“Relativism” and Iconoclasm in late Chosŏn Dynasty: Hong Tae-yong’s Argument for Reform

SONG, Young-bae*

1. Introduction: A Philosophical Look at the Novelty of Hong Tae-yong’s Thought

Studies of Hong Tae-yong (Pennname: Tambŏn, 1731-1783) up to the present have generally been characterized by two broad methodological approaches. The one focuses on the “modern” aspect of Hong’s natural scientific theories based on his theory of the rotation of the earth;¹ the other represents attempts to delve into the philosophical significance of Hong’s advocacy of the “theory of the identity or the equality of humans and things” from the standpoint of the Nakha School in the Debate between the Hŏsŏ and Nakha Schools (Horak Nonjaeng)—a lively debate over the identity of human nature and the nature of things that had its foundation in Chu Hsi’s Neo-Confucian theory of the nature of the heart-mind (hsin-hsing lun).²

However, in the course of reading through a major philosophical treatise of Hong Tae-yong’s, the Ŭisan mundap (“Conversations on Mount Ŭi”), I came to realize that the scope of Hong’s philosophical thinking, which labels the inflexible “sinocentric” mindset (also linked inevitably to a geocentric mindset, as we shall

*Professor of Chinese and Korean Philosophy, Seoul National University

¹ On this point refer especially to the following Yi Yong-bŏm, “Yi Ik-ūi Chudongsŏl-kwa kŏ Non’gŏ—Pu Hong Tae-yong-ūi Ujugwan,” Chundan hakbo 34 (1972); Ogawa Haruhisa, “Chiten(dō) setsu-kara Uchumugeron-e Kim Sŏk-mun-to Hong Tae-yong-no Sekai”, Tokyō Joshi Daigaku Ronshū Dai 30 Kan (1980); Pak Sŏng-nae, “Hong Tae-yong-ūi Kwaḥah Sasang,” Han’guk Hakbo 23 (1981)

see later) of the times as ḫō or “devoid of substance” and talks of the process of transformation of the natural cosmic realm, went altogether beyond the then representative China-as-center-of-the-universe worldview of the conservative ruling class or the theoretical framework of Chu Hsi’s “nature of the heart-mind” scheme: Hong’s thought not only bears the imprint of contemporary western astronomical views of the universe,³ but also draws largely upon the nonabsolutist epistemology of Chuang-tzu (fourth-century B.C.), with its rejection of all absolutist dogma and its insistence on the relative nature of all knowledge.

It is in fact true that until the present, there have been scattered comments from time to time in various studies of Hong’s thought that a relativistic view of an infinite cosmos lay at the bottom of his reformist thinking;⁴ however, it does seem that a philosophically-oriented attempt to get to the heart of Hong’s thought through a comparison with Chuang-tzu’s relativistic epistemology has never been made to date. In order to set forth discussions on this very topic, I seek in this essay to first look briefly into Hong’s relativistic view of the infinite cosmos, and second, to note just to what degree Hong moves away from Chu Hsi-ésque weltanschauung to argue for his reformist ideas from the perspective of relativism, through a detailed examination of the latter’s theory of the heart-mind. In addition, with a view to deepening the understanding of Hong’s reformist scheme based on his relativist stance, there is a short introductory discussion of Chuang-tzu’s non-absolutist epistemology and his philosophical system of infinite change (flux). Lastly, it is my aim to delve into Hong’s very own philosophy of infinite flux (as distinct even from that of Chuang-tzu), and his independent-minded theory of reform in light of Hong’s criticisms of the intellectual milieu of the time, especially his advocacy of shil or “that which is progressive and of substance” over against ḫō or “an empty ideological rigidity full of pridefulness”

2. Challenging Sinocentrism: Hong Tae-yong on the Relative Position of the “Center” of the Universe

Various Western disciplines of learning (sŏhak) made their way en masse into Chosŏn-dynasty Korea in the 17th century, after Yi Su-gwang (1563-1628) introduced Matteo Ricci’s (1552-1610) map of the world and works such as T’ien-chu shih-i and Chiao-yu lun and also provided a substantial amount of information

³ Cf Pak Sŏng-nae, op cit
on Western astronomical sciences in his *Chibong yusŏl* (1616).\(^5\) It is clear that Hong already possessed quite a bit of knowledge on Western astronomy and mathematics even before his visit to Peking as a member of an official envoy to the Imperial Ch'ing court (1765-66), through being acquainted with the works of people such as Yi Ik (Penne name: Sŏngho, 1681-1763). Hong Tae-yong's *Ŭisan mundap* contains clear refutations of what he regarded as unfounded theories such as the theory of "the roundness of Heaven and the squareness of earth" which placed an absolute value and meaning on a sino-centric world-view; the theory of "realms" which divided the known universe into twelve realms centered around China; the theory of *Yin-Yang*, and especially the theory of the Five Elements; and the theory of the "mutual stimulus and response of Heaven and Man". In addition to these, the basic assumptions of the customary sino-centric astronomy of China are rejected wholesale in Hong's theory of the relative nature of the center of the universe,\(^6\) testifying to the innovative reformist spirit of Hong's thought that is free from the bonds of tradition.

The above innovative aspects of Hong's scientific thought can in some ways therefore be attributed as "modern"; however, this claim does need further explication. It is true that Hong's understanding of natural phenomena include explanations that can be linked to the then sciences of the West—namely the astronomical view held by Western missionaries to China since the 17th century, which subscribes to Tycho Brahe's (1546-1601) modified geocentrism and the theory of the spherical nature of the earth,\(^7\) and which in turn provides the background to the *Shih-hsien li* calendar, as well as the refutation of the traditional Five Elements theory.\(^8\) In my opinion, however, the most salient characteristic in his

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5. On Yi Su-gang's knowledge of "Western Learning", refer to Han Yong-u, "Yi Su-gwang-ŭi Hakmun-gwa Sasang," *Han'guk Munhwâ* 13 (1992), pp 359-431

6. On Hong Tae-yong's natural scientific theories, Cf Yi Yong-bôm, *op cit*, Pak Sŏng-nae, *op cit*

7. In the West, Copernicus (1473-1543) proposed the theory of heliocentric rotation of the earth in the mid-16th century. However, in 1616 the Papal See included Copernicus' *De Revolutionibus Orbium Coelestium Libri IV* in its list of forbidden books. For this reason, and because Galileo in the trial of 1633 had bowed to the pressures of the Vatican, the Jesuit missionaries in China since the 17th century could not introduce Copernicus' theory of the rotation of the earth to the Chinese, introducing in its stead the Danish astronomer Tycho Brahe's eclectic model. According to Brahe, planets rotate around the sun, and these planets and the sun in turn rotate around the earth and the moon. This eclectic model, which represents a compromise between the theologically-oriented geocentric theory and the Copernican theory, was first introduced to China in P. Jacobus Rho (Lo Ya-ku) 1593-1638 in his treatise *Wu-wê-ŭi-ch' i* contained in the Ch'ing-chen li-shu. Cf Kang Chae-ŭn, *Chosŏn Sŏhaksâ* (Seoul Munhimsa, 1990), pp 41-42

8. Cf "Ŭisan mundap," *Tumhŏnŏ Naeup*, ed Hong Yong-son (Seoul Kyŏngun Munhwasa, 1939), kwon 4, p 23 a-b [Referred to hereafter as *Ŭisan mundap*]
view of the infinite universe is in fact the following notion: if each heavenly body in this infinite universe were to see the universe from its own perspective, then each star would in fact regard itself as the center, with all other heavenly bodies in the vicinity seen as being relegated to the periphery. This view comes to constitute Hong’s theoretical rejection of an absolute center of the universe. In my opinion, insofar as Hong’s very own natural scientific theory is the theory of the relative position of the center of the universe, it can definitely not be said to have developed along the same lines as “modern” Western views of the natural universe. Although Hong himself does not specifically mention it in his writings, I suspect that his position was influenced decisively by Chuang-tzu’s relativistic theory of knowledge. Hong’s view of the natural universe reflects modern Western views of science that go beyond the traditional sinocentric view of the natural universe, but it also strongly manifests Hong’s own “relativistic view of the natural universe”.

