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# Asami Keisai and Hong Daeyong: Dismantling the Chinese Theory of the “Civilized” and “Uncivilized”

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## 1.

Asami Keisai was born in 1652 and died in 1711. He was primarily active around the time of Genroku [元祿], the golden age of the Edo period. Hong Daeyong was born in 1731 and died in 1783. He was active during the reigns of King Yeongjo and King Jeongjo, when the “little China” mentality was at its height within Korea.

These two figures were born almost 80 years apart. Not only that, but Asami Keisai was an intellectual from a military family, while Hong Daeyong was an intellectual from a literary family. Asami Keisai carried a sword with him wherever he went, while Hong Daeyong never forgot his geomun-go,<sup>1</sup> the gentleman’s stringed instrument, even when he traveled. In spite of these differences, the two had quite a few interesting similarities, and these similarities

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1. A six-stringed Korean instrument.

can be confirmed in their scholarship, their attitude toward the perception of reality, and in their thoughts on the theory of “civilized” and “uncivilized” [Hwairon, 華夷論].

In this paper, I intend to center my argument around the attitudes of these two figures toward the theory of civilized and uncivilized. First I will examine Asami Keisai, then I will examine Hong Daeyong, and then I will compare the two. Let us not forget that this comparison is an intellectual exercise that deals not only with similarities but also with differences. Finally, I will end with a critical review of the significance of a comparative discussion of the philosophies of these two figures.

## 2.

2.1. The first document that clearly defined Asami Keisai’s position on Hwairon is volume 7 of *Seikenigenkōgi* [靖獻遺言講義], *Shoshi Ryuin Jo* [‘處士劉因’條]. In this work, he speaks of Japanese students studying abroad who became enraged or shamed upon seeing Japan referred to as an “uncivilized people” in Chinese texts, lamenting the fact that they were born in an uncivilized land. Then he emphasizes that there is no land as precious as the land of one’s birth. Also, though the sages of China<sup>2</sup> made comparisons between “the central nation and uncivilized peoples,” Keisai claims that such was nothing more than a matter of point of view; if the sages had been Japanese, then Japan would have been the “central nation” and Chinese would have been the “uncivilized people.” Keisai explained that some might see this as contradictory, but in reality this was a “duty.” Keisai felt that it was this point that the Japanese

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2. “China” here does not refer to a specific dynasty, but as China without out any value conception. It differs in this regard from the value concept of “central nation.”

students failed to understand, and that they therefore could not grasp their highest duty. He then offers the following interesting metaphor:

Others have parents and I have parents. Though he strikes the head of another's parent, it is his duty of a child not to strike the head of his own parent. I believe others will also not strike the heads of their own parents. This would seem to be a contradiction, but herein is duty. And yet Japan calls itself a "little nation" — if this is so, then if one sees that another's parents are stronger, can he call his own, weaker parents useless and abandon them?<sup>3</sup>

If this is so, then how are we to interpret Japan's sending of emissaries and tributes to China? Keisai sees this as a mistake made by Japan when they failed to understand their true and highest duty. According to Keisai, Japan is a "country that has not been overshadowed by another country since the creation of the heavens and the earth, and a country that has not had even the slightest problem in orthodoxy since the time of the gods."<sup>4</sup> He said that it was most unfair to read Chinese books and strive to become like the Chinese, thinking of Japan as nothing more than an inn.

In sum, Keisai rejects the Chinese theory of civilization that was presented in ancient Chinese texts, and which later determined the hierarchical international order of East Asia. He sees it as nothing more than a relative theory that stems from China's viewpoint, and claims that the core of the highest duty is for Japan to define the terms "central nation" and "uncivilized peoples" from their own point of view. In other words, Keisai's basic conviction at the time was that if Japan were to define for itself what the "central nation" and "uncivilized peoples" were, then the "central nation"

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3. Quoted from *Kinsei shakai keizai gakusetsu taikai* [近世社會經濟學說大系], *The Writings of Asami Keisai* [淺見綱齋集] (Edited and annotated by Tazaki Masayoshi [田崎仁義], Tokyo: Seibuntō shinkōsha [誠文堂新光社], 1937), p. 196. This translation and all others are mine.
  4. Tazaki Masayoshi [田崎仁義] ed., *The Writings of Asami Keisai*, p. 196.

would be none other than Japan and China would become the “uncivilized people.”

