Is there a Post-Neo-Confucianism? Ch'ng Yagyong, It Jinsai, and the unraveling of li-ch'i metaphysics

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In this paper we plan to explore the varying extent and ways in which certain schools of thought in the Tokugawa and especially the Chosön period, exemplified by the work of It Jinsai (1627-1705) and Ch'ng Yagyong (1762-1836), may have challenged and transcended the boundaries set by the Chuang-Chu school, or in other words, orthodox Neo-Confucian thinkers.

These challenges are politically as well as philosophically significant, for orthodox Neo-Confucianism served as a de facto ruling ideology both in the Chosön dynasty as well as Ming and Qing China. Tokugawa Japan did not have a civil service examination system, and yet key advisers to the shoguns, and specifically members of the Hayashi family, used the neo-Confucian teachings as the basis of their political and ethical values and policies.

The term Neo-Confucianism is often used as a translation of the Chinese term hsing-li hsueh, which literally means the learning of human nature and principle, and in practice refers to a philosophical movement which sought to construct a metaphysical framework for, and in so
doing, ascribe a cosmic significance to, the Confucian and Mencian teachings on practical ethics and human nature. This movement includes two major schools of thought, the Ch=eng-Chu school on the one hand, referring to the teachings of the Ch=eng brothers and Chu Hsi, and the Lu-Wang school on the other, referring to the teachings of Lu Hsiang-Shan and Wang Yang-ming.

Consequently, when scholars refer to something as "Neo-Confucian" they usually mean either, (1) that it is related to one of the two schools of thought mentioned above or (2) that it uses the li-ch=i (principal / material force) conceptual framework propounded by these schools.

Specifically, the Ch=eng-Chu Neo-Confucians tried to link humans with the cosmos by constructing a metaphysics which posited li, a cosmic pattern or principle which was both natural and normative, as the essence of human nature. The Lu-Wang school extended the linkage between principle and human existence by equating principle with the mind, which was a broader concept than human nature as it included the sphere of intentions and emotions.

The indiscriminate usage of the term "Neo-Confucian" to refer to Confucian schools of thought after the Sung is symptomatic of a widespread neglect of the work of certain thinkers who in one way or another seriously challenged key premises of the Neo-Confucian philosophical system. It is of course widely recognized that the Ch=eng-Chu school had serious critics during the Ming and especially the Ch=ing periods. Nonetheless there is little recognition that some of the most serious and systematic of the challenges to the Ch=eng-Chu system were launched in Japan and Korea. The authors of these challenges were not content to simply question Chu Hsi=s particular formulation of principle / material force metaphysics, but went on to challenge the

relevancy and orthodoxy of his principle / material force conceptual framework itself, and
furthermore, propose alternative philosophical systems. The lack of awareness of the nature of
these challenges is not surprising in view of the historic tendency of Chinese scholars to ignore or
minimize the contributions of Korean and Japanese Confucians to the unfolding of the tradition as
a whole.

This paper is a preliminary attempt to argue that 1) the work of the Tokugawa scholar It
Jinsai represents a pioneering effort to challenge essential premises of the principle / material force
metaphysical system prior to similar efforts in China; 2) comparable critiques, probably
independent of It =s influence, picked up momentum on the continent in the work of the so-called

k=ao-cheng or Aevidential philosophers;@ and 3) inspired by It Jinsai and using the more rigorous

scholarly methodology of evidential learning imported from the Ch=ing. the Korean scholar
Ch4ng Yagyong effected a still more radical critique of the principle / material force system. He
built on previous efforts not only by challenging the viability of the concept of li or principle but
furthermore by unraveling the ontological conception of human nature (hsing) with which it was
closely associated. In its place he proposed an alternative philosophical system based on a
dynamic, psychological interpretation of human nature.