......When people talk of heaven and earth [the universe], how can they not think that the realm of the earth is in the middle of the universe, and that the sun, moon and the stars surround [it]? [But the fact is] among the realms of the stars that fill the heavens there is not any that does not form a realm [unto itself]. From the perspective of the stars, earth is also a star. Given that countless realms are scattered throughout the vast space [of the universe], it cannot be that only the realm of the earth coincidentally exists in the middle of it. ... From the perspective of the [other] various stars, each star would say that it was the center of the realm of the stars, just as the earth does from its perspective. That the seven stars (sun, moon, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn—author’s note—) surround and envelop the earth is indeed so if one is to measure from the perspective of the earth, and hence it is possible [from that perspective] to say that the earth is the center of the seven stars. [But] saying it is right in the middle of all the various stars [in the universe] amounts to the view of a frog in a well... The five stars surround and envelop the sun, with the sun being in the center; the

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9 See Pak, op. cit., p 174
sun and the moon surround the earth, with the earth being in the center. Since Venus and Mercury are near the sun, the earth and the moon are outside their original orbits, and since [the remaining] three stars (Mars, Jupiter and Saturn—author’s note—) are far from the earth, the earth and the moon are within their original orbits.... For this reason earth is the center of the sun and the moon, but cannot be the center of the five stars. The sun is the center of the five stars, but it cannot be right in the center of all the stars [in the universe]. If even the sun cannot be right in the center, how can earth be?"  

Here Hong regards not only geocentrism but also heliocentrism as being relative to one’s point of view. On what observation or theory does Hong Tae-yong base such a relativist theory of the natural universe? 

In order to afford a deeper understanding of the issue posed by such a question, I wish to introduce the beginning part of the “Autumn Floods” chapter of the Chuang-tzu, thereby seeking to connect the rejection of absolute knowledge and the relativist stance contained in the work with similar findings in Hong’s Ŭisan mundap.

The autumn floods came on time and the hundred streams poured into the Yellow River. Its racing current swelled to such proportions that, looking from bank to bank or island to island, it was impossible to distinguish a horse from a cow. Then the Lord of the River (a personification of the Huang Ho or the Yellow River—author’s note—) was beside himself with joy, believing that all the beauty in the world belonged to him alone. Following the current, he journeyed east until at last he reached the North Sea (the Po Hai—author’s note—). Looking east, he could see no end to the water. Only then did the Lord of the River turn his gaze, and looking vacantly toward Sea-god Jo (a personification of the Po Hai—author’s note—), he sighed and said, “The common saying has it, ‘He thinks even the one who has heard the Tao [the Way] a hundred times is not as good as he.’ It applies to me....Now I have seen your unfathomable vastness If I hadn’t come for lessons at your gate, I would forever have been laughed at by the masters of the Great Scope!”

Jo of the North Sea said, “You can’t discuss the ocean with a well frog—it’s limited by the space it lives in. You can’t discuss ice with a summer insect—it’s bound to the time of a single season. You can’t discuss the Tao with a cramped scholar [who insists only on one position]—he’s shackled by his doctrines. Today you have come out beyond your limits and so it will be possible to talk to you about the Great Principle.

10 "[　] 世之談天地，豈不以地界為空界之正中，三光之所包統？[　] 滿天星宿，無非地也　自星界=G，地界亦星也　無星之界，無星之界界，惟此地界巧居正中，無有是理 [　] 各界之觀，同於地觀 各自謂中各星行界 　若七政包地，地則固然，以地謂七政之中則可 謂之星行之正中，則坐井之見也 [　] 盖五緯包日，而以日為心，日月包地，而以地為心 金水近於日，故地月在包圍之外，三緯遠於日，故地月在包圍之內 [　] 以地為星行之正中，而不為星行之正中，而不得為星行之正中，況於地乎？ Ûisan mundap, p. 23a-b"
Of all the waters of the world, none is as great as the sea. Spring or autumn, it never changes. Flood or drought, it takes no notice. It is so much greater than the streams of the Yangtze or the Yellow River that it is impossible to measure the difference. But I have never thought of myself as big on account of this. I am in the universe but as a small stone or a small tree are on a huge mountain. How can I regard myself as big?

"To think of the four seas as being within the universe—is it not like the empty space in a bottle within a large marsh? To think of our Middle States [China] as being within the four seas—is it not like one tiny grain in a great storehouse? When we refer to the myriad things of creation, we speak of them as numbering ten thousand—and man is only one of them. In the Nine Provinces [of China] where men are said to live, grain and foods are grown and boats and carts pass back and forth, man being only one of the many things. Compared to the ten thousand things, is man not like one [small] tip of a hair on the body of a horse? The Five Emperors' ceding the throne in succession to one another, the Three Kings' revolutions, the moralist's worries and the martyr's travails—all are but as insignificant as the tip of a hair. Po Yi gained a reputation by giving it up; Confucius passed himself off as learned because he talked about it. But in making much of themselves in this way, were they not like you a moment ago making much of yourself on your flood waters? From the point of view of the Tao, all that exist have no nobility or meanness. From the point of view of [individual] existences themselves, each regards itself as noble and other things as mean... [N]obility and meanness are not determined by the individual himself. Those who went against the times and flouted custom were called usurpers; those who went with the times and followed custom were called companions of righteousness. Be quiet, O Lord of the River! How could you understand anything about nobility and meanness or about great and small?"  

In the above "Autumn Floods" section of the Chuang-tzu, two fictional characters, the Lord of the River and Jo of the North Sea, are set up: it depicts the Lord of the River, who prides himself in his absoluteness within the restricted space of the Yellow River, as finally giving up his pride and learning to see finite things in proportion, as only relatively great or small, good or bad from someone who exists on a bigger scale than he—Jo of the North Sea, who teaches him that knowledge cannot be absolute. We see something similar happening in Hong Tae-yong's Üisan mundap: Hōja ["Master Devoid-of-Substance"]—seemingly a personification of the obstinate and narrow-minded attitude of the Chosŏn dynasty Korean literati—meets Shirong ["Practical-Old Man-of-Substance"] on Mount Ŭimuryŏ on the boundary between China and Korea. Through Shirong's aid, Hōja gradually comes to grasp the notion that knowledge is relative, dependent on the nature and capacity of the parties doing the cognizing. In this way, Hōja is able to look toward a larger world, and in the end to break out of an obstinate and narrow-minded pridefulness of the Confucian literati that in narrowness of scope matches the narrowness of the land of Korea.

Master Hōja sequestered himself from the world and read books for thirty years. He made a thoroughgoing study of the process of creation and transformation of heaven and earth, investigated the subtleties of life, pursued to the limit the origin of the Five Elements and mastered the essence of the Three Teachings (Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism—author's note—) He was extensively acquainted with the principles that guide human conduct and in mastery of the principles that govern things; after searching and fathoming the profound depths and seeing through the origin and the end of things, he went out to the world to talk to people, but upon listening to him, there was not one person who did not laugh at him. Hōja said, "One cannot talk of great things with people of lesser intelligence, one cannot talk of the Tao with vulgar philistines." [He] then went westward and entered Yŏndu [Peking], where he stayed for sixty days, lottering about and engaging in discussions with lofty intellectuals, but till the end did not succeed in meeting [anyone who would appreciate his worth]. At this, he packed up his bags and made his way homeward, in the course of which he came to climb Mount Ŭimuryŏ. Walking scores of ri [a Korean league = 400 meters], [he}
found] a gate of stone. On it was written, "Gate of Shil’s dwelling".  

