary place. (*JTJ* vol. 11: 117; my translation)

Concerning these methods of *gyeong/jing* with the ten diagrams, he goes on to advise:

When one thinks about one diagram, one should pay special attention to the diagram as if one does not know the fact that there is another diagram. When one deals with one thing/affair, one should pay special attention to the thing/affair as if one does not know that there is another thing/affair. (*JTJ* vol. 11: 117; my translation)

Toegye concludes his advice to the king by explaining the practice of *gyeong/jing* as a requirement to fully realize the Confucian vision:

If one accumulates truth and keeps practice (of *gyeong/jing*) for a long time, the mind-heart and principle (理) will be naturally permeated to each other (such that) one does not recognize that they are integrated and penetrated. Practice and things/affairs will ripen each other, and thus it will be gradually seen that they will be easily and safely done. Although one has to pay attention only to one in the beginning, one will now combine all things/affairs into unified one. This is exactly the state of “steeping oneself (in the Way, what one is learning) and finding it in oneself,”<sup>12</sup> which is the very experience of “grow then can’t stop it”<sup>13</sup> as discussed by Mencius. If one diligently practice and develop what one is endowed with, one will have Yen Hui’s mind-heart of “not lapse from human-heartedness”<sup>14</sup> which is good for the government of a state<sup>15</sup> or one will be like Zengzi 曾子 who knew (the virtue of) *chungseo/zhongshu* 忠恕 (wholeheartedness and reciprocity) as one thread (*ilgywan/yiguan* 一貫)<sup>16</sup> (of the Confucian *Dao*) and possessed duty of transmitting the *Dao* in his body. (*JTJ* vol. 11: 118; my translation)

Here we can read Toegye’s interpretation of the key concepts of Confucian philosophy and how he claims *gyeong/jing* as the essential means of cultivation toward the ideal Confucian status.

<sup>12</sup> *Mencius*, 4B: 14; Lau (1970: 130).

<sup>13</sup> *Mencius*, 4A: 27; Lau (1970: 127).

<sup>14</sup> *Analects*, 6: 7; Lau (1979: 82), slightly modified.

<sup>15</sup> *Analects*, 15: 11; Lau (1979: 133).

<sup>16</sup> *Analects*, 4: 15; Lau (1979: 74), modified.

Toegye ends his introduction by relating the result of practicing *gyeong/jing* to other key ideas of the Confucian classic, *Zhongyong*. If (one's practice of) reverential fear and *gyeong* (*oegyong/weijing* 畏敬) does not part from everyday life, one can complete "the state of *jungghwa/zhonghe* 中和 (centrality and harmony), by which (heaven and earth) attain their proper order and (all things) flourish (*Zhongyong*, chapter 1). Then, as Toegye continues to draw from the text, one can arrive at the state in which virtuous behaviors are only performed within proper human relationships, through which one can attain the subtle unity of heaven and humans (*cheonilhapil/tianrenheyi* 天人合一). As is commonly understood, the unity of heaven and humans is one of the expressions used to show the ideal state according to the Confucian perspective. Here, Toegye claims that *gyeong/jing* is the beginning and end of *seonghak*, and intends to show how the idea of *gyeong* is systematically related to all ten diagrams and lessons from *seonghak*.

In many parts of *Seonghaksipdo*, there is a clear intention to organize and understand the ten diagrams in terms of *gyeong/jing*. In the "Diagram of the *Great Learning*" (*Daehakdo* 大學圖), chapter 4 of *Seonghaksipdo*, Toegye cites Zhu Xi's discussion on *gyeong/jing* from the "Questions and Answers on the *Great Learning* (*daebakhokmun/daxuehuowen* 大學或問)": when someone asked, "How does one practice *gyeong/jing*?" Master Zhu answers with the major points we examined earlier such as "concentrating on single-mindedness and freedom from distraction," "be well orderly and solemn," "always keep mindful alertness and "[keep] one's mind-heart recollected and [do] not [allow] anything" (*JTJ* vol. 11: 131).