It  Jinsai’s challenge

It  Jinsai’s critique of Chu Hsi’s teachings is regarded as mainly Apolemical® by certain scholars as it was allegedly written to appeal to the sensibilities of the townspeople of Kyoto who looked askance at the Samurai exploitation of Chu Hsi’s philosophy in their effort to legitimize their powerful social status. Another reason why this critique is not taken at face value is that the championing of It  as an independently minded thinker who resisted a common tendency to

unquestioningly follow Chinese models is interpreted by some to be a philosophical expression of a nationalistic agenda.

Irrespective of whether It  and those who championed him were politically motivated or not, it is clear from the content of his *Gom jigi* (Meaning of the *Analects* and *Mencius*) as well as
Rongo kogi (Ancient meaning of the Analects) that his critiques were far from empty manifestos that skirted direct engagement with the substance of Ch=eng-Chu philosophy. On the contrary, It =s work unabashedly challenges most of the key premises of Chu Hsi=s system, including his innovative theory of self cultivation based on ko-wu, the āinvestigation of things, āhis emphasis on the cultivation of the mind through quiet sitting, and his t=i-yung or substance/function paradigm. It objected to the substance/function metaphysical frame of reference particularly because substance was associated with principle and thus regarded as the essence or root of phenomena, and function with āaffairs, āor the branches. According to It this association could easily lead to an overemphasis on the value of principle and a neglect of practical affairs such as filial piety and brotherly deference.²

Still more significant than this critique was It=s effort to extricate considerations of the

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² Gom jigi, in Yoshikawa K jir and Shimizu Shigeru, eds., It Jinsai, It T gai, Nihon
human condition from the principle / material force cosmic framework. It directly undermined the

latter system by drawing a sharp distinction between the Way of T’ien (the cosmos) and the Way of Humanity, arguing that the three Ways of T’ien, earth, and humanity must not be confused with each other. Yin and Yang should not be called the way of humanity, and neither should humanity and integrity be referred to as the Way of T’ien. It further argued that Confucius regularly talked about the Way of humanity and rarely about the Way of T’ien. It implied that

metaphysical concepts were not applicable to the human condition, and furthermore that Confucius rarely mentioned them due to his emphasis on practical ethics. The etymology of the concept of the *Tao* (Way) clearly indicated that its proper usage lay in the realm of practical affairs.

In keeping with his emphasis on the distinction between a metaphysical Way and the Way

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3 Gom *jigi*, 122.

of humanity, It insisted that the term li (principle) was only applicable to inanimate objects, and this was the context in which it was referred to in the Book of Changes.\(^5\)

In this way It undermined an essential ontological premise of the Ch=eng-Chu school, by attacking its identification of li or principle with human nature. As argued above, this identification of principle with human nature represented the linchpin of Chu Hsi=s system, as indicated by the etymology of hsing-li hsueh, the Chinese term for Neo-Confucianism.

It raised questions about the distinction Chu Hsi had drawn between the positions of Confucius and Mencius, when he claimed that the former=s only reference to human nature identified it with the physical nature, whereas the latter had identified it with the original nature. This was, It suggested, tantamount to splitting up the lineage of classical Confucianism into two

\(^5\) Gom jigi, 125.
It argued that Mencius had expounded on the goodness of human nature only in the context of the activity of the mind, and went as far as suggesting that the idea of an ontological goodness divorced from human activity, which was implied by the theory of original nature was absurd. It did not make sense to endow concepts such as activity and stillness and good and evil with meanings separate from those used in ordinary parlance.