Shirong said, "[All] who are born due to heaven and raised by earth, and have blood and vigor—are equally human. An exceptionally brilliant person who suppresses and rules over an area is just as much a ruler as any other [A place where] one fortifies the gate of the fortress, digs deep trenches, and keeps to protecting one’s realm diligently, is a country like any other Changbo (ceremonial cap of the Yin dynasty—author’s note—) or Wimo (ceremonial cap of the Chou dynasty—author’s note—), ordinary tattooing or tattooing the forehead red and blue after the fashion of the southern barbarians—all are equal in that they are customs. From the perspective of heaven [nature], how can there be any distinction between "in" (nae) and "out" (oe)? Thus each feels close to his own [neighbor], each respects his own ruler, each defends his own country, and each finds comfort in his own customs—[in this] Hwa [China] or Yi [Korea] are all the same."  

It can be seen that an emancipatory viewpoint subscribing to a relativist theory of knowledge, that seeks to do away with obstinate and narrow-minded idée fixe from the perspective of a larger scale, is found in both Chuang-tzu and Hong Tae-yong.  

3. Challenging Chu Hsi: Hong Tae-yong’s Relativist Theory of the Equality or “Making Even” of Humans and Things (Inmul kyullon)  

Since the Sung-Ming era, Neo-Confucians, understanding all phenomena of change and flux within the natural universe as the unfolding of life’s vitality and growth sheng (“The great mysterious power in the natural universe [active in the generation of things and within one’s own heart]—is called life’s vitality and growth” T’ien-ti chih ta-te yiueh, sheng. 天地之大德曰生), have presented a vision whereby the substance and the function of such vitality and growth—instead of [Buddhist] “Emptiness” (k’ung) or [Taoist] “Non-being” (wu)—serves as the ontological basis of both the human and the natural realms. They explain such an ontological basis as existing inherently in individual human beings and within the nature of the myriad things that compose the universe. This unfolding of cosmic

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12 “子虚子隱居，讀書三十年，窮天地之化，究性命之微，極五行之根，達三教之理 經緯人物 館通物理 銘深潢澗 洞悉源委 然後出而謁人，聞者莫不为之 虛子曰 小知不可與語 大俗不可與語道也 乃西入燕都，遊觀於茲都 居幾舍六十日，卒無所遇，於是 東裝而歸，乃登歷巫閣之山．行數十里，有石門 當道題曰，實居之門 實翁曰 天之所生，地之所養，凡有血氣，均是人也 出類拔萃，制治一方，均是君王也 重門深蔽，遙守封疆，均是邦國也 章甫委貌，文身雕題，均是習俗也 自天觀之，豈有内外之分哉？是以各親其人，各尊其君，各守其國，各安其俗，事義一也." Özsoy mundap, p 16a-b, p 37a
life’s vitality and growth is in fact seen as being equivalent to the unfolding of the Tao, or the Heavenly Principle T’ien-li. It was therefore incumbent upon the Neo-Confucians to grasp the universal principle of moralistic metaphysic or moralistic ontology present inherently within the self in order to pursue the “perfection of the self on the road to sagehood” (nei-sheng) from their variously situated respective positions within the cosmic order, and to acquire the knowledge connected with such a pursuit—the knowledge of the moral nature (or “to honor the moral nature” tsun te-hsing). Such an academic inclination, common to all Sung-Ming Neo-Confucians, came to exercise a deep and widespread influence on the Korean scholars of the Chosŏn dynasty.

According to Chu Hsi (1130-1200), a supernatural personal deity who lords over the infinite process of the growth and transformative development of all things does not exist, however, this does not signify that such a transformative process takes place recklessly without a certain telos, in a state of chaos.\textsuperscript{13} The transformative process of the myriad things in the universe is made possible by the a priori existence of “the reason why a thing is as it is” (so-yi jan chih ku) and “the rule to which a thing should conform” (so tang jan chih tse)—principles which are responsible for the way things are and which govern the way things operate in the world, respectively. This is what is meant by li (“principle”) or T’ien-li (Heavenly Principle) serving as the foundation of a moralistic ontology in Chu Hsi. Li is only the a priori ontological foundation of all things, and as such, cannot have a sensory, empirical dimension to it; at the same time, it exists as a separate category altogether from things in the phenomenal realm before the latter even come into being.\textsuperscript{14}

The above aspect of li sets it apart ontologically from specific objects which belong to the phenomenal realm. Objects in the actual phenomenal world undergo constant transformation and take tangible form in the course of the flow of the constantly circulating ch’i [material force]. But this ch’i, non-purposeful by nature, without a fixed regular shape or form, flowing and being transformed without end, is something “posterior to, after, physical form”, i.e., “physical” (hsing-erh-hsia). It must not be confused or mixed with li—something “prior to, before, physical form”, i.e., “metaphysical” (hsing-erh-shang)—whose purposeful existence is responsible for bringing about action or process conducive to the achievement of the ultimate.

\textsuperscript{13} “蒼蒼之謂天，運轉周流不已，便是那個 而今說天有個人在那裏批判罪惡，固不可 說盡 全無主者，又不可 ”, Chu Tzu yu-let, chuan 1

\textsuperscript{14} “上天之載，無聲無臭，而實造化之樞紐也.”, Tai-chu-shuo chieh; “若在理上看，則未有物而已有物之理 ”, Chu Tzu yu-let, chuan 1
telos (Ger. zweckmäßig), and is the ground upon which values and valuation are
dependent on the ontological level. ("Li and ch'i are to be differentiated from each other.") \textit{li ch'i pu-hsiang tsa} 理氣不相離)\textsuperscript{15} However, the only actually manifested form
of reality in the universe is ch'i—which signifies that even though metaphysical li
exists a priori on the ontological level, in real terms it is not able to take recourse to
something other than ch'i for the purpose of its existence. ("Li and ch'i are
inseparable from each other." \textit{li ch'i pu-hsiang li} 理氣不相離)\textsuperscript{16} Chu Hsi's
philosophy is thus a view of reality that is both "monistic" (\textit{pu-hsiang li}) and
"dualistic" (\textit{pu-hsiang tsa}). But Chu Hsi himself seems to stress the superintending
and foundational aspects of \textit{li}—the principle or reason behind purposeful activity.

Chu Hsi refers to the overall origin of this \textit{li} as the "Great Ultimate" or \textit{T'ai-ch',
which as the highest overall principle also exists simultaneously within all specific
individuals, as well as within all things (\textit{Jen-jen yu i T'ai-ch', wu-wu yu i T'ai-ch').}\textsuperscript{17}
Therefore \textit{li-as-T'ai-chi} is both "One as Principle" in that it is the overall
ontological principle, and at the same time. "Many as Manifestations in ten-
thousand shapes and forms" in that it is endowed—i.e., exists inherently—with an
infinite number of concrete objects (Chu Hsi's theory of "One Principle, Many
Manifestations" \textit{li-i fen-shu}). Through the theory of \textit{li-i fen-shu}, Chu Hsi provides
the total systematic framework for the workings of the universe and for the various
purposive roles and positions to be firmly taken up and occupied by each individual
and thing within that overall universal order. This framework comes to represent the
absolute cosmic and human order (\textit{T'ien-li}) for Chu Hsi and his followers in the
literati class of the traditional Confucian cultural sphere.

