CHAPTER 4

Yi Yulgok on the Role of Emotions in Self-cultivation and Ethics: A Korean Confucian and Comparative Interpretation

Edward Y. J. Chung

4.1 Introduction

Yi I 李珥 (Yulgok [literary name] 栗谷; 1536–1584) was a leading Neo-Confucian thinker and one of the greatest statesmen in Joseon Korea (1392–1897). He explained certain ambiguity and questions about the textual orthodoxy of Confucianism by presenting his own opinions and

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E. Y. J. Chung (✉)
Asian Studies and Religious Studies, University of Prince Edward Island, Charlottetown, PE, Canada
e-mail: chung@upei.ca

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insights. One key idea in the Confucian and Neo-Confucian tradition is *jeong/qing* (情; emotions or feelings) and its vital role in self-cultivation. Yulgok developed an engaging philosophy of emotions and discussed its implications for ethics and political reform according to his original, creative study of classical and Neo-Confucian doctrines. As far as I know, this interesting topic is insufficiently discussed in current scholarship on Korean Confucianism.[1]

This chapter therefore presents such a topic by focusing on Yulgok's interpretation of the holistic nature of emotions in self-cultivation and statecraft. It covers his famous Four-Seven debate letters and *Seonghak jibyo* (聖學輯要; Collected essentials of sagely learning) as well as his major political essays such as *Yukjogye* (六條啓; Six-article memorial for current affairs) and *Dongho mundap* (東湖問答; Dongho questions and answers [regarding sagely rulership]). The second and third sections articulate the basic nature, role, and problem of emotions and briefly compare Yulgok's views with some Western theories of emotions. I discuss Yulgok's theory that emotional harmony and virtuous action require "the transformation of *gi/qi* (氣; vital energy; material force)"[2] for self-cultivation and ethics, and why this theory supports his practical ideas of political reform as well.

[1] For current scholarship focusing on Yulgok and Korean Neo-Confucianism, consult Ro (1989) and (2019) (a new anthology including two articles on Yulgok), Kalton et al. (1994) (includes Yulgok's Four-Seven debate letters), Lee (2006), H. Kim (2018), Chung (1995; (chapters on Yulgok's Four-Seven debate and self-cultivation), 1998, 2019a). The current literature on Korean Neo-Confucianism, Yi Toegye (李退溪, 1501–1570), and Yi Yulgok includes Kalton (1988, 2019a, 2019b), Kalton et al. (1994), Ro (2019), H. Kim (2015), Ivanhoe (2015, 2016), Seok (2018), de Bary and Kim Haboush (1985), Keum (1998), Chan (1985), Ching (1985), Tu (1982, 1985b), and Chung (1995, 2010a, 2010b, 2011a, 2011b, 2015, 2016, 2019a, 2019c), Chung (2020; on Korean Yangming Neo-Confucianism), Chung (2021; a new book on Yi Toegye's moral-religious thought). For works in East Asian languages, see Abe (1977), Song (1987), Hwang (1987), Geum (1980, 1989, 1998), Yi (1986), and so on. See also the list of references in Chap. 1 of this book for more relevant primary sources and other translations and secondary sources I have listed and cited regarding the Chinese and Korean Confucian traditions.

[2] On account of the complexity of translating some key Confucian concepts comprehensively and flexibly, we use some romanized forms when appropriate as follows: *gi/qi* (氣; vital energy or material force), *i/li* (理; principle [of being], pattern, order), and *gijil/qizhi* (氣質; physical and psychological dispositions). For details on the translation of these and other terms, see my (editors') Note on Transliteration, Translation, and Citation Style at the beginning of this book.

The concluding section presents some further comments. For example, it briefly compares Yulgok's interpretation of moral emotions (*jeong/qing*) with some compatible aspects of Western virtue ethics. It also concludes that the modern relevance of Yulgok's insights emphasizes ethical passions to promote political justice and social wellbeing. His passion for government "people-based policies" and national prosperity strongly resonates with the contemporary spirit of democracy and political responsibility. By putting fresh light on the breadth and depth of Yulgok's thought, I wish to provide an interesting chapter on Korean Neo-Confucianism and the comparative study of emotions and, at the same time, to make a worthwhile contribution to the new Palgrave Studies in Comparative East-West Philosophy.

4.2 Emotions: Basic Nature and Types

Emotion (*jeong/qing* 情) is a central idea in Yulgok's interpretation of self-cultivation and ethics. I translate and explain this key term according to its different contexts. Throughout this chapter, it is translated as "emotion(s)," "feeling(s)," or more inclusively "emotions and feelings." So we use both English words interchangeably. As I have thoroughly discussed in the introductory chapter, the same term can *positively* mean affection, sympathy, or sentiments or also *negatively* denote or relate to such emotions as pleasure, anger, sorrow, fear, and hatred.[3] For Yulgok, *jeong/qing* is therefore a dynamic interplay between the body and the heart-mind. As in the case of his Four-Seven ethics, it also refers to an aroused physical or psychological state, often the result of a stimulation of the mind.[4] In this book, the editors and most chapter contributors generally use the word "emotion(s)" for the Korean term *jeong/qing*.