It =s concept of a dynamic human nature was based on a celebrated discourse by Mencius on the psychological and ethical foundations of ideal government. According to Mencius, humans without exception are endowed with benevolent tendencies. These tendencies are often hidden from view, as most social environments do not encourage people to take the reflective approaches necessary to nourish them. Nonetheless they surface in certain critical situations, and with regular nourishment they can grow and become a motivating force in a wide range of essential human relationships. If rulers would only extend these subtle tendencies in their leadership of the nation,

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6 Ibid, 134.
7 Ibid, 135, 136.
8 Ibid, 136.
9 Mencius 2A.6.
it would be “as easy to rule the empire as rolling something on one’s palm.”\(^{10}\)

Mencius illustrated the spontaneity of these tendencies by arguing that if anyone saw a defenseless child about to fall into a well they would feel alarm and pity. This feeling of alarm and pity or the “heart of alarm and pity,” as Mencius puts it, is described as the \(t’uan\) of the most treasured Confucian virtue of humanity (\(jen\)). Etymologically \(t’uan\) means “origin,” “sprout” or the “extremity of a thread.” In this latter sense it can thus be translated either as “beginning” or “end,” meaning that the heart of alarm and pity could be interpreted to mean either the innate source of the Confucian virtue of humanity, or the external expression of an innate humanity.

Mencius further argued that humans exhibit other feelings closely associated with the great virtues. The heart of shame is the \(t’uan\) of righteousness or integrity, the heart of courtesy and modesty is the \(t’uan\) of propriety, and the heart of right and wrong, or in other words the gut feeling that something is right or wrong, is the \(t’uan\) of the virtue of wisdom. The Sung Neo-Confucians took \(t’uan\) to mean the “end of a thread.”\(^{11}\) This interpretation lent strength to their conception of virtue as originating within the nature as moral principle, and the feelings as representing the external expression of these innate virtues. Feelings, in other words, were not directly associated with principle but rather were the result of the mind’s response to external things, and were thus considered to be easily prone to distortion by turbid material force.

It Jinsai was one of the earliest Confucian thinkers to recognize that the Ch’eng-Chu

\(^{10}\) Ibid.

\(^{11}\) Chu Hsi, \(Meng-tzu chi-chu\), 2:12a, in Ssu-shu chi-chu, SPPY edition.
interpretation of the Mencian concept of nature had radical implications for ethical theories. According to Jinsai, Ch’eng I and Chu Hsi had profoundly misunderstood Mencius. The graph \textit{t’uan}, according to early Han and Wei commentators such as Cheng Hsuan, clearly meant “origin” or “root,” and consequently the innate tendencies or “hearts” of pity, shame and dislike, modesty and compliance, and right and wrong, were the roots or sprouts of the Confucian virtues of humanity, integrity, propriety and wisdom, respectively. In other words, the sprouts were inborn tendencies that, if nourished and extended to a broader array of relationships, would blossom into the Confucian virtues.\footnote{It Jinsai, \textit{Mosi kogi} 2.619, in Nihon meika chushaku zensho, vol. 2 (Tokyo T y tosho kankokai, 1936).} Human nature was not a nebulous concept that somehow existed prior to the expression of emotions, but on the contrary was closely associated with the affections. Contrary to the Ch’eng-Chu school, Mencius does not refer to human nature aside from the physical endowment, which includes the emotions.\footnote{\textit{Gom jigi}, 135.}

Furthermore, It felt that the “sprouts” were the basis of the goodness of human nature, and that prior to their expression there was no intrinsic good or evil within nature itself. If, as Chu maintained, human nature was principle, then it would be possible to claim that this nature was intrinsically good, but he found no evidence in the classics that nature was associated with a
metaphysical *principle.*

It does an admirable job of clarifying what human nature is not, but he is less ready to

precisely specify what it is. This hesitation could be due to a reluctance, shared by Confucius and
to a lesser extent Mencius, to dwell in too much detail on abstract matters far removed from the
sphere of practical ethics, which of course was the focus of It’s teachings. Nonetheless, as

explained above, It does sketch the parameters of the concept of human nature, stating that it is
closely associated with the physical dispositions, particularly the feelings which are a direct
expression of the nature, and furthermore that it is a dynamic rather than ontological concept.14

**Chinese reactions to Chu Hsi**

Prior to It Jinsai, there were of course, outspoken critics of the Ch=eng-Chu school. The
seeds of opposition are found as early as the idealistic Sung Neo-Confucian Lu Hsiang-shan, who felt that their approach to self-cultivation was too bookish and that their metaphysics was too dualistic. These criticisms were taken up by Wang Yang-ming and given further emphasis in his reinterpretation of the famed steps of the *Great Learning*. Nonetheless Lu and Wang still retained the concept of a metaphysical principle, which they equated with the mind rather than human nature, as a centerpiece of their respective philosophies.