Toegye re-notes that Zhu Xi continued to relate the value of *gyeong/jing*'s practice to the teachings of a few Confucian classics:

If one's mind-heart is established in the state of *gyeong/jing*, one will go toward the work of investigation of things and extension of knowledge through which one will understand the principle of things and affairs. This process is what is meant by "honoring the moral nature and following the path of question and learning." From this process, one cultivates oneself by making their will sincere and by rectifying their mind-heart. This is exactly what Mencius means when he says, "if one makes one stand on what is of greater importance in the first instance, what is of smaller importance cannot usurp its place."<sup>17</sup> From this notion, when one proceeds to regulate their family and to bring order to their state, then there will be peace

<sup>17</sup> *Mencius*, 6A: 15; Lau (1970: 259).

throughout the world. This process is what Confucius meant when [to the question on “cultivating oneself by practicing *gyeong/jing*”] he said, “One cultivate oneself, and thereby bring peace and security to one’s fellow people.”<sup>18</sup> The state is also what is meant by “[when the superior man] is sincere and reverent, the world will be in order and at peace” (*Zhongyong*, chapter 33). All of these processes and states cannot be completed if one does not practice *gyeong/jing* even for a single day.” (*JTJ* vol. 11: 131–132; my translation)

Given these desirable states and processes of cultivation, Zhu Xi claims that the one word, *gyeong/jing*, is the essential and main point of *seonghak*. Following up Zhu Xi’s passage on *gyeong/jing* as an essential way of self-cultivation, Toegye emphasizes that one should understand the diagram of the *Great Learning* in the context of not only the “Diagram of the *Elementary Learning* (小學),” but also all other diagrams, and adds his comments to support Zhu Xi’s answer as follows:

*Gyeong/jing* runs throughout both “upper and lower,”<sup>19</sup> so one should not lose one’s practice of *gyeong/jing* both when one starts one’s practice and when one collects the effect of practice. (*JTJ* vol 11: 132; my translation)

In chapter 8, “Diagram of the Study of the Mind-Heart” (*simhakdo* 心學圖), Toegye cites once again these main pillars of *gyeong/jing* to support that *gyeong/jing* means “the master of one’s mind-heart (心之主宰)” and the foundation of all affairs (*JTJ* vol. 11: 144):

[The lower part of the diagram, which is about *gyeong/jing*] from “be discerning and undivided, and select [what is good] and hold on to it firmly,” and below, is all about the cultivation for blocking [selfish] desires and preserving the principle of Heaven. [The lower-left part of the diagram] from “be watchful when alone,” and below, is all about blocking selfish desires. When one attains the state that one’s mind-heart does not move, wealth and high position cannot make him corrupted. Poverty and low position cannot move him. Mighty power cannot bend him. At this stage one will be able to observe that his *dao* is illuminating and his virtue is established. [the lower-right part of the diagram] “Cautious and apprehensive,” and below, is all about the cultivation for preserving the principle of Heaven. When one

<sup>18</sup> *Analects*, 14: 42; Lau (1979: 147).

<sup>19</sup> I understand that this means the teaching of the books and diagrams of “*Great Learning* and *Elementary Learning*.”

attains the state that one can follow one's mind-heart, the mind-heart will be its substance and desires will be its function. The substance is the *dao* and the function is righteousness. Then, one's voice [naturally] follows rules and one's bodily movement is performed according to its proper code. At this stage one can see that one can understand without thinking and attain without effort. In sum, the essential point of applying [all these ideas] for cultivation is that anything is not departing from *gyeong/jing*. (*JTJ* vol. 11: 143–144; my translation)

Toegye clarifies the practice of *gyeong/jing* as a required way of cultivation for controlling selfish emotions and desires so that they can be issued, preserving their principle. What he means by “preserving the principle or the principle of Heaven” is that when one successfully cultivates oneself by *gyeong/jing*, one will be able to make all emotions as function of the mind-heart naturally aroused virtuous and lead attitude and behaviors to follow proper order without any deliberate effort.

Finally, in chapter 9, “Diagram of the Admonition for *Gyeong/Jing* Studio” (*gyeongjaejamdo* 敬齋箴圖), Toegye quotes Zhu Xi’s “Admonition for *Gyeong/Jing* Studio” to finalize his treatise on *gyeong/jing* and sage learning through all ten diagrams which he organized using the teachings of *gyeong/jing*. The Admonition contains numerous guidelines on how and what one should actually do while they practice *gyeong/jing*. I do not have to recite the passage of the Admonition here because we examined concrete rules for practicing *gyeong/jing* earlier in this chapter. It is unsurprising to learn that Toegye himself does not add much of his own commentary. Toegye evaluates the excellence of this Admonition as a summary of the meanings of *gyeong/jing*, quoting the statement by Zhen Dexiu 真德秀 (1178–1235)<sup>20</sup>: “there is nothing left that could be talked about the meanings of *gyeong/jing*” (*JTJ* vol. 11: 148). Toegye also emphasizes the role of such diagrams for *gyeong/jing* practice and concludes once again that *gyeong/jing* is the very beginning and end of *seonghak*.