This topic is one of the most important contributions Yulgok made to Zhu Xi Neo-Confucianism and its Korean school (*Seongnihak*). In addressing Confucian orthodoxy, Yulgok pointed out that there are certain

[3] I also discuss other points about the dynamic and flexible translation of the term *jeong/qing* in the introductory chapter, Sects. 1.4 (Diversity of Emotions) and 2.1 (Emotions in Early (Pre-Buddhist) China). The beginning of the concluding chapter also discusses the translation issue.

[4] For my discussion of the idea and role of *jeong/qing* according to the Korean Four-Seven debate on emotions, see also Chap. 1, Sect. 1.4.1 as well as Chaps. 2 and 6 by Seok and Harroff, respectively. For the original Chinese doctrines, see Chap. 1, Sect. 1.2.2 (Emotions in Classical Confucianism) and Sect. 1.2.3 (Zhu Xi Neo-Confucianism on Emotions…).

ambiguities at the heart of classical texts and Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucian writings, so it is important to clarify their "intended meanings" through one's experience and thoughtful reflection.[5]

In his famous Four-Seven debate,[6] Yulgok rigorously discussed the basic nature and types of emotions (*jeong/qing*). Like Toegye, he debated various questions and issues about the Four Beginnings of virtue (*sadan/siduan* 四端) and the Seven Emotions (*chiljeong/qiqing* 七情), as I have discussed in Chap. 1, Sect. 1.4.1 (Korean Confucian Perspectives).[7] This debate also articulated the vital implication of the Four-Seven interplay for self-cultivation and ethics, most of which was not explained clearly in the Chinese tradition. Yulgok's goal was therefore to interpret a moral, conceptual, and psychological link between the Four and the Seven. The key question was whether the Four should be viewed as moral emotions, intuitions, knowing, or willing that are independent or dependent of the Seven and whether the Seven are to be identified as physical or psychological phenomena, the aroused states of the human body and mind.

According to Yulgok, ordinary emotions, feelings, sensations, and desires all belong to the physical and psychological part of human nature and experience, although they are not necessarily moral *jeong/qing*.[8] In his Four-Seven debate letter, Yulgok states: "In some cases, our mind (*sim/xin* 心) is aroused in favor of moral principles (*i/li* 理); in other cases, it is aroused in favor of eating and sexual desires (*yok/yu* 欲)."[9] In other words, he concurs with Mencius and Zhu Xi's interpretation that all human beings have a common tendency to be virtuous according to the moral essence of human nature backed up by *i/li*

[5] Yi I (Yulgok) (1985), *Yulgok jeonseo* (栗谷全書; *Complete works of Yi Yulgok*), 2 vols., 10: 13a; I, 202. Hereafter, this primary source is abbreviated as *YJ*.

[6] The Four-Seven debate was a very important and challenging topic for eminent Korean Neo-Confucians such as Toegye and Yulgok, as well as among their debaters and followers. It played a powerful role in contributing to the distinctively Korean development of Neo-Confucianism, thereby producing the focused interpretations of Seongnihak thought. It established a major intellectual agenda for many scholars until the late nineteenth century (Chung 1995). Current scholarship on this topic includes: Kalton et al. (1994; a complete translation of the Four-Seven letters), Ching (1985), Tu (1985b), Ivanhoe (2015, 2016), Seok (2018), Kim (2015), Chung (1995: a comparative study of Toegye and Yulgok) Chung (1998), Chung (2019b: on the history, philosophy, and spirituality of the Four-Seven debate), Chung (2021: chapter 4).

[7] For the *locus classicus* listing of the Four and the Seven, see nn. 17, 21 below.

[8] *YJ* 20: 57a; I, 455. This point appears in Zhu Xi (1880), *Zhuzi yulei*, 61:5a-b as well.

[9] *YJ* 10: 4a-b; I, 198.

([metaphysical] principle, ground of being, or pattern).[10] However, this innate goodness is also subject to the daily reality of things and phenomena that are stimulated and conditioned by *gi/qi* (氣 vital/physical energy or material force) as well.

I/li and *gi/qi* are two key Neo-Confucian ideas. Song Chinese Neo-Confucians, especially Zhang Zai (張載 1020–1073) and Cheng Hao (程顥 1032–1085), developed their philosophies by focusing on the idea of *gi/qi*. Cheng Yi (程頤; 1033–1107) and Zhu Xi (朱熹; 1130–1200) articulated their metaphysics and ethics in terms of *i/li*, human nature, and self-cultivation. Yulgok's interpretation is therefore based on Zhu Xi's philosophy of *i/li* and *gi/qi*, a well-researched topic that does not need to be rehearsed here.[11]

In Yulgok's view, sages and ordinary people share basic human feelings and desires that are associated with their physical disposition and functions. For example, all human beings "want (desire; *yok/yu* 欲) to eat when hungry."[12] "Like uncultivated inferior people, the sages cannot avoid eating when [feeling] hungry or drinking when [feeling] thirsty."[13] However, Yulgok argues that these are not moral emotions. We all "desire to wear clothes when cold," "desire to scratch when itchy," and have "the four limb's desire for comfort." Two other examples are "desire to relax when tired" and "desire to have sex when one's semen is abundant."[14]

Accordingly, these feelings (*jeong/qing* 情) are aroused as desires (*yok/yu* 欲) or sensations to satisfy what Yulgok calls the specific

[10] See *Mencius* 2A: 6, 6A: 2, 6; see also *Gyeongseo* (1972). For Zhu Xi's view, see my discussion of his Four-Seven philosophy in Chap. 1, Sect. 1.2.3.