During the Late Ming and early Ch‘ing a different kind of critique emerged in the work of Lo Ch‘in-shun and Wang Fu-chih (1619-1692), who, inspired by the work of Lo, vigorously opposed the tendency to reify principle rather than to regard it simply as the pattern of material force (*ch‘i*). They were clearly opposed to Ch‘eng I’s rather dualistic perception of the relationship between principle and material force, claiming that principle was simply the principle of material force.

Nonetheless Wang claimed that dualistic bifurcations of nature into a good original nature and a physical nature that was a mixture of good and evil were misinterpretations of Ch‘eng I’s philosophy. According to Wang, when Ch‘eng I spoke about the physical nature he was only implying that this nature lay within the physical element of humans.

Wang further argued that principal operates within material force, and in this context it controls and distributes material force. The concrete forms of objects thus embody material force,

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16 *Tu ssu-shu ta-ch‘uan-shuo*, 8.16.
and material force in turn embodies principle. It is because these physical forms embody material
force that a human has vitality, and it is because the material force embodies principle that humans
have a nature.\(^{17}\)

In this way Wang extended his cosmology, which is based on his concept of the
inseparability of principle and material force, where principle is purely the orderly pattern of
material force, to the sphere of human nature. In doing so he blurred the Ch’eng-Chu
Neo-Confucian distinction between the original and physical natures, while retaining the principle
/ material force framework in his discussion of the two integrated aspects of human nature.

The early Ch’ing proponent of shih-hsueh (Practical Learning) Yen Yuan, who flourished
less than a decade after Wang Fu-chih, was inspired by the principle / material force monism of
both Wang and Lo. Yen concluded that the distinction between the moral and physical natures,
whereby the moral or original nature was equivalent to principle, and the physical nature consisted
of principle embedded in material force, was false and misleading.\(^{18}\)

Yen Yuan weakened the relevance of the principle / material force system by implying that
the existence of material force has no bearing on the question of the good and evil of human nature.
According to Yen, the physical nature is nothing but the practical expression of the conferred
nature, and consequently cannot be referred to as evil. The evil expressed by humans results from
their lack of ability to exert self control in their relationships with their social and material
environments.\(^{19}\)

\(^{17}\) Ibid.
\(^{18}\) Yen Yuan. Ts’un-hsing pien, 2.5.
\(^{19}\) Ts’un-hsueh pien, 1.11-13.
Like the Sung Neo-Confucians Yen maintained that the nature of things results from the endowment of principle and that their physical endowment results from the conglomeration of material force. On the other hand he parted ways with the traditional Neo-Confucian explanation of evil by claiming that what corresponds to the Mean pertains to principle and material force, but what deviates from the Mean also pertains to them.20

Because Wang Fu-chih and Yen Yuan refused to associate the existence of material force, and particularly turbid material force, with evil, they were consequently able to elevate the status of the emotions (ch’ing), or rather to rehabilitate them, to the respectability they were accorded during the classical Confucian period.21

In view of the above it is apparent that Wang and Yen did not reject the use of principle / material force philosophy in their descriptions of the human condition, and continued to use the concept of material force when dealing with questions of human nature. Their main disagreements with the Ch’eng-Chu school were that they felt principle was simply the pattern of material force, that evil was not associated with the turbidity of material force but resulted from human enslavement by material things, and that the emotions provided the impetus for self cultivation rather than representing mainly a hindrance to the same.