<sup>20</sup>The *Book of the Mind-heart* (*simgyeong/xinjing* 心經) compiled by Zhen Dexiu was one of the main resources for Toegye’s lifelong study.

### 3.4 GYEONG/JING IN CONTEMPORARY ETHICAL DEBATE

The recent debates on the concept of virtue and the revival of virtue ethics help us recognize that it is time to stop the wrestling between teleological and deontological theories. Influenced by recent debates, many commentators attempt to interpret Confucianism and/or Neo-Confucianism as a version of virtue ethics. Indeed, discussing the issues that arise from the revival of virtue ethics as an alternative to the two dominant moral theories, as well as the interpretation of Confucian and/or Neo-Confucian ethics as virtue ethics, is ongoing meaningful work; but beyond the scope of this chapter.<sup>21</sup> In this limited section, I assume that Toegye's ethical perspective can be characterized as virtue ethics in the sense that virtue ethics, unlike action-centered theories such as deontology and consequentialism, is concerned with the question of virtue/vice, character trait, and/or one's whole life as primary. I intend to support that Toegye's philosophy presents a unique version of virtue theory by providing the distinctive role of *gyeong/jing*. For this chapter, I attempt to approach selected problems that arise in the milieu of contemporary ethical debates on the revival of virtue ethics, from Toegye's ethical perspective on *gyeong/jing*. Although it is widely accepted that the idea of *gyeong/jing* has a very significant place within both the Chinese and the Korean Confucian tradition, the questions of whether and how the idea can be applied to modern life beyond the Confucian tradition are seldom discussed.<sup>22</sup>

Virtue ethics is not a new idea. In contemporary ethics discourse, virtue ethics is, as Gary Watson would have it, not a code or a general moral claim, but a set of abstract theses on how certain concepts are best fitted together for the purpose of understanding morality (Watson 1990: 451). Thus, virtue ethics cannot but meet with diverse objections from different perspectives. One of the most prevailing objections against virtue ethics, which Walter Schiller calls the Standard View (Schiller 1990), is that moral virtues are, fundamentally and essentially, dispositions to obey moral rules, that is, to perform or omit certain actions. In other words, to have a moral virtue is to be disposed to act as moral rules direct, on the grounds that "moral virtues derive their contents from the requirements set by moral rules" (Schiller 1990: 2).

<sup>21</sup> Regarding both questions, see Angle and Slote (2013).

<sup>22</sup> For an example of exception, see Chung (2011).



Against this objection, two responses are possible. First, the main interest of virtue ethics is neither the act nor its consequences, but rather the agent. This, of course, does not mean that a notion of action should be excluded in the debate of morality. Virtue ethics is not interested in one particular act under certain conditions or within a moral quandary, but rather in long-term characteristic patterns of actions. Second, Michael Slote's recent article about agent-based virtue ethics attempts to evaluate actions in terms of inner states of the persons who perform them (Slote 1995: 83–101). This claim seems to be radical within the contemporary view of ethics. He claims that an agent-based approach to virtue ethics treats the moral or ethical status of acts as entirely derivative from independent and fundamental *aretaic* ethical characterizations of motives, character traits, or individuals (Slote 1995: 83–84).

However, I note that both the Standard View and virtue ethicists' responses to it are limited to the debates on the relationship between action and virtue (or character). All of them presuppose that, as George Sher claims, action seems to be conceptually prior because, while we must understand character in terms of action, a particular or long-term pattern, we may be able to understand action without reference to character (Sher 1998: 4). However, although it seems to make sense that any plausible analysis of character traits makes essential reference to various types of actions (Sher 1998: 4–5), it is not necessarily true. Not only can we act virtuously from a particular virtuous disposition, but we can also have virtuous motivations, habits of thought (Montague 1992) will, desires, and emotions that do not always issue in action, but constitute one's character (Premise #1). Action's conceptual priority in *analysis* cannot warrant its priority in ethical and *practical* value and the basis of morality.

I will now introduce my second premise, comparing the common formulas of the fundamental claims of act utilitarianism, deontology, and virtue ethics on right action<sup>23</sup>:

1. Act utilitarianism: An action is right if and only if it promotes the best consequence.
2. Deontology: An action is right if and only if it is performed following/obeying a correct moral rule or principle.

<sup>23</sup>Although there are many different formulas of these major moral theories, I adopt them from Hursthouse (1999: 25–42).

3. Virtue ethics: An action is right if and only if it is what a *virtuous agent* world characteristically [decide to] do in the circumstances.