[11] For the translation of *i/li* and *gi/qi,* see the Note on Transliteration, Translation and the Citation Style that I have provided at the beginning of this book. For more discussion on Yi Yulgok's philosophy of *i/li* and *gi/qi*, see Ro (1989, 2019) and Chung (1995, 1998, 2019a). The current literature on Zhu Xi's philosophy of *i/li* and *gi/qi* includes Angle and Tiwald (2017), Chan (1963, 1967, 1986), de Bary (1981, 2004), Gardner (1990), Ching (2000), Tu (1985a, 1985b), Tu and Tucker (2004), Tang (1973), Tomoeda (1969), and so on. For Toegye, Yulgok, and Korean Neo-Confucianism on this topic, see Kalton (1988), Hyoungchan Kim (2018), Chung (1995, 2016, 2020, 2021). Chung (2020) presents a detailed discussion of Jeong Hagok's (1649–1736) systematic critique of Zhu Xi's and Toegye's philosophies of *i/li* and *gi/qi* according to Hagok's creative synthesis of Yangming Neo-Confucianism in Korea.

[12] *YJ* 10: 3b; I, 197.

[13] *YJ* 10: 15b; I, 203.

[14] *YJ* 14: 4a; I, 282.

"individual needs" of the human body and mind.[15] In other words, they are the Aristotelian "natural kind" of feelings (instincts) constituting human nature. This part of Yulgok's theory also resembles what William James, an eminent psychologist (of religion), calls physiological "sensations" (or the feelings of "bodily changes") (1984, 1990).[16]

In relation to desire, Yulgok, like other Korean Neo-Confucians such as Toegye, also talked about the so-called Seven Emotions (*chiljeong/qiqing* 七情): "pleasure (happiness; *hui/xi* 喜), anger (*no/nu* 怒), sorrow (*ae/ai* 哀), fear (*gu/ju* 懼), love (*ae/ai* 愛), hatred (dislike; *o/wu* 惡), and desire (*yok/yu* 欲)" are basic human emotions that "are not acquired through learning from the outside."[17] Yulgok affirmed that all of the Seven belong to the ordinary group of physical and psychological feelings that are understood as the "aroused" (*bal/fa* 發) states of our mind and body. The Seven are therefore not necessarily moral emotions, so self-cultivation requires a measure of control over them; that is, emotional harmony.

In his Four-Seven letters, Yulgok also emphasizes that human beings have the moral type of emotions: desire "to be filial to parents," desire "to be loyal to a ruler," and other desires based on their moral principles (*i/li*).[18] Here it is quite interesting and important to note that Yulgok affirmed "desire" (*yok/yu* 欲), one of the Seven Emotions, as a moral emotion if it follows or is based on *i/li* (principle; moral pattern/order). In other words, one's genuine desire to love one's parents is certainly a moral emotion in accordance with the moral principle (*i/li*) of filial piety.[19] From a comparative perspective, Yulgok's notion of emotions as "desires"

[15] *YJ* 10: 3b-4a; I, 197–99 and 14: 4a; I, 282.

[16] I mentioned these two Western theories of emotions by Aristotle and James in Sect. 1.1.1 (Theories of Emotions) of Chap. 1 of this book.

[17] For the locus classicus for "the Seven Emotions," see the *Book of Rites* (Legge 1970: [1] 379) and *Doctrine of the Mean*, chapter 1 (see Chan 1963: 98). The latter text pays special attention to the first three of these emotions and adds "joy," representing the Seven Emotions as follows:

Before *pleasure*, *anger*, *sorrow*, and *joy* (*rak/le*; 樂) are manifested (*bal/fa* 發; aroused) it is called centrality (the Mean). After they are manifested and each and all attain due measure and degree, it is called harmony. Centrality is the great foundation of the world, and harmony is its universal Way. When you realize centrality and harmony to the utmost, Heaven and Earth will sustain their proper order and the myriad things will flourish. (My translation and *italics*)

For more details on this topic, see Sect. 1.2.2.3 (Mencius: Four Beginnings…) of Chap. 1 of this book as well as Bongrae Seok's Chap. 2 on the essential features of Korean Four-Seven debates.

[18] *YJ* 10: 6b; I, 198.

[19] I discussed this point in Sect. 1.1.4 (Diversity of Emotions) of Chap. 1 of this book.

seems to concur with a contemporary Western theory of emotions as "desires" according to Joel Marks (1995, 2013).[20]

For Yulgok, other virtuous emotions include what Mencius called the Four Beginnings [of virtue] (*sadan/siduan* 四端): namely, "the hearts-minds (*sim/xin* 心; moral feelings) of "compassion" (*cheugeun/ceyin* 惻隱), "shame and aversion" (*suo/xiuwu* 羞惡), "courtesy and modesty" (*sayang/cirang* 辭讓), and "discerning right and wrong" (*sibi/shifei* 是非).[21] These emotions are therefore associated with moral rightness. Regarding the Four Beginnings as moral emotions (*jeong/qing*), Yulgok then interprets the *Mencius* 6A:6 as follows: the moral heart-mind of compassion—which Mencius refers to as "the beginning of human-heartedness (*in/ren* 仁; benevolence)," one of the Four—is aroused after, for example, "suddenly seeing a child about to fall into a well." In this particular case, the child is an apparent external stimulus; otherwise, this compassion would not be a "real emotion."[22] In other words, there are no "aroused emotions/feelings" without being conscious of the world of concrete phenomena. Yulgok writes:

[20] Marks's theory of emotions as "desires" is also discussed in Chap. 1, Sect. 1.1.1 (Theories of Emotions).