20 Ts’un-hsing pien, 3-4.

21 Yen Yuan furthermore argues: “how can it be argued that principle is solely and uniquely good whereas the physical endowment tend towards evil?” Ibid, 1.1.
It Jinsai=s philosophy represents a significant step beyond this position by directly asserting that the principle / material force system, and especially principle, was inapplicable to the human condition and human nature in particular. It was only with Tai Chen of the middle Ch=ing, who used the more rigorous and objective scholarly methods of k=ao-cheng hsueh (Evidential Learning) to analyze classical philosophy, that China saw the beginnings of an explicit effort to disassociate discussions of the human condition from the concept of principle.22 Yet curiously, and perhaps not coincidentally, it was in Chos4n Korea, the bastion of Neo-Confucian orthodoxy, that one of the most systematic efforts to dismantle principle / material force philosophy came to maturity, in the philosophy of Ch4ng Yagyong.

Ch4ng Yagyong’s critique

Ch4ng=s philosophy resembles that of his Japanese Kogaku and late Ming/early Ch=ing predecessors in a number of respects, including his rejection of the Ch=eng-Chu scholar’s theory of self-cultivation based on ko-wu, their theory of the investigation of things, their emphasis on the cultivation of the mind through introspection, and their t=i-yung or substance/function.

22 Benjamin Elman has pointed out that Tai Chen=s work bears some interesting resemblances to the work of It Jinsai, though these are not specified. See Benjamin A. Elman, From Philosophy to Philology: Intellectual and Social Aspects of Change in Late Imperial China (Cambridge: Council on East Asian Studies, 1985), 227.
paradigm. Furthermore, like It, Ch4ng sharply distinguished the Way of T’ien from the Way of Humanity, and in so doing attacked the cosmological framework the Sung Neo-Confucians had used to discourse on the significance of Classical Confucian ethics. Nonetheless Ch4ng’s most significant contribution to the unraveling of the principle / material force system and the formulation of a consistent alternative vision lay in his reinterpretation of the concept of human nature.

Like his Kogaku and k=ao-cheng predecessors Ch4ng was strongly opposed to the bifurcation of human nature into an original nature and a physical nature, where original nature was identified with a cosmic, a priori principle and the physical nature was regarded as principle implanted in material force, and thus susceptible to good and bad emotions. According to Ch4ng, there was no basis for this view in the teachings of either Confucius or Mencius. As we shall see, he did maintain that human nature exhibited both moral and sensual tendencies, but he argued that these were both essentially psychological inclinations, and he was strongly opposed to the idea of ascribing different metaphysical spheres to them. It and later Yen Yuan had implied that the idea of original nature did not reflect the teachings of Classical Confucianism as Mencius had only

referred to human nature in the context of the physical dispositions.\textsuperscript{24} It is implicit conception of human nature, which he shares with Yen Yuan, as a dynamic, psychological attribute instead of a passive ontological one, is given more systematic expression by Ch4ng Yagyong.

Ch4ng is much more ready, or perhaps one should say eager, to delineate a detailed theory of human nature that, like It, he claims is solidly grounded in the teachings of Mencius. He agrees with Ito that the essence of human nature is represented by the benevolent tendencies. Moreover he argues that the virtues are the result of extending these innate tendencies to the sphere of action. In this regard Ch4ng is more emphatic than It, repeatedly pointing out that virtue is only realized as a result of ethical action, and cannot exist before action has taken place. According to Ch4ng,

\textsuperscript{24} Gom jigi, 136.
Originally there is no virtue within the mind, only the upright nature. What is meant by “virtue” is action in accord with the upright mind. The term virtue is only applicable upon the completion of good deeds. How can one have ‘illustrious virtue’ prior to action?  