Though brief, this text reveals Keisai’s basic tenets regarding the theory of the “civilized” and “uncivilized.” It does not appear, however, that the logical support for his argument was very strong. The basis for his argument is roughly that (1) the land of one’s birth is more precious than anything, (2) that one’s own parents are more important than another’s parents, and (3) that Japan has not been ruled by another country since the foundation of the world, and Japan is a magnificent land that has not had the least problem in orthodoxy. Of these, (1) and (2) are basically reiterations of the same idea, and in a sense they are closer to a direct outpouring of naive pathos than a logical line of reasoning. Not only that, but if the land of one’s birth is precious, then is not the land of another’s birth precious as well? Can one justify hitting the parents of another with the fact that one’s own parents are more precious than another’s parents? And does this not go against the Confucian spirit of treating others as oneself? These are some of the ways by which his argument may be refuted. His third argument, on the other hand, refers to Japan’s independent history and the continuity of the Imperial line.<sup>5</sup> That is, he points out that Japan’s history and culture are in no way inferior to China’s. His emphatic referral here to the continuity of the Imperial line stems from the great importance he places on “orthodoxy” (this can be confirmed in his *Theory of Orthodoxy* [正統論]).

2.2. At the age of 33, Keisai began writing *Seikenigen* [靖獻遺言], which he completed and published at the age of 35,<sup>6</sup> and it is

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5. This assertion of Keisai’s is very similar to Yamaga Sōkō [山鹿素行]’s argument in *Chūchōjijitsu* [中朝事實], which criticized the contemporary Japanese scholars’ worship of China, saying that Japan’s royal line was unbroken because, unlike China, which often changed dynasties, there were no immoral individuals who violated the law of the Son of Heaven, so it was more appropriate to call Japan the central nation.
  6. The chronological record of Kondō Keigo [近藤啓吾], *Asami keisai no kenkyū*

estimated that he completed *Seikenigenkōgi*, which was meant to be a supplement to *Seikenigen*, three years later, at the age of 38.<sup>7</sup> In later years, Keisai said that he only compiled *Seikenigen* to awaken people to the highest duty, and that this highest duty was none other than the duty to be aware of Japan's subjectivity and to confirm it. This is shown in the following passage:

We must revere the way of the sages. However, it is heresy to revere the Confucian classics as sacred in and of themselves. We were born in Japan and now enjoy a time of peace, living with a peace of mind and cultivating life through the grace of those above us. To support foreign lands is great heresy, and if even now Confucius or Zhu Xi should be ordered by the lord of a foreign land to attack Japan, I would be at the front with a gun and shoot Confucius and Zhu Xi in the heads. To say that they possess the Way and surrender to foreigners or to become their vassals is a great disloyalty. This point is the highest duty of lord and vassal. *Seikenigen* merely explained this idea. If one reads the Confucian books, becoming a foreigner in his heart and putting on foreign clothes to mimic foreigners, this is because he does not know the true Way. To shoot Confucius and Zhu Xi is to make Confucius and Zhu Xi happy. They would think that following them out of reverence and belief would be disloyal.<sup>8</sup>

Keisai wrote this at the age of 48, in 1699. The following year, he exchanged letters with Atobe Yoshiaki [跡部良顯], who agreed with Sato Naokata [佐藤直方] on such subjects as the theory of the “civilized” and “uncivilized,” and Japanese Shinto, and two years after that he finally brought together his thoughts on the theory in a text called *Chūgokuben* [中國辨]. As Keisai himself reveals, there were many confused arguments concerning this problem put forth by disciples of Yamazaki Ansai after Keisai first elucidated his thoughts in the *Shoshi Rysin Jo* of *Seikenigenkōgi*<sup>9</sup>: “Before, I said

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[淺見綱齋の研究] (Tokyo: Shindōshigakkai [神道史學會], 1970).

7. Tazaki Masayoshi [田崎仁義] ed., *Op. cit.*, p. 134.
8. “Asami sensei gakudan [淺見先生學談],” *The Writings of Asami Keisai* (Kondō Keigo [近藤啓吾] and Kanemoto Masataka [金本正孝] ed., Tokyo: Kokusho kankōkai [國書刊行會], 1995), pp. 643-644.

in *Kōgi* [講義] (referring to *Seikenigenkōgi*: my note) that Japan was the central nation and foreign lands were uncivilized peoples, but there were so many confused arguments that dealt with the terms ‘central nation and uncivilized peoples’ that I have studied the issue further and came to this conclusion.”<sup>10</sup> The argument between Keisai and Atobe Yoshiaki was a part of this controversy. Thus, Keisai felt it necessary to further clarify and develop his thoughts. In this regard, *Chūgokuben* revised and supplemented his arguments from the *Shoshi Ryuin Jo* of *Seikenigenkōgi*, presenting what could be called his final thoughts on the theory of civilized and uncivilized. In the next section we will analyze the structure and meaning of *Chūgokuben*.

2.3. There was a twelve-year gap between *Seikenigenkōgi* and *Chūgokuben*. *Chūgokuben* took the opinions expressed in *Seikenigenkōgi* as its basic framework, yet it not only showed marked differences in its method of argument and the detailed nature of its logical development, it also showed important changes in Keisai’s perception of the “self” and the “other.”