[21] The locus classicus for "the Four Beginnings" is Mencius, who emphasized the Four as both the heart-mind (*sim/xin*) and innate emotions (*jeong/qing*). According to the *Mencius* 2A: 6,

A person without *the heart-mind of compassion* is not human; a person without *the heart-mind of shame and aversion* is not human; a person without *the heart-mind of courtesy and modesty* is not human; and a person without *the heart-mind of right and wrong* is not human. … All human beings have these Four Beginnings [of virtue] just as they have their four limbs. For those possessing the Four Beginnings to neglect their own potentials is to destroy themselves. (My translation and *italics*; see also Lau 1970: 82–83 or Chan 1963: 65)

We also read in the *Mencius* 6A:6:

The heart-mind [moral emotion] of compassion is [the beginning of] *human-heartedness* [benevolence]; the heart-mind of shame and dislike is [the beginning of] *justice [righteousness]*; the heart-mind of courtesy and modesty is [the beginning of] *propriety*; and the heart-mind of right and wrong is [the beginning of] *wisdom*. Human-heartedness, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom do not come from the outside; they originally exist in me. (My translation and *italics*; see also Lau 1970: 163)

For further details on this topic, see Chap. 1, Sect. 1.2.2.3 (Mencius: Four Beginnings…) as well as Seok's Chap. 2 on the Korean Four-Seven debates.

[22] *YJ* 10: 6b; I, 198.

> Even the sagely *heart-mind* cannot act on itself with nothing felt (*gam/kan* 感).[23] The heart-mind moves only when it feels something. What is felt involves an external phenomenon. This is because filial piety is generated when one feels for one's parents; loyalty is aroused when one feels for one's king. … How can there be any emotion (*jeong/qing*) aroused only from the inside without [the self] being conscious of the external world?[24]

When one is aware of human relationships, one wants to "abide in human-heartedness (benevolence)," "be filial to parents," and so on.[25] Regarding these moral emotions, "What is felt or what moves is certainly physical form."[26] Emotions are aroused in response to the reality of "physical form (*hyeonggi/xingqi* 形氣)."[27] Yulgok's interpretation therefore confirms the Cheng-Zhu idea of physical form in relation to the idea of *gi/qi*, the human body, and the external world. The mind is "aroused by physical dispositions (*gijil/qizhi* 氣質)."[28] By the term *gijil*, Yulgok meant not only its standard rendering of "physical dispositions"[29] but, more broadly, various physical and psychological factors. This is why emotions are therefore diverse due to the dynamic activity of *gi/qi* with respect to human life and experience.[30]

For Yulgok, then, emotions are aroused as the consciousness of the self responds to concrete things or phenomena, insofar as the human body and mind are aware of and participate in the external world. For example, moral emotions entail some awareness of established human-social relationships. In other words, Yulgok does not distinguish emotion from

[23] The Korean-Chinese verb *gam/kan* 感, used in this passage, has other related meanings such as "to be conscious of," "to be moved [stimulated] by," or "to perceive" as well.

[24] *YJ* 10: 6b; I, 198.

[25] *YJ* 10: 4a; I, 198.

[26] *YJ* 10: 4a; I, 198.

[27] The term *hyeong/xing* 形 represents the body as well; in classical Chinese thought, it was a common character frequently used to represent the human body (as noted by Ames 1993). In Neo-Confucian writings, the same term signifies "form," "shape," or "disposition." The second character *gi/qi* means vital energy or material force; accordingly, the combined Neo-Confucian term *hyeonggi/xingqi*, as explained by Yulgok (and others), refers to physical and psychological forms, as well as the phenomenal world of things.

[28] *YJ* 10: 4b; I, 198.

[29] The Neo-Confucian term *gijil/qizhi* is usually translated as "physical dispositions" (Chan, de Bary, and others), but Yulgok's interpretation also encompasses psychological dispositions and characteristics, in relation to human emotions. For my further discussion of this topic, see Chung (1995, 1998, 2016, 2019a).