However, the problem remains that countless numbers of people and things in the
actual world are neither virtuous nor perfect: How can this be? The reason for this is
that all individual humans and things are products of ch'i—which is without
specific shape or form, non-purposeful, always circulating and undergoing
transformations—and as such, subject to the limitations of ch'i. Chu Hsi refers in
particular to the "lt that is endowed in each being" (\textit{fen-shu-li}) as "nature" (hsing).
He calls the aspect of nature [of humans and things] possessing the purposive,
perfectly good quality of \textit{lt}, the "nature of heaven and earth" (\textit{T'ien-ti chih hsing}) or
"original nature" (\textit{pen-jan chih hsing}). Meanwhile, he calls the aspect of nature that
stands in opposition to this original nature—i.e., the nature that is mixed with the

\textsuperscript{15} "雖其方在氣中，然氣自是氣，性自是性，亦不相離離"，\textit{Chu Tzu yu-let}, chuan 4
\textsuperscript{16} "理不離離氣"，\textit{Chu Tzu yu-let}, chuan 1
\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Chu Tzu yu-let}, chuan 94.
shifting and fluctuating ch'i, lacking in goodness—"physical nature" (ch'i-chih chih hsing). In the human mind ("heart-mind" hsí) coexists "nature" (hsíng) or the dimension of the purely good "original nature", and "emotions" (ch'íng) or the dimension of the "physical nature" in which are found both good and evil ("The mind commands and includes nature and emotions" hsm t'ung hsíng-ch'íng). According to Chu Hsi, human mind is "pure goodness" on the ontological level, in the "not yet released" (wei fa) stage (i.e., before actual activity begins); in the "already released" (i fa) stage (i.e., after actual activity begins), depending on how the physical nature ch'íng functions, the heart-mind can manifest itself as either good or evil.

For Chu Hsi, the "mind of the Way" (Tao-hsin), which flows out of one's "original nature", and "human desire" (jen-yü), which arises out of one's "physical nature", are mutually antagonistic: he strongly advocates the slogan "keep to Heavenly Principle and do away with human desire" (ts'un T'ien-li mieh jen-yu) which exhorts people to preserve the Heavenly Principle within themselves following the dictates of the Tao-hsin, and to get rid of "human desire" by avoiding sensory feelings connected with the passions. Chu sets up an imaginary ideal world within the inner realms of humans and things, and argues for the realization of the ideal moral world through the overcoming of actual passions and desires by means of adherence to such an imaginary ideal standard of value.

Chu Hsi on the one hand allows for the possibility of pure goodness through the dimension of li, while on the other contrasting it with the dimension of the imperfect ch'i, which stands in opposition to it. In this way, he is able to leave room for two possibilities: the firm establishment of his system of moralistic metaphysic, and the improvement of actual deficiencies in life. Thus was born his moral ontology representing the position of the scholar-official class, which comprehensively embraces both the realms of human morality and the natural universe. In emphasizing "keeping to Heavenly Principle and doing away with human desire" in the pursuit of his ideal moral world, Chu appears to be much too extramundane and ascetic. And because such an ideal world is a purposive world which is in the end idealist in nature, his philosophy necessarily takes on the characteristics of a "quietestic" (chu-ching) philosophy with its advocacy of inner reflection and self-examination.

Chu maintains that in order to apprehend the principles of the operation of heaven and earth and that of self-cultivation within the social matrix of human relations, one must go outside the mind, and make a thoroughgoing investigation of the li of things and events by coming face to face with the phenomenal occurrence of each
object (wu) and event (shih) (chi wu ch’iung li). In the process of actually grasping, in person, the various principles inherent in each object and in each circumstance at the places of their occurrence, one comes to one day all of a sudden "achieve a wide and far-reaching penetration all at once" (huo-Jan kuan-t’ung). This is so because the Heavenly Principle embraces the human mind as well as the entire order of the universe, within which are enshrined the respective roles and responsibilities of individual humans and things. For this reason Chu Hsi argues for the necessary grasping beforehand of one’s own endowed li or fen-shu-li (chih hsien), followed by one’s putting into practice (hsing hou) what one has learned based on the clear knowledge that such an understanding affords (chih hsien hsing hou).

According to Chu Hsi, such a moralistic metaphysic as he envisions disappeared after Mencius, and its true meaning was only revived and carried on by the Sung Neo-Confucians. He sees as the obligation of intellectuals in particular, the clarifying of such meaning through academic studies, so as to first understand it oneself before passing it on to later generations (hsien chüeh chüeh hou). As a result, he writes systematic commentaries to not only the Four Books but also the Five Classics. His system is truly vast in scope, and in it, he provides for the twofold task of "honoring the moral nature" (tsun te-hsing) and "following the path of inquiry and study" (tao wen-hsiüeh): the first involves understanding for oneself the reality of the Heavenly Principle and the realizing of one’s original nature—i.e., the perfecting of one’s ideal potential—and the second points to the more intellectual task of the scholarly class.

But Chu Hsi’s philosophy, which expands and extends the moral self-awareness of the intellectual to cosmic proportions and urges the individual’s inner reflection within the overall framework of the social order, comes to be rigidly codified as official government instruction after Chu’s death, with his commentaries serving as the basic texts for the official state examination (k’o-ju). Ironically, throughout the actual history of the Yuan, Ming and Ch’ing periods, Chu’s moral idealism and quietistic philosophy were transformed into a tool for advancement in the world. It was also inevitable that his undue emphasis on the Heavenly Principle and inordinate demands to curb human desire were lost on the well-off and powerful scholar-officials of the times. The moralistic self-reflection and the attitude of strict self-discipline vis-à-vis learning required of by Chu Hsi came more and more to exist for the sake of form, devoid of any substance. As for the intellectuals seeking to uphold the tenets of Chu Hsi’s teachings in later ages, they were restricted to accepting the status quo in a retrogressive and contemplative manner, instead of responding autonomously and actively to the changes in social reality. As a result,
Chu's "Learning of Nature and Principle" gradually lost its original vibrancy and became inflexible, with its philosophical relevance being questioned by progressive intellectuals looking for actual, practical solutions to the social ills of the day. It was in fact in this climate that the Yang-ming School of Neo-Confucianism and various ch‘i-monistic philosophies arose during the Ming dynasty.

The a priori existence and the superintending quality of li that occupies such a pivotal position in Chu Hsi's Neo-Confucian system comes to be denied by Hong in the following manner:

Those who speak of li say "li without shape or form exists". To say something is without shape or form and [yet] exists, what kind of thing is that? If li does exist, how can it do so without shape or form? [We] say something exists if it has sound; [we] say something exists if it has colour; [we] say something exists if it has odour and taste. If these four things are not present, then there can be no shape or form, nor location [in time and space]. If [despite the absence of these] something is said to exist, what can that thing be?

It is also said [li] has no sound or odour and yet is the hinge upon which the creation and transformation [of all things] revolves; it is the foundation of all things. If so, how can [it] be the hinge or the foundation without actively being involved in the actual doing and making of things?

Also, so-called li is such that if the ch‘i is good, then it is also good, and if the ch‘i is evil, then it is also evil. This means li does not superintend, and only follows what ch‘i does. If it can be said li is originally good and whatever evil there is [to it] adheres to the maternal base (ch‘i-chuh) and is not its original substance, this would already mean that this [originally good] li is the origin of the creation and the transformation of all things. [If so,] just how does it make ch‘i not to be purely good, giving rise to "impure, turbid, distorted and perverse" ch‘i, so as to throw the world into disorder? If [li] is assumed to be the origin of good and also the origin of evil, this means that it changed due to specifically existing things, completely unable to superintend.....