It seems that virtue ethicists need to provide their definition of “virtuous agent.” Let me attempt this: A virtuous agent is one who has certain virtues. Then, virtue ethicists can offer the list of virtues which are character traits.<sup>24</sup> At this point, if the concept of virtue is defined simply in terms of particular actions and moral rules in order to respond to epistemological questions, the attempt results in the typical critique that virtue ethics is, at best, a version of (can be reduced to) deontological theory. My premise #2 is that, in order for virtue ethics to be established as a significant alternative to the major moral theories and to properly respond to their opposers, virtue ethicists must answer questions such as “what has the priority in both *conceptual and practical* understanding of morality” and “what makes an agent a virtuous one, no matter whether the agent indeed performs a particular action/obeys a moral rule.” These answers should demonstrate the priority of virtues/character traits of an agent without excluding the conceptual priority of action.

From my premises 1 and 2, I would like to suggest that the idea of *gyeong/jing* systematized by Zhu Xi and Toegye can respond to these demands. I would name this philosophical perspective virtue ethics of *gyeong/jing*. As we have examined, *gyeong/jing* is one’s respect for one’s goodness as human nature and effort for maintaining it. It is not simply the act of following a set of given concrete moral rules under a situation, but honoring the moral nature and embodying *li* (理) in all actions. When it is expressed externally, it may come to firstly possess the appearance of respect (*gong/gong* 恭). But the essential role of *gyeong/jing* is to make specific virtuous emotions possible and to keep them virtuous.

It is not simply a disposition to perform a certain pattern of action and to obey a certain moral rule that involves a particular judgment or evaluation; rather, as I demonstrated earlier from Toegye’s passages, *gyeong/jing* is a complex<sup>25</sup> of dispositions such as “preserving one’s mind-heart,” “strict

<sup>24</sup>This is a common way to define virtues that has been adopted by commentators who interpret Confucian ethics as virtue ethics.

<sup>25</sup>I thank Dr. Halla Kim for his comment on this point at the Annual Conference of the Korean Philosophical Society, Kyungpook National University, Korea, November 2019, where I presented an early version of this chapter. He also suggested the possibility of Yulgok’s virtue ethics of *seong* 誠 (sincerity) and Dasan’s virtue ethics of *sindok* 慎獨 (watchfulness when alone) and *seo* 恕 (reciprocity).

composure and quiet recollection,” “admonishment and cautions,” and so on. It is also an even higher level of disposition such as self-examination that controls those dispositions to properly act and continuously make other forms of cultivation like investigation of principle possible. It is also a moral attitude that always leads us in maintaining awareness of human goodness as human nature. In this sense, *gyeong/jing* should be understood as a key for representing and cultivating one’s moral character. Relating to action, it is not only a basis from which moral action can be performed, but also a standard by which a given action can be evaluated.

### 3.5 CONCLUSION

As Toegye explains in the “Diagram of Learning of the Mind-Heart,” chapter 8 of *Seonghaksipdo*, the mind-heart is the master of one’s body and *gyeong/jing* is the master of the mind-heart. *Gyeong/jing* is not simply a disposition which has a tendency to act in a pattern as contemporary opponents of virtue ethics define virtue. Practicing *gyeong/jing* entails one’s practice of admonishment and caution, single-mindedness and freedom from distraction, being orderly and solemn, keeping recollected, and keeping mindful alertness. *Gyeong/jing* is not only the emotion of reverence but also of self-examination, self-reflection, and self-awareness, for which the serious attitude of honoring the originally good moral nature is always implied.

The aim of Toegye’s *gyeonghak* is to be a virtuous person, like an exemplary person or a sage who maintains the practice of *gyeong/jing*, so that even when one simply follows an aroused emotion, their character ensures that a consequent thought, speech, or action will not violate the *Dao*, but “hit upon what is right without deliberate effort and apprehend without deliberate thinking” (*Seonghaksipdo*, chapter 8).<sup>26</sup> As a representative scholar of Korean Neo-Confucianism, Toegye did not stop at inheriting Zhu Xi’s Neo-Confucianism, but advanced to clarify and systematize the idea of *gyeong/jing*. In doing so, he re-consolidated the philosophy of *gyeong/jing* as a holistic approach to self-cultivation, which embraces *both* honoring the moral nature and following the path of question and learning, at *both* the theoretical and the practical level, and performs emotional control in *both* tranquility and activity of the mind-heart.

<sup>26</sup> *Seonghak sipdo*, chapter 8, originally from *Zhongyong*, chapter 20.

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