[30] *YJ* 10: 7b; I, 199.

reason (cognition), and vice versa because the heart-mind (*sim/xin* 心) is one single holistic faculty that coordinates and apprehends the entire self with respect to rationality and emotionality. This is compatible with Marks's theory of emotions as "desires" (1995, 2013) and Robert C. Solomon's theory of emotions as "judgments" (1993, 1995a, 2001), both of which support the cognitive nature of emotions: in Marks's case, desiring means cognitively knowing what to desire for; and in Solomon's case, judgments "need concepts," so one's judging assimilates to some level of one's reasoning (i.e., cognition).[31]

In his famous *Seonghak jibyo* (聖學輯要; Collected essentials of sagely learning),[32] Yulgok's most extensive and systematic work of Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucian metaphysics, ethics, and statecraft, Yulgok points out that the essence of human nature is "the unmanifested state of the mind" that is always pure and good, whereas aroused emotions and feelings, "the manifested state of the mind," give rise to either good or evil.[33] According to his second Four-Seven letter as well, evil can become apparent in the Seven Emotions or other ordinary feelings or desires if they are not properly *harmonized*. Bad or good emotions depend on whether or not one's *gi/qi* is "impure."

The following section discusses how Yulgok therefore emphasized the active role of emotions in the practice of self-cultivation.

4.3 The Meaning and Role of Emotions in Self-cultivation

The mind (*sim/xin*) coordinates all dimensions of human life and experience because human nature is conditioned by *gi/qi* through the dynamic reality of external things and phenomena. Yulgok states in his Four-Seven letter: "the physical [and psychological] conditioning of human nature can have both good and evil."[34] In other words, when stimulated by external

[31] I discussed this topic in Sect. 1.1.1 (Theories of Emotions) and Sect. 1.1.3 (Dichotomy of Emotion and Reason) of the introductory chapter.

[32] Yulgok's *Seonghak jibyo* is found in *YJ* 20: 1a–20:38b; I, 428–527 and II, 1–81. This major work consists of eight lengthy volumes that are divided into 26 fascicles on many ideas and topics. It is a superb Korean systematization of Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism. For my translation and discussion of a few selected passages from the *Seonghak jibyo*, see Chung (1995: especially chapter V and appendix 4) and (2019a).

[33] *YJ* 20: 57b; I, 455.

[34] *YJ* 9: 39a; I, 195.

factors, either good or evil arises, depending on whether or not the self *harmonizes* daily emotions and desires properly.[35] In his *Seonghak jibyo*,[36] Yulgok explains good and evil (bad) from a similar perspective as follows:

> To be joyful when one should be joyful and to be angry when one should be angry refer to good emotions [of joy and anger], whereas to be joyful when one should not be joyful and to be angry when one should not be angry refer to evil emotions [of joy and anger].[37]

Note that joy and anger in this quoted paragraph are two of the so-called Seven Emotions. In other words, if an emotion like joy or anger is expressed according to its proper ground or context, then it is as good as moral emotions like the Four Beginnings. In other words, the Seven are good emotions when they are harmonized by attaining what the *Doctrine of the Mean* (chapter 1) calls their "due measure and degree." The following statement from Yulgok's Four-Seven letter also articulates the same point further:

> We are joyful when we should be joyful, we are sorrowful on account of bereavement, we are pleased in seeing those we love, we desire to study principles when we encounter them, and we desire to be equal to the worthies when we meet them: these are the emotions (*jeong/qing*) of joy, sorrow, love, and desire [four of the Seven Emotions], all of which refer to the beginnings of [the virtue of] human-heartedness (benevolence). [Similarly,] we are angry when we should be angry, and we hate something when we should hate it: these are the emotions of anger and hatred [two of the Seven], both of which refer to the beginnings of [the virtue of] justice.[38]

In short, Yulgok basically means that the Four Beginnings, including compassion, are none other than "the good side" of the Seven Emotions. It is rationally and ethically justified (or appropriate) to be angry at (or hate) evil things such as injustice and violence. If expressed properly, anger is a good emotion indistinguishable from "the heart-mind (moral feeling) of shame and dislike," that is, "the beginning of justice," one of the Four.

[35] *YJ* 9: 38a: I, 195.

[36] See the first and most important part on "Self-cultivation," *YJ* 20: 1a–29b; I, 427–499. This part of the *Seonghak jibyo* has three main major chapters consisting of thirteen sections that are divided into short subsections on various themes about Confucian self-cultivation.

[37] *YJ* 20: 57a; I, 455; translation from Chung (1995: 146).

[38] *YJ* 10: 7a–b; I, 199, translation, with slight modification, from Chung (1995: 101–102).

Yulgok means that this justified anger (hatred) is a kind of moral indignation; that is, an ethical passion to love and support justice. In my comparative opinion, it somewhat concurs with what Solomon (1993, 1995a, 2001) calls "passion for justice" and "the meaning of life."

Regarding the role of emotions in self-cultivation, Yulgok confirms the self in its interaction with the external world. In the *Seonghak jibyo*, he states that "evil comes from one's own nature that is conditioned by *gi/qi* and physical and material desires."[39] So evil emotions can occur when you remain selfish or ignorant, as disturbed by your "impure *gi/qi*." This is why Yulgok's other major writings[40] all emphasize the practice of self-cultivation. According to his Four-Seven letter, "The sages' physical and psychological dispositions (*gijil/qizhi*) are clear and pure … and their desires have no selfishness and are always controlled properly.[41]

By contrast, inferior (uncultivated) people's *gijil* are "turbid" and "impure," so their moral nature is neglected or lost. This is because their self-cultivation is "incomplete." Selfish emotions or desires make one's self-cultivation a difficult task when moral principles (*i/li*) are ignored. Nonetheless, Yulgok emphasizes: "That which is turbid can be transformed to become clear; that which is impure can be transformed to become pure. This is because only human beings work at self-cultivation."[42]