Like It, Ch4ng was convinced that Mencius’ account of the benevolent tendencies was subject to misinterpretation by the Sung Neo-Confucians, who had defended their vision of virtue as innate by citing Mencius to the effect that the virtues were “rooted in the mind.” For Ch4ng the whole point of this statement was to draw attention to the innate goodness of human nature by arguing that the virtues were not inculcated through the education of externally formulated norms, but on the contrary that they originated in deep seated natural tendencies.  

Having drawn a sharp distinction between the innate tendencies and the acquired virtues, and thereby implying that the affective tendencies described by Mencius represent the essence of what human nature is, Ch4ng goes on to present his theory of human nature in purely ethical and psychological terms. Specifically, he claims that human nature is \textit{kiho}. This term is a Chinese binome, rarely used in philosophical contexts, which literally means something akin to “liking” “taste,” or “appetite,” but, in view of the philosophical sense imparted to it by Ch4ng, is more

\begin{enumerate}
  \item Taehak kangj, 1:6b, in Ch'angbo yuyudang ch4ns4, Vol 2.
  \item Mencius, 7A.21.
  \item Taehak kangj, 2:26a.
\end{enumerate}
adequately translated as "inclinations." Ch4ng goes on to describe two kinds of appetite or inclination, both of which he perceives to be present in the writings of Mencius. Both aspects are described by It, who nonetheless does not go as far as giving specific names to them. According to Ch4ng one aspect of human nature, which he regards as the unique attribute of humans, is represented by the moral *kiho* or appetites, exemplified by their "love of goodness and shame of depravity." The other aspect is represented by the physical appetites, such as the desire for food and sex.

"Appetites" may sound like a peculiar choice of term to refer to moral inclinations, and yet it would seem to reflect the exact sense given to "kiho" when Ch4ng argues that humans seek and need nourishment from the performance of virtuous deeds, in the same way as their physical inclinations seek edible nourishment, just as "rice seedlings thrive on water, and garlic on chicken droppings." It is worth noting that the concept of moral and physical inclinations is more of a monistic duality than the Sung Confucian concept of the original nature / physical nature duality, particularly as both aspects pertain to certain psychological appetites, rather than two separate spheres of existence. Indeed, Ch4ng emphasizes that people do not have two

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28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.
People do not have two natures. [Their nature] is like the partiality of rice to water and its impartiality to dry soil, like the partiality of millet to dry soil and its impartiality to water. It is worth noting here that the concept of dual natures has a long history, and there is a relatively detailed discussion of two contrasting aspects of human inclinations in the writings of Mencius. Asked by one of his more philosophically inclined followers what it is that distinguishes a so-called Noble Person (chun-tzu) from a small-minded person, Mencius responds that the former follows his “greater self,” whereas the latter follows his “lesser self.” He elaborates on this idea by explaining that small-minded people fail to discover and enrich their greater selves because they are drawn away by the attraction of material things. This leads to the question of what leads “small-minded people” to be lead away by material things to the neglect of their greater selves. Mencius implies that it is their inability to “reflect” (ssu) that renders them incapable of working out their moral priorities. Ch’ng elaborates on the Mencian theme of reflection by claiming that it is the “power of moral choice” (ch’uan-heng), a unique feature of humans, which enables them to work out their moral priorities. Ch’ng thus extends and applies the classical Confucian concept of ch’uan, used by Confucius and Mencius to refer to the human ability to act by resisting the pull of their physical appetites when appropriate.

31 Taehak kangji, 2:28a.
32 Mencius 6A.15.
33 Ibid.
appropriately in situations where the rules of propriety do not easily apply, in a systematic
effort to explain how humans should deal with the contrasting urges of the moral and
physical appetites.35

A detailed reading of the Mencius, and particularly those passages that explicitly pertain to
his theory of human nature, would seem to support Ch’4n’g’s view that the moral inclinations are in
some ways comparable to physiological appetites, particularly in that they encourage steady moral
“nourishment,” enabling humans to grow and reach their full potential. Mencius often speaks of
“nourishing” the moral inclinations, and there is a specific reference to the value of nourishing
one’s nature.36 There is a further reference to the nourishment of one’s “vital force,” which
appears to be related to the moral nature, and it is emphasized that this vital force shrivels up
unless it is supported by the feeling of satisfaction that accompanies acts of righteousness.