These days, whenever scholars open their mouths, they say [human] nature is good. How does so-called nature manifest its goodness? Seeing a child fall into a well and feeling pity can truly be said to be due to original [human] nature. [But] if a feeling of covetousness arises upon seeing something fun and interesting, such that one naturally follows it straight away without even a moment to collect oneself, how can it not [also] be called original nature? Nature is also something that is [inside] of a body; if li is without sound and odour, where can the two words good and evil locate themselves?18

18 "凡言理者，必曰「無形而有理」既曰「無形而有理」者是何物？既曰「有理」則豈有「無形而有理」乎？蓋有聲則謂之有，有色則謂之有，有臭與味，則謂之有。既無是四者，則是無形體無方所所謂有者，是何物耶？且曰「無聲無臭，不為造化之樽樽。品彙之根本，則無所有為，何以見其為樽樽根本耶？且所謂理者氣善則亦善，氣惡則亦惡，是理無所主宰，而隨氣之
Hong Tae-yong rejects all whose existence cannot be established by experience—i.e., the a priori reality of idealist existence. He therefore draws the conclusion that a metaphysical li “without sound or odour” cannot exist. In Hong’s view, because the li of an object not only exists in the ch’i which composes that object, but also changes its nature depending on the changes in the quality of the ch’i of that specific object, it is not capable of superintending. If a purely good li existed a priori within things and went on to superintend them, there could not arise “impure, turbid, distorted and perverse” ch’i. Also, although it is possible to regard original human nature hsing as purely good, and attribute the feeling of pity (ts’ê yin chih hsin) that naturally arises upon seeing a child about to fall into a well as being one’s “real” heart, if one is to talk in terms of the impulses of the heart that flow out naturally and instinctively, and not from engaging in deep self-reflection, one would see that in addition to such moralistic impulses, many other impulses that induce sensual amusement exist, which, despite their being non-moralistic, are nonetheless also to be viewed as equal basic impulses of the heart. Because human beings are concrete and sensory creatures, Hong explains, human good and evil has nothing to do with “ontological idealism” of the world of li that transcends the realm of the senses. For Hong Tae-yong, therefore, there naturally does not exist a distinction between “original nature”—an embodiment of human moral principles—and “physical nature”. To him, Chu Hsi’s ontological order of “One Principle, Many Manifestations” can have no meaning, since he does not subscribe to a metaphysical system running through the cosmic and human order alike that can serve to curb human desire.

From here Hong Tae-yong in fact goes a step further. From a “panch’iistic” (yugiron) perspective, he recognizes the difference in outward form between humans and things, but in the final analysis does not view the mind (hsin)—that driving force behind human moral development—as being something unique to man. By mentioning that all things in nature, including animals and trees and plants, possess minds of their own, he argues for the identity of the mind of things in nature and that of man:

Now regarding the kind of thing the mind is. It is only a type of ch’i that is pure, a
type of natural matter that is wondrous and mysterious. It has neither [the difference of] big and small, nor [the difference of] thick and thin, nor [the difference of] being blocked up and being open; it is capable of knowledge (chih) and perception (chileh); being empty of confusion and exquisitely subtle, it is without darkness (horyông pulmae). Singularly, the brightness of this original substance (i.e., mind) is not made more apparent by sages, nor made obscure by fools; it is neither damaged by animals nor made to disappear by plants and trees. This is due no other than to the fact that the substance of the mind, as something ineffably subtle and pure, does not lose its foundation through being restricted by ch'i. Now a human being may not love his/her child, but a tiger always loves its offspring. A human being may not be loyal, but bees always hold their sovereign [the queen bee] in respect.. The trunks and branches of trees [with different roots] join together and plants unite at night, they are happy when it rains and wither when frost falls. Does this mean their minds are uncannily adroit or does it not? ..If it does mean that their minds are uncannily adroit, when compared to humans they are not only not different, but in some cases even surpass humans .. Are the minds of humans and natural things really any different?..Once there is difference, it is so because the mind has changed following the changes in the ch'i. The uncanny adroitness of the mind's substance has no fixed background ....Therefore it is said a foolish person is subject to limitations of ch'i and natural objects are subject to limitations of background raw material (chih), but that their minds' uncanny adroitness are the same. Ch'i can change but chih cannot change This is the difference between man and natural things (wu)....That which assumes clear ch'i and takes shape is man; that which assumes turbid ch'i and takes shape is a thing. Among these, that which is the most clear and the most pure so as to be meffably subtle, is mind. [MIND] possesses all principles in an exquisite way, and is the basis for presiding and prevailing over all things. In this man and natural things are the same.....Among humans are also those who are foolish like ungainly monsters, among things are also those which are enlightened and swiftly able to attain understanding. For example, ants know beforehand when it is going to rain, and the kirin [mythical deer-like animal] does not tread on grass. The uncanny adroitness of their minds makes them in fact all the wiser than humans: how can they not be as good as those foolish ungainly monsters?!

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19 “今夫心之為物，——只是氣之粹者，物之神者，無大小，無厚薄，無明暗，無通塞，能知能覺，虛靈不昧。惟此本體之明，不以聖而顯，不以愚而晦，不以禽獸而缺，不以草木而亡。無他，體神且粹，不拘於氣而失其本故也。今夫人有不慈，而虎必愛子。人有不忠，而軍必敬君。此而達理，草之合，雨而喜，霜而憔悴，此其心靈乎不靈乎？...謂之靈，則方之於人，非惟不異。而或過之，人物之本，其果不同乎？一有不同，是心逐氣變，體靈無定本。故曰：『愚者於氣，物物於質，心之靈則一也。氣可變，而質不可變。此人物之殊也。』得清之氣而化者為人，得濁之氣而化者為物。就其中至清至粹，神妙不測者爲心。所以妙具衆理，而粹則萬物，是則人與物一也。人亦有靈次靈者，物亦有通明敏悟者。如螟蛾先知雨，蝗蝻不食草。其心之靈，反有賢於人者，何巢不若彼縦靈縦者耶？”。 "Tap S6 Song-jí non shumsŏl," Tambŏksŏ, kwon 1, p 3a-4b
From Hong's perspective, all things in nature are produced by the ch'i taking on specific shapes and forms; the minds of those things are each made up of ineffably subtle ch'i, and the minds of humans and things such as animals and plants are the same, in that both sets “possess all principles in an exquisite way”, and in that they “predisde and prevail over all things”. Not only is the human mind precious to humans, but the minds of other creatures are also, each in their own way and for their own purpose, all uncannily adroit and ineffably subtle. Here Hong is seen to deny the absoluteness of the moralistic metaphysical dignity and value of human beings. In the end, moral principles governing human relations that are confirmed as being equal to Heavenly Principle in Chu Hsi's Learning of Nature and Principle come to lose their absolute authority, and become relativized along with the high value placed on human beings.

Moral rules governing the Five Human Relations and the Five Precepts for correct behaviour are human proprieties. To move in flocks and eat with mouths and beaks is the propriety of animals. If one looks at things from the human point of view, humans are noble and things are base; If things were to look at humans from the point of view of things, things would be noble and humans base. From the perspective of the heavens (T'ien—i.e. Nature for Hong Tae-yong), humans and things are the same.20

From Hong's panch'istic viewpoint, man, as an integral part of the natural realm which fosters them, is necessarily to be relativized as just one among the many existing categories of things. Furthermore for Hong, the universe is nothing more than a “rarefied realm” (högye)—i.e., empty space: “What is empty are the heavens. Thus the empty space within a well or a pit, and the empty space within a bottle or a jar are also the heavens.”21 Here the mysterious power of “Heaven” (T'ien), which has exercised absolute authority over the mindset of the Chinese and other East Asians for thousands of years, is effectively denied.22 According to Hong, the ch'i

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20 “五倫五事，人之禮義也。群行伺嘩，禽獸之禮義也。聲苞條暢，草木之禮義也。以人視物，人貴而物賤。以物視人，物貴而人賤。自天而觀之，人與物均也。” Üisan mündap, p 19a
21. “虚者天也，是以井坎之空，瓶罍之空亦天也.” Üisan mündap, p 28a
22. “Heaven” or the heavens (T'ien) in the Üisan mündap simply denotes material “empty space”, with the mysterious power of the traditional Heaven being denied and relativized. We see a similar denial of the absolute mysterious power of the Tao in the paradigmatic relativistic framework of Chuang-tzu's thought

“Tung-kao-tzu inquired of Chuang-tzu, 'Where is it, that which we call the Way?' 'There is nowhere it is not.' 'Unallowable unless you specify.' 'It is in molecrickets and ants.' 'What, so low?' 'It is in the weeds of the ricefields.' 'What, still lower?' 'It is in tiles and shards.' 'What, worse than ever?' 'It is in shit and piss.' 'Tung-kao-tzu did not reply.'