Yulgok's *Seonghak jibyo* therefore concludes that self-cultivation requires to harmonize emotions and desires by "nourishing your *gi/qi* (氣)" and "transforming your distorted *gijil/qizhi*." The way of nourishment and transformation means "to recover the fundamental moral nature."[43] As Yulgok articulates in his Four-Seven letter, it cannot be done without following moral principles (*i/li*). This is why one has to be "compassionate" to others, "filial to parents," and "loyal to a ruler" on the basis of their moral principles (*i/li*).[44] In the context of Mencius and Zhu Xi's interpretation, Yulgok means that all human beings can be virtuous according to the moral essence of human nature backed up by *i/li* (principle).

[39] *YJ* 20: 60a; I, 457.

[40] Including the *Gyeongmong yogyeol* (擊蒙要訣; Essential instructions of Gyeongmong), *YJ* 27: 3b; II, 82 and *Hakgyo mobeom* (學校模範; An academic model), *YJ* 15: 34a; I, 330. For my brief annotated discussion of these essays, see Chung (1995), especially chapter VI, sect. 4 as well as appendix 4.

[41] *YJ* 10: 14b-15a; I, 203.

[42] *YJ* 10: 3a; I, 197.

[43] *YJ* 21: 6a-b; I, 465.

[44] *YJ* 10: 6b; I, 198.

4.4 Yulgok's Ethics of Emotions: Passion for Political Reform

As we've seen above, Yulgok endeavored to articulate the positive role of emotions and the transformation of *gi/qi* in ethics. Regarding established human-social relationships, Yulgok says: one wants to "be faithful to friends," "be filial to parents," "follows justice," and so on.[45] These moral emotions confirm Confucian belief in the virtuous heart-mind, i.e., the original goodness of human nature. The virtuous emotion of filial piety or "family reverence" (*hyo/xiao*) particularly confirms what Roger Ames (2010, 2020) and Henry Rosemont and Ames (2016) call "Confucian role ethics." Furthermore, it is also important to recognize the extension and application of family reverence as well as justice to society and politics.

In late sixteenth-century Korea, Yulgok provided a new set of passionate ideas and guidelines to reform the Joseon dynasty's institutions. His major political essays, all of which were directly addressed to the Korean king, articulated specific political, social, and economic strategies. Yulgok emphasized this reform as a virtuous and righteous path to "cultivate the self" and "govern the nation" according to the basic teaching of the *Great Learning*, one of the Four Books of Confucianism.

Yulgok's renowned political career reveals a pro-active commitment to this path. In 1569 he submitted to the king the famous *Dongho mundap* (東湖問答; Dongho questions and answers)[46] and proposed eleven new articles on political reform, including two policies for "securing people's welfare" and "education of people." Yulgok meant that this reform will bring about the joy of benevolent rulership, social harmony, economic wellbeing, and political justice. Note that he was aware of "joy" as one of the Seven Emotions according to the *Doctrine of the Mean* (one of the Four Books).

In his *Yukjogye* (六條啓; Six-article memorial for current affairs),[47] another inspiring ethical-political essay submitted to the king, Yulgok criticizes the Joseon dynasty's persistent discrimination based on birth and social status by addressing the true Confucian way of leadership, responsibility, and harmony. In an emotionally and ethically rigorous style, six

[45] *YJ* 10: 4a: I, 198.

[46] This political memorial is included in *YJ* 15: 2a-33b; I, 313–329.

[47] For this essay, see *YJ* 8: 18a–23a; I, 172–189. For some further discussion of Yulgok's *Yukjogye*, *Dongho mundap*, and *Maneon bongsa* 萬言封事 (Ten-thousand character memorial) (*YJ* 5:10b–39a; I, 95–109), see Chung (1995: appendix 4).

urgent reform policies are recommended: e.g., the liberation of talented slaves, and the recruitment of skilled people from the commoners and servants. A reformist egalitarian vision for the people's rights, needs, and concerns is revealed through this and other political essays.[48] Yulgok also emphasizes "people-based" policies and government "for people" and "by public opinion," most of which are, in my view, fairly reminiscent of the basic spirit of modern democracy as well.

These and other political essays reveal Yulgok's passion to transform the practical and socio-political world of *gi/qi*, thereby advocating an egalitarian and prosperous nation. This passion (*jeong*) was not just personal but also ethical and political. In my view, it certainly points to the fundamental spirit of moral equality and what Sungmoon Kim calls "Confucian democracy" (Kim 2014, 2016). In light of the *Great Learning* (one of the Four Books of Confucianism), Yulgok argues that the ethical virtues and passions one develops through personal cultivation ought to be extended and applied to political ethics. In other words, this Confucian way of harmony emphasizes the unity of the self and the public, which also reveals a healthy implication for the promotion of political and social justice in our world.[49] The contemporary relevance of Yulgok's ethics of emotions and politics is commented further in the next concluding section.[50]

[48] In early nineteenth-century Joseon Korea, Yulgok's reformist political thought likely influenced the greatest Silhak scholar, Jeong Yagyong 丁若鏞 (Dasan 茶山; 1762–1836) and especially his practical learning (*silhak*) and ethics. So, it is necessary to consider the intellectual and historical continuum between Yulgok and the Silhak school because the latter's reformist background echoes the former's practical and political thinking. The empirical and practical nature of Yulgok's philosophy and his political reform thought likely influenced such leading Silhak thinkers such as Yi Ik 李翼 (Seongho 星湖; 1681–1763) and Dasan. We can call Yulgok a sixteenth-century pioneer in the early legacy of Silhak thought. For details on this topic, see Chung (2019a). Furthermore, see Chap. 5 of this book for Don Baker's interesting discussion of Dasan's ethics of emotions.