This vital force is extremely big and extremely powerful. Nourish it with
rectitude and protect it from harm, and it will fill the cosmos. This vital force
accompanies integrity and morality, and without them it shrivels up. It grows
through the accumulation of integrity and cannot be obtained by contrived acts of
integrity. If one’s actions are not satisfying to one’s mind then it shrivels up.37

Like Mencius, Ch’4n’g is associating both the moral and physical inclinations with the affective
component of human nature, and yet he seems much more reluctant than It Jinsai or later

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34 Maengja voilj, 2:19a.
35 Taehak kang’aj, 2:28a.
k'ao-cheng thinkers to speak of human nature in terms of feelings (ching) and desires.

It places a great deal of emphasis on the important role of feelings and desires in the realization of goodness. Furthermore, he seems to attach special significance to his claim that human feelings are the desires of human nature, repeating it a number of times in the Gom jigi.

This statement, inspired by a passage of the Record of Music, to the effect that the desires of human nature enable people to respond to things with activity, closely associates human feelings and human nature, and in so doing, elevates the status of the feelings, particularly because human nature is regarded as the essence of what humans are. Nonetheless, it is careful not to equate the feelings directly with human nature.

It goes on to imply that not only do the feelings express themselves in the desire of the

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36 Mencius, 7A:1.

37 Mencius, 2A:2.
senses for fulfillment through material things, but furthermore, they express themselves in the desire of people for self-improvement and fulfillment through moral action.

As indicated above Ch'ng too felt that the \( kiho \) or innate tendencies, which he identified with human nature, caused one to seek both physical and moral fulfillment, but he failed to specify how these tendencies were related to the emotions (ching). There is certainly an affective aspect to his concept of \( kiho \). One could surmise that the \( kiho \) were more essential than the emotions, existing prior to their expression. On the other hand one could draw the conclusion that Ch'ng did indeed regard the moral tendencies to be emotions, but that because the emotions, particularly in the eyes of Korean Neo-Confucians, were associated with more selfish and destructive tendencies, he desisted from using terminology that carried such associations.

In conclusion, one can broadly trace the unraveling of the Neo-Confucian principle / material force system into three distinct phases. The initial phase was achieved during the Ming in the teachings of the material force monist Lo Ch'in-shun, and later with greater force by Wang Fu-chih, both of whom objected to the reification of principle by arguing that it was simply the pattern of material force. In so doing they rejected the idea that principle existed as an ontological entity. A logical consequence of this position was for Lo, and more explicitly for Wang, to reject the closely related theory of the bifurcation between the original and physical natures, particularly because in their eyes moral tendencies could not be disassociated from the

38 Gom jigi, 138.
physical aspect of human existence.

The next stage in the disintegration of the principle / material force system took place in the teachings of It Jinsai, who vigorously claimed that the concept of principle was not applicable to the sphere of human nature. The philosophical basis of It’s claim was twofold; one was that the concept of principle only pertained to inanimate objects, and the other was that the Way of the Cosmos as it was described in the Classics was entirely distinct from the Way of Humanity.

A further stage in the disintegration of hsing-li hsueh, the “learning of human nature and principle” emerged in the work of the Late Chosin thinker Ch4ng Yagyong. Ch4ng’s concept of human nature as kiho or appetites jibed well with It’s dynamic perspective, and furthermore represented a significant break with the Neo-Confucian system in that it replaced an ontological frame of reference with a psychological one. There was no longer room for a static, impersonal principle in this system, mainly because the moral side of human nature was redefined as the capacity and tendency of people to “love virtue and experience shame when confronted with wrongdoing.”
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