' [So when one of Robber Chhh's band asked him,] 'Do robbers too have the Way?'; Chuh answered, 'Where can you go unless you have the Way? A shrewd guess at where the things are hidden in the house.
of fire emanating from the sun, along with the ch’i of the soil and that of the water from the earth first react through mutual interaction (kiihw), and thus reaction then develops into the “process of taking on concrete forms and shapes” (hyǒnghw), through which humans and things are produced.23

[The ground of] the earth is a living, dynamic being within the rarefied realm [of the universe]. Soil is the skin and flesh of that living thing, water is its refined vital essence [sperm] and blood. Rain and fire make flourish or protect its hon [Chin. hun—the positive, “lighter” part of the maternal soul] and its paek [Chin. p’o—the negative, “heaver” part of the material soul]. Thus water and soil are fostered inside [this being], and fire from the sun blows warm breath on it from the outside, thereby enabling the many things to increase and grow. The grass and the trees are the hair covering the body and the head of the earth; the people and the animals are like the fleas and lice [living inside the hair] of this earth.24

According to Hong, there is not an ounce of difference between human beings and other animals, since in terms of existence they are all produced by the harmonization of the ch’i of the fire from the sun and the ch’i of the soil from the surface of the earth. It is clear that there is no room here for Chu Hsi’s Neo-Confucian worldview which makes a distinction between the metaphysical realm of the Heavenly Principle and the physical realm of the localized ch’i, nor for the position that explains “the reason why a thing is as it is” (so-yi jan chih ku) and “the rule to which a thing should conform” (so tang jan chih tse) in terms of the scheme of “One Principle, Many Manifestations” (li-i fen-shu). I myself feel that the debate between the Hosô and the Nakha Schools—with its focus on whether “nature” hsing (the perfection of the metaphysical ideal within Chu Hsi’s scheme of the nature of the heart-mind) of humans (jen) and non-human things (wu) are identical—came to no longer have any significance for Hong Tae-yong, whose panch’iistic framework classifies man as just one among the many relative categories of existence. In view

23 Cf Ûsan mundap, especially kwon 4, pp. 34b-37b

24 "夫地者，虚界之活物也 士者，其膚肉也 水者，其精血也 雨露者，其涕汗也 風火者，其魂魄榮衛也 是以水土膚於內，日火蒸於外 元氣凝集，滋生衆物 草木者，地之毛髪也 人獸者，地之蟲蛆也 "， Ûsan mundap, kwon 4, p. 34
of this fact, I must therefore point out that there is a clear limit to delving into the meaning of Hong’s philosophical thought in the context of the Debate between the Hosŏ and the Nakha Schools. Incidentally, if one is to identify the system of philosophy that most radically rejects discriminating humans and other categories of living creatures and critiques the very foundations of man’s self-righteous normative ethics, one would have to turn, at least within the Chinese cultural tradition, to Chuang-tzu’s relativist epistemology and philosophy of infinite flux, with its attending rejection of the knowledge of an objective, absolute truth. Subsequently, it is my claim that Hong Tae-yong’s theory of the equality (“making even”) of humans and things goes far beyond the scope of Chu Hsi’s Neo-Confucian framework, and that it instead comes close to embracing Chuang-tzu’s Taoist ideas.

4. A Paradigm for Relativist Epistemology and Philosophy of Change: the Chuang-tzu as Background to Hong Tae-yong’s Relativism

According to Chuang-tzu (369-286 B.C.E.), empirical knowledge is a doubtful guide to the existence or the non-existence of some facet of reality or of some object of cognition. Also, some objective standard of judging right or wrong, big or small, good or evil, cannot exist, independent of the conditions of existence in which the subject of cognition finds itself.

In the north is a deep ocean, where there lives a fish named the K’un. It changes into a bird, its name is the P’eng, the P’eng’s back measures who knows how many thousand ń. When it puffs out its chest and flies off, its wings are like clouds descending from the sky. This bird can set off for the deep ocean to the south [only] when the seas are heaving massively ....

If a mass of water is not bulky enough it lacks the strength to carry a big boat. When you upset a bowl of water over a dip in the floor, a blade of grass will make a boat for it, but if you put the cup there it sticks fast to the bottom, for the water is too shallow and the boat too large. If the mass of the wind is not bulky enough it lacks the strength to carry the great wings. Therefore when the P’eng rises ninety thousand ń, he must have the wind under him like that....

A cicada and a turtle-dove laughed at it, saying, “When we make an effort and fly up, we can get as far as the elm tree. Sometimes we don’t make it and just fall to the ground. Now how is anyone going to go ninety thousand ń to the south”?

Someone goes off to the green of the woods nearby, with food enough for three meals will be home with the belly still full; someone going a hundred ń must pound grain for the
journey the night before; someone going a thousand li must get provisions together for/to last three months. What do these two creatures know? Little wits cannot keep up with great, or the short-lived with the long-lived. How does one know this is so? The mushroom of a morning [that lives only for a day] does not know old and new moon; the summer cicada does not know spring and autumn. They are the short-lived. South of Ch’u there is the tree Ming-ling, which grows through a spring of five hundred years, declines through autumn of five hundred years; in the remotest past there was the great tree Ch’un, with eight thousand years for its spring and eight thousand years for its autumn; yet P’eng-tsu (said to have lived for 800 years according to legend—author’s note—) alone is famous today for having lived a long time, and everyone tries to ape him. Isn’t it pitiful?  

As in the passage above, Chuang-tzu argues that empirical knowledge is determined by the intelligence level and the scope of existence of the individual organism doing the cognizing. Knowledge that transcends the scope of existence and the level of intelligence of the individual organism either does not exist, or else is meaningless to that organism. The first and the last days of the month have existence (wu) only for those beings that live for more than a month, and do not have existence (wu) for an insect which lives only for a day. Because the modes and circumstances of the lives of diverse organisms all differ, knowledge of various sorts necessarily exist side by side. No one type of knowledge can be said to be absolutely valid. From the perspective of the “short-lived” such as the day-fly or the cicada, human lifespan must seem incredibly long; seen from the perspective of the Ming-ling tree of Ch’u or the great Ch’un tree of the days of yore, the lifespan of humans is as meaninglessly short as those of the day-fly or the cicada. To these paragons of long life, even the life of the 800 year-old P’eng-tsu represents an unimportant moment in time. Therefore to say something “exists” or “does not exist”, is “long” or “short”, always only has relative meaning, since the meaning is dependent on the nature of the subject cognizing reality. To regard what is in fact only relative knowledge as the absolute norm and to strive to attain it is, alas, lamentable indeed. In other words, for Chuang-tzu, all knowledge takes on meaning

25 "北溪有魚，其名為鱧。[ ] 化而為鳥，其名為鸛。鸛之書，不知其幾千里也。怒而飛，其翼若垂天之雲。是鳥也，海運則將徙於南溟。[ ] 且夫水之積也不厚，則其負大舟也無力。置杯焉則膠，水淺而舟大也。風之積也不厚，則其負大翼也无力。故九萬里則風斯在下矣。[ ] 僂 academics 笑之曰：‘我決起而飛，搶榆枋，時則不至而控於地而已矣，奚以之九萬里而南為？’適千里者，三餐而反，腹猶果然。適百里者，宿舂糧。適千里者，三月聚糧。之二鶴又何知？小知不及大知，小年不及大年。奚以知其然也？朝菌不知晦朔，蟪蛄不知春秋，此小年也。楚之南有冥靈者，以五百歲為春，五百歲為秋。上古有大椿者，以八千歲為春，八千歲為秋，而彭祖乃今以久特聞。衆人匹之，不亦悲乎？" "Going Rambling without a Destination," Kuo, Chuang-tzu, pp 2-11
only relative to the cognizing capacity of the subject engaged in the process of knowing, and there cannot be an objectively valid standard of right/wrong that exists independent of the subject of cognition.