[49] Note that justice or righteousness (*eui/yi* 義) is one of the four cardinal virtues of Confucianism and its virtuous beginning (foundation) is the moral emotion (heart-mind) of "shame and aversion," one of the Four Beginnings (*Mencus* 2A: 6 and 6A:6); see also n. 21.

[50] From a broader comparative standpoint, we can discuss this issue here a little further, although it is beyond the main focus and scope of my chapter. Yulgok's political ethics concurs with, for example, Hyo-Dong Lee's Chap. 7 of this book on the empathetic heart (*jeong*), Confucian civility, and modern Korean democracy: Lee interprets the Confucian concept of emotions (*jeong/qing*) as a core moral-political value for "Confucian democracy" within the Korean context. Lee concludes that Confucian empathy (compassion) as "moral equality" has contributed to the promotion of political civility and "Confucian democracy" in Korea. From a similar angle, Sungmoon Kim already articulated the cross-cultural significance of Confucian ethical politics in terms of moral equality, "Confucian democracy," and

4.5 Conclusion: Confucian and Comparative

Yulgok's thought is both comprehensive and systematic. From a historical and philosophical standpoint, he believed that the continuity or justification of orthodoxy empowers a reasonable process to clarify, update, and/or enrich existing teachings and norms. No wonder why he developed an original and creative interpretation of Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism by means of articulating a practical ethics of self-cultivation and statecraft along with the notion of emotions (*jeong/qing*) and the idea of *gi/qi*. In this regard, we see some similar patterns among several well-known Cheng-Zhu scholars of East Asia: Yulgok (1536–1584) in Korea, Qing Chinese Neo-Confucians such as Wang Fuzhi (1613–1692), Yan Yuan (1635–1704), and Dai Zhen (1724–1777), and Tokugawa Japanese scholars, especially Kaibara Ekken (1630–1714).[51] In recognizing the fundamental need for a reinterpretation in order to address the practical ethical or political relevance of Neo-Confucianism, they formulated similar philosophies by emphasizing the factual and social world of *gi/qi*. This historical and philosophical pattern of change among these parallel wings of the Cheng-Zhu school certainly points to an important topic for more scholarly research in the future.

This part of Yulgok's thought grew partly out of his critique of Toegye's philosophy of *i/li* (principle). In his "Four-Seven debate letters," Yulgok indirectly criticized Toegye for strictly distinguishing the moral and transcendent order of *i/li* from the material, physical, and emotional reality of *gi/qi*. For Yulgok, Toegye was wrong in emphasizing the priority of *i/li* (principle) as well as its self-manifesting moral power because Zhu Xi's original philosophy assigned actual dynamism to *gi/qi* only.[52] This is partly why Yulgok appears to have innovated a *new* direction within the Korean Cheng-Zhu school (Seongnihak) by offering concrete ideas and actions for political ethics and reform. In my opinion, it is therefore a key

political democracy (Kim 2014, 2016), which, in my view, resonates with Yulgok's political ethics in sixteenth-century Korea.

[51] See Brasovan (2017) and Tan (2021) for Wang Fuzhi's life and thought; Yang (2016) for Yan Yuan's; Hu (2015) for Dai Zhen's; and Tucker (1989) for Ekken's.

[52] Elsewhere I discussed Yulgok's critique of Toegye's Four-Seven thesis and his philosophy of *i/li*; see Chung (1995, 1998, 2019a, 2019b). However, we should also note that Yulgok did not *fully* grasp the inner, spiritual dimension of Toegye's Four-Seven philosophy that emphasizes the moral and transcendent reality of *i/li* and human nature. Regarding Toegye's ethics and spirituality of *i/li*, *gyeong* (reverence), and spiritual cultivation, consult Kalton (1988), Chung (2004, 2010a, 2011b, 2016, 2019c), Chung (2021; a new book on Toegye's religious thought).

landmark in the Korean development of Neo-Confucianism, which also reveals the significant distinctiveness of Yulgok's thought in sixteenth-century Korea.

In the West, emotion is flexibly defined or interpreted in terms of feeling, sentiment, affection, sensation, desire, inclination, belief, and judgment according to different theories and approaches, whether classical or contemporary.[53] Despite some fundamental differences, certain modern Western theories of emotions are similar to Yulgok's Korean Neo-Confucian interpretation that the causes or reasons of emotions are within the world of human life, experience, and knowledge, regardless of how our emotions and feelings are aroused, expressed, learned, contextualized, cherished, or criticized.