Chuang-tzu rejects the absolute validity of human knowledge and puts such a great deal of emphasis on relativeness of knowledge because he seeks to deny the cogency or relevance of the judgements of “right” (shih) and “wrong” (fei) that arise from human experience and the forcefully advocated moral justifications or the normative ideologies based on such human experience. The ideologues of each of the various pre-Ch’in Warring States period philosophical schools begin from mutually differing premises, and stick rigidly to the ideology and the affirmations and denials of their own particular school as absolute unchanging truth for all time. As a result, they end up denying each other’s ideologies or arguments, and engage in bitter disputes and deadly struggles. Amidst such a situation, Chuang-tzu announces the futility of mutual dispute and struggle by presenting the case for the relative nature of knowledge.

...And so we have the “That’s it, that’s not” of Confucians and Mohists, by which what is it for one of them for the other is not, what is not for one of them for the other is. If you wish to affirm what they deny and deny what they affirm, the best means is Illumination.

No thing is not “other”, no thing is not “it”. If you treat yourself too as “other” they do not appear, if you know of yourself you know of them. Hence it is said:

“‘Other’ comes out from ‘it’, ‘it’ likewise goes by ‘other’’, the opinion that “it” and “other” are born simultaneously.....If going by circumstance that’s it (shih) then going by circumstance that’s not (fei), if going by circumstance that’s not then going by circumstance that’s it .. What is It is also Other, what is Other is also It. There they say “That’s it, that’s not” from one point of view, here we say “That’s it, that’s not” from another point of view. Are there really It and Other? Or really no It and Other?26

Chuang-tzu refers especially to the universally applicable ontological basis for the existence of all individual objects of human empirical cognition in the universe as the Tao. For him the Tao signifies “the cosmic reality in the eternal process of becoming” (la Réalité cosmique en perpetuel devenir).27 From the perspective of the Tao, Chuang-tzu explains the relative nature of knowledge as follows:

27 Cf. Liou Kau-Hway, L’Esprit synthétique de la Chine (Paris, 1961), especially Chapters II and IV, p 126 and following, as well as p 153 and following
If we examine them in relation to the Way, things are neither noble nor base. If we examine them in relation to other things, they see themselves as noble and each other as base. Examining them in terms of degree, if assuming a standpoint from which it is great you see it as great, not one of the myriad things is not great; if assuming a standpoint from which you see it as small you see it as small, not one of the myriad things is not small. When you know that heaven and earth amount to a grain of rice, that the tip of a hair amounts to a hill or a mountain, the quantities of degree will be perceived.

[If we examine them in terms of the Way,]
All the myriad creatures in oneness evens out.
Which of them is short, which of them long?
The Way has no end and no start,
There are things which die, things which are born
Can't be sure of a prime of life,
Now they empty, now they fill,
There's no reserved seat for their shapes.
The years cannot be warded off,
Times cannot be made to stop.
Dwindling and growing, filling and emptying,
Whatever is an end is also a start.

...A thing's life is like a stampede, a gallop, at every prompting it alters, there is never a time when it does not shift. What shall we do? What shall we not do? It is inherent in everything that it will transform of itself.28

Chuang-tzu talks of the infinite process of change as the actual circumstance of existence to which the myriad things are subject; he also suggests that human knowledge only has relative relevance and significance from the viewpoint of the Tao—the cosmic reality in the eternal process of becoming. He draws our attention to the “sad” human practice of obsessively clinging on to the relative knowledge that has its origin in human circumstances in light of the infinite flux in the universe. Chuang-tzu rejects the “truth of the sages (sheng-jen)” posing as objective authority—i.e., normative value systems and ideological moral justifications which are imposed artificially on all existing things by human beings. In seeking to be one with the Tao which undergoes perpetual transformation, Chuang-tzu can be

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seen as wishing to escape from the bounds of all norms and to enjoy his infinite spiritual freedom in his own private world of fantasy.

4. Relativism as Tool for Practical Renewal: Hong Tae-yong’s Autonomous Philosophy of Change and Social-Minded Theory of Reform

Hong Tae-yong’s philosophy is, admittedly, different from that of Chuang-tzu. Although Hong borrows from Chuang-tzu’s relativistic epistemology in rejecting the metaphysical realm of the Heavenly Principle (the world of eternally unchanging cultural sinocentrism and absolutist Neo-Confucian orthodoxy), he at the same time strongly advocates carrying out a new task, which would enable people to respond actively to the changes in the natural and the social realms of existence. According to Hong, "'Human affairs' (insa) must necessarily be in a state of mutual communication and responsiveness with the ‘opportunities of time’ (ch’ön shi) or the changes in the objective state of things with the passage of time'. 29

To follow the customs of [the times] in accordance with the times is the method by which the Sages rule over society.....If times change, [other] customs arise, and there is no use prohibiting and preventing them. If one goes against [this flow] and obstructs it, the confusion will be all the greater, so that even the efforts of the Sages will have no effect on it. Therefore it is said, if one lives in the present but wishes to return to the rules of the past, one will meet with misfortune. 30

Here Hong expounds on his views of inevitable social progress and corresponding views on reform. On the other hand, he maintains that Hwa (Chinese civilization) and Yt (Non-Chinese “Barbarian” civilizations) are to be seen as “one” within the wide context of the world (or the earth). 31 He also holds that the distinction between “inside [civilization]” (nae) and “outside [civilization]” (oe) is not a pointer to the existence of absolute separate categories but rather the result of an overly zealous absolutization of an arbitrary subjective knowledge. Hong’s viewpoint reflects the opening of new horizons in that it sees such a distinction (until now sacrosanct) as only temporary and relative. According to Hong, the Spring and

29 “人事之感召天時之必然”, Ŭisan mundai, kwŏn 4, p 37a
30 “固時順俗，聖人之權，制治之術也［　時移俗成，禁防不行，民而得之，其亂滋甚，則聖人之力，實有不逮也 故曰 治今之世，欲反故之道，災及其身”, Ŭisan mundai, kwon 4, p 35b
31 “華夷一也 ”, Ŭisan mundai, kwon 4, p 37a
Autumn Annals (the Ch’un-ch’iu) written from the viewpoint of Confucius of Chou origin regards the kingdom of Chou—or Chinese civilization—as “inside” and other civilizations as “outside”. However, had Confucius attempted to set the historical record straight according to his moral standard of righteousness (as in the Ch’un-ch’iu) in an area other than that of the Chou civilization, Hong argues, that “area-outside [of Chou, China]” (yōgoe) would have been the “inside [civilization]” and conversely, Chinese civilization would then have been the “outside [civilization]”.

Here we can see that although Hong Tae-yong’s relativistic epistemology borrows from Chuang-tzu’s philosophy, its purpose is not Chuang-tzu-style critique of ideology or the pursuit of freedom on the private level of the mind of the individual, and that it reflects his autonomous historical consciousness which sought to overturn the absolute idealist mindset of the narrow-minded elite of the times.