For Yulgok, certain emotions (*jeong/qing*) are aroused as desires (*yok/yu* 欲) to fulfil the specific "individual needs" of the human body and mind. This Neo-Confucian theory apparently resonates with what James emphasized as physiological "sensations" (or feelings of "bodily changes") (1984, 1990). From a related comparative angle, Yulgok's notion of emotions (*jeong*) as "desires" also concurs with Marks's theory of emotions as "desires" (1995, 2013).[54] Furthermore, "desire to be filial to parents" and the Four Beginnings of virtue engage some level of one's moral awareness and conscious judgment. As I mentioned in the foregoing sections, despite some fundamental difference of philosophical standpoint, Yulgok's interpretation is compatible with Solomon's emphasis on emotions as "judgments" (1993, 1995a, 2001). Furthermore, we can also compare Yulgok's humanistic ethics of compassion with Michael Slote's virtue ethics of "empathy" (Slote 2007, 2010) because empathy is a "moral motivation" and moral virtues like "compassion and benevolence are best understood in relation to empathy" (Slote 2020: 61).[55] A good question beyond the limited focus and scope of this chapter is to discuss the differences among

[53] I discussed this topic in Sect. 1.1.1 (Theories of Emotions) and Sect. 1.1.4 (Diversity of Emotions) of the introductory chapter. See also Solomon (1995b, 2003) and Marks and Ames (1995).

[54] See also Marks's well-known book *It's Just a Feeling: The Philosophy of Desirism* (2013), according to which most emotions tend to be the natural feelings of "wanting" or "desire," although certain emotions are not necessarily moral.

[55] Slote emphasizes this point in chapter 5 ("Many Roles of Empathy") of his new book, *Between Psychology and Philosophy: East-West Themes and Beyond* (2020: 61–92). This chapter presents a comparative discussion of empathy in Chinese (Confucian) and Western thought, especially from an ethical and psychological standpoint.

Yulgok's interpretation and these contemporary Western theories more specifically in a new detailed, comparative study.[56]

Furthermore, what we can discover here is that unlike Marks's, Solomon's, and Slote's modern theories/ethics of emotions, the sixteenth-century Korean thinker's philosophy not only emphasizes real *actions*, not just theoretical ideas, but, more importantly, *actively* inspired and *participated* in a development of political reform, social improvement, and cultural prosperity. In other words, this represents the Korean distinctiveness/excellence of Yulgok's Neo-Confucian virtue ethics.

According to Yulgok, evil can happen if one's body or mind remains attached to "selfish" desires. This is why he calls for a way of self-transformation to harmonize our emotions, feelings, and thoughts. In my opinion, it is about the question of how we can positively integrate the emotional and other interconnected dimensions of human life and experience. This integration would inspire our ideas and passions; guide our beliefs, values, and judgments; and determine the ultimate meaning to life. Not only does this represent the heart of Yulgok's interpretation in the practical spirit of the Confucian Way, but it also has a potentially engaging implication for the comparative and cross-cultural study of emotions.

Yulgok saw our emotional dynamics as conditioned by material, physical, social, moral, and other related factors. Accordingly, the true understanding of emotions is not just a conceptual, theoretical, or psychological matter but, more importantly, *inspires* the holistic practice of self-cultivation and ethics. Yulgok passionately advocated political reform actions to bring about economic and cultural benefits to a Confucian society at large. His emphasis on moral emotions for political justice and social wellbeing also seems to support Solomon's ethics of "passion," "justice," and "ethical life" (1993, 1995a, 1995b).

In this regard, Yulgok must have captured certain insights into the humanistic and political role of emotions in dealing with the core teaching of Confucianism. We can conclude that the modern spirit of democracy, political responsibility, and social justice resembles Yulgok's ethical passions for good government "for people" and "by public opinion,"

[56] In the coming years, I hope to prepare a book manuscript on Yi Yulgok's life and thought that will likely include such a detailed study (chapter). It will be based on my translation and interpretation of Yulgok's famous philosophical and political essays.

"people-based policies," and national prosperity.[57] This is another key reason for us to recognize the contemporary relevance of Yulgok's Korean Neo-Confucian ethics and politics of passions (*jeong*).

Overall, according to Yulgok, emotional harmony plays an essential role in self-cultivation, virtuous action, and politics. It ought to be done through the regulation and harmonization of our physical, emotional, intellectual, and ethical faculties in interaction with the daily reality of things and phenomena. In other words, human emotionality can indeed inspire personal cultivation, human relationships, and socio-political development.

The contemporary significance of Yulgok's thought emphasizes the *positive* role of our passions in personal development and cultural wellbeing. In my opinion, this is the significant distinctiveness of Korean Neo-Confucianism, which has some vital implication for our cross-cultural study of emotions as well. To conclude, I hope to have provided a thought-provoking chapter for Yulgok's thought and the comparative ethics of emotions, thereby making a worthwhile contribution to this book.

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[57] The contemporary notion of "Confucian democracy" (Kim 2014, 2016) is also relevant here. Another interesting point that emerges out of my chapter is to develop a new comparative study that will articulate Yulgok's moral-political thought, especially in terms of human dignity and equality, social harmony, political justice, Confucian political thinking, and so on. In the near future, I hope to prepare a book manuscript on Yulgok's Neo-Confucian thought, which will likely include such a study.

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