5. Conclusion: Ponp’yo Ki-in—“Of Essentials and Details, Of Self and Other”

In the “Preface” to the Tamhönsŏ, Chŏng In-bo laments the lack of a spirit of autonomy among the late Chosŏn dynasty literati class, accusing them of being totally unable to distinguish “that which is essential” from “that which is peripheral”, and “that which pertains to the Autonomous Self” from “that which pertains to the Other” (ponp’yo ki-in), vis-à-vis problems of history and society. Chŏng notes that the significance of Hong Tae-yong’s thought within the context of Korean intellectual history may be discovered by reading Hong’s three major treatises: the Chuhae suyong, the Imha kyŏngnyun, and the Ŭisanmundap. But Chŏng In-bo goes on to point out that the unique import of Hong’s particular thought lies in his differentiating “Essentials” and “Details”, “Self” and “Other”—i.e., in his autonomous sense of history—as found in the Ŭisanmundap, as opposed to the Chuhae suyong, with its introduction of western mathematics or geometry, or the Imha kyŏngnyun which deals with the socio-political structure of the times. It was to facilitate the understanding of the intellectual origins of the “relativist” frame of mind that plays such a key role in the formation of Hong Tae-yong’s autonomous historical consciousness, that I included a discussion of Chuang-tzu’s philosophy.

The discourse on shil over against kŏ carried out by the two protagonists Hŏja and Shıroong in the Ŭisanmundap represents the reasoning behind Hong’s theory of

32 Ŭisanmundap, kwon 4, p 37a-b
Chŏng In-bo, “Preface to the Tamhönsŏ,” Tamhönsŏ, p 2b-3a
reform, which argues for the necessity of moving with the times, in accordance with the changes in natural and social circumstances. To those vain ideological intellectuals "devoid of substance" who are unable to discern these changes and cling tenaciously to sinocentrism and to the absoluteness of Chu Hsi’s orthodoxy, Hong Tae-yong offers a progressive vision of different perspectives and worldviews, and suggests a new realistic world of shil, free from the pernicious conservatism and anachronism of the times.

O how sad it is! Ways of realizing the truth have long since disappeared! After the death of Master Confucius sundry scholars cast the Tao into confusion; with the decline of Master Chu’s learning sundry scholar-officials made it smk into disrepute. They uphold those things that yield discernible results, and forget the true meaning of affairs. They learn what words mean on the surface but their true significance is lost on them. Their holding on to “right learning” really comes from a prideful mind (kângshim); their ostracizing “harmful discourse” really comes from a competitive and dominating mind (sângshim), their “benevolence” (jen) with which they seek to save the world really comes from a power-hungry mind (kuœnshim); their moralistic justification that they are preserving themselves wisely in lawless times in reality smacks of a self-serving mind (ishim). As these four minds conjoin together, true meaning decreases by the day, and all people under the heavens rush on in a vast expanse to each day follow that which is empty and false!

(Translated by Kim Han-sang, M.A., S.N.U.)

GLOSSARY

| Autumn Floods | 秋水 | Ch'ip-monistic philosophies | 氣哲學 |
| blood and vigor | 血氣 | ching | 精 |
| Changbo | 章甫 | Ch'ing | 清 |
| ch'i (material force) | 氣 | ch'ing | 情 |
| Chiao-yu lun | 交友論 | chih hsien hsung hou | 知先行後 |
| Chibong yusul | 芝峰類説 | chi wu ch'iuang li | 即物窮理 |
| ch'i-chih chih hsing | 氣質之性 | ch'öng shi | 天時 |
| chih | 知 | Chong In-bo | 鄭寅普 |
| chih | 質 | Choson-dynasty (Korea) | 朝鮮王朝 |
| chih hsien | 知先 | Chou | 周 |

33 "鳴呼，哀哉！遠緖之亡久矣！孔子之衰，諸子亂之，朱門之末，諸儒相之，崇其業，而忘其邁。習其言，而失其意。正學之微，賓由矜心，邪說之立，賓由勝心，救世之仁，賓由權心，保身之蔽，賓由利心，四心相仍，賓意日亡，天下滔滔". Uisan mungap, p 17a.
Ch’u 楚
Chuang-tzu 莊子
chu-ching 主靜
chüeh 覚
Chuhae sayong 粒解需用
Chu Hsi 朱熹
Chu Hsi’s teachings 朱子學
Confucians 儒家
Debate between the Hosõ and Nakha Schools (Horak Nonjaeng)

fei 非
fen-shu-li 分殊理
Five Classics 五經
Five Elements 五行
Five Emperors 五帝
Five Precepts for correct behaviour

First

Four Books 四書
four seas 四海
Gate of Shil’s dwelling 實居之門
Great Principle 道
great tree Ch’un 大椿
Heaven 天
hö 虚
högye 虚界
Höja 虚子
Hosö 湖西
Hong Tae-yong 洪大容
höryöng pulmae 虛靈不昧
hsien chüeh chueh hou 先覺覺後
hsin 心
hsing 性
hsing-erh-hsia 形而下
hsing-erh-shang 形而上
hsung hou 行後

hsun t’ung hsing-ch’ing 心統性情
Huang Ho 黃河
hun 魂
hui-jen kuan-t’ung 豁然貫通
Hwa 華
hyöng hwa 形化
i fa 已發
Imha kyöngnyun 林下經論
Inmul kyuallon 人物均論
insa 人事
ishim 利心
jen 人
jen 仁
Jen-jen yu i T’ai-chi 人人有一極
jen-yü 人欲
Jo of the North Sea 北海若
kihwa 氣化
kirin 麒麟
k’o-ju 科學
K’un 鯤
k’ung 空
kangshin 眞心
kwönsim 僞心
Learning of Nature and Principle

性理學
li 理
li ch’i pu-hsiang li 理氣不相離
li ch’i pu-hsiang tsa 理氣不相雜
li-i fen-shu 理一分殊
localized ch’i 器氣
Lord of the River 河伯
Ming 明
Ming-hing 冥靈
Mohists 墨家
Moral rules governing the Five Human Relations 五倫
Mount Ŭimuryŏ 蹆巫閰山
Nakha 洛下
nae 內
Nature 天
nei-sheng 內聖
Nine Provinces 九州
oe 外
panch’usim (yugiron) 唯氣論
P’eng 鴻
P’eng-tsu 彭祖
pen-jan chih hsing 本然之性
Po Huo 渤海
Po Yi 伯夷
Ponp’yo ki-in 本剽己人
pre-Ch’in 先秦
pu-hsiang li 不相離
pu-hsiang tsa 不相離
ri, li 里
Sea-god Jô 北海若
sheng 生
sheng-jen 聖人
shih 事
shih 使
Shih-hsien li 時憲曆
shîl 實
Shirong (Practical-Old Man-of-Substance) 實翁
sôhak 西學
Sôngbo 星湖
Song, Young-bae 宋榮培
so tang jan chih tse 所當然之則
so-yi jan chih ku 所當然之故
Spring and Autumn Annals (the Ch’un-ch’iu) 春秋
Sung 宋
Sung-ming 宋明
săngshim 勝心
T’ai-chi 太極
Tao-hsin 道心
tao wen-hsüeh 道問學
Tamhôn 湛軒
Tamhônso 湛軒書
theory of the identity or the equality of humans and things
人物同 人物均論
theory of the nature of the heart-mind
(hsin-hsing lun) 心性論
theory of “the roundness of Heaven and the squareness of earth”
天圓地方說
theory of the “mutual stimulus and response of Heaven and Man”
天人感應說
Three Kings 三王
Three Teachings 三教
T’ien-chu shih-i 天主實義
T’ien-li 天理
T’ien-ti chih hsing 天地之性
ts’ê yin chih hsin 懷隱之心
tsun te-hsing 尊德性
tsun T’ien-li meh jen-yü 存天理滅人欲
Ŭisan mundap 墟山問答
Warring States period 戰國時代
wei fa 未發
Wimo 委貌
wu 無
wu 物
Wu-wu yu i T’ai-chi 物物有一太極
Yang-ming 陽明
Yellow River 黃河
Yi 夷
Yi Ik 李瀾
Yi Su-gwang 李粹光
Yin 殷
Yin-Yang 陰陽

yōgoe 域外
Yōndo 燕都
yu 有
Yüan 元