Firstly, unlike the *Shoshi Ryuin Jo*, *Chūgokuben* thoroughly adopted a dialogue form of argument. This is the result of his awareness of the various arguments brought against his views. More specifically, *Chūgokuben* briefly introduces the thoughts of the narrator, which are then followed by nine questions and answers.

The narrator first emphasizes that, whether it be China or Japan, every country with an established territory and customs considers itself to be a world of its own. To this is posited the first question, which basically asks: since China is refined in etiquette

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9. See also “Chūgoku ronshū [中國論集]” (volume 7 of *Onzōroku* [軀藏錄]) and “Ogiatsu Yuzhu tantō zasshi [荻濃祐重擔當雜誌]” (volume 14 of “*Onzōrokushūi* [軀藏錄拾遺]”). These two texts are recorded in volumes 1 and 2, respectively, of *Zōtei Satō Zikihō zenshū* [增訂佐藤直方全集] (Nihon koten gakkai [日本古典學會] ed., Tokyo: 1979).

10. *Chūgokuben*, in *The Writings of Asami Keisai* (Published by Kokusho kankōkai), p. 372. All further references to *Chūgokuben* are from this text.

and morality, is it not natural that a distinction be found between the central nation and uncivilized peoples?

This question is answered from two different angles. First, the highest duty exists irrespective of the level of virtue of a nation. He explains this point by using the example of a virtueless father — even if one’s father is without virtue, one must not despise him, but support and serve him. Secondly, the etiquette and morality of Japan are in no way inferior to China. This is what he is pointing out here: “Since the creation of the world, the orthodoxy of our land has been unbroken and the fundamental principle of the relation between the lord and his vassals has been unchanged for ten thousand years, and this is the most important of the three fundamental principles of human relations, unachieved by other nations. In addition, the character of honesty and uprightness as brave samurai have become rooted in our nature. These are the magnificent traits of our land. Since the restoration, sages have often appeared and ruled our land well, so our morality and etiquette are no less than any other nation.”<sup>11</sup>

The second question is that, even if that is the case, China is a vast nation, while Japan is a small nation, so how can they be the same? This question is likewise answered from two different angles. The first questions whether one only recognizes one’s parents if they are tall and treats them poorly if they are short, while the second points out that, if one looks at a map of all nations, China is only a small part of it. This second reply is noteworthy in that it assumes a relative perspective toward China, juxtaposing it to the world at large.

The third question asks whether, according to a specific passage in the *Book of Rites*, China (the “central nation”) is not indeed the center of heaven and earth. The answer to this is that the reference to the *Book of Rites* is utterly irrational, and “central nation” is merely a term applied by China to the extent of their rule. Not

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11. *Chūgokuben, Ibid.*, p. 369.

only that, but the San-Miao, Huai-yi, and Xi-rong peoples are located within the nine states of China, and yet they are still called “uncivilized peoples.” In short, China is not at the topographical center of the world, and thus it is improper to call China the “central nation” and call the myriad nations around the world “uncivilized peoples.” This answer is noteworthy in that it completely rejects a geographical distinction between “civilized” and “uncivilized.”

The fourth question states that, according to the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, those that follow the teachings of China are treated as central nations, while those that do not are treated as uncivilized peoples, and then asks if it is not only natural to call all civilized lands central nations. In his answer to this, Keisai begins with this counter-argument: “If that is so, then if the people of the nine states of China wear their clothing the opposite way, and if their language is different, then they must all be called uncivilized peoples.”<sup>12</sup> Basically, he is pointing out the contradiction in distinguishing “civilized” from “uncivilized” according to virtue. This argument is in line with the answer to the first question.

The fifth question asks if it would not then be proper to ignore the distinction between the central nation and uncivilized peoples spoken of by the sages, as it is without foundation and only served to support their own land. The answer to this is that the Way spoken of in the *Spring and Autumn Annals* is not to unconditionally accept the Chinese conception of China as the central nation and Japan as an uncivilized people, but to view one’s own land as the “master” and other lands as “guests.” This was the original intent of Confucius, who wrote *Annals*, and thus if Confucius had been born in Japan he would have written the *Annals* with Japan as the center. This answer is noteworthy in that it does not contradict Confucius, yet at the same time it interprets Confucius’ theory of civilized and uncivilized in a completely different way, thus rendering powerless the theory of civilized and uncivilized on

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12. *Chūgokuben*, *Ibid.*, p. 371.



which the *Annals* is based.

The sixth question is whether Japan should not submit to China, even if the sages of the mythical Yao and Shun should appear and say that Japan must submit to China. In reply to this, Keisai offers a famous quotation from his teacher, Yamazaki Ansai: “If China should wage war on Japan and the sages of Yao and Shun should come as their generals, it would be the highest duty to smite them with a cannon blast. Even if we imitate them for the sake of etiquette and virtue, it is best for us not to become their vassals. This is the Way of the *Spring and Autumn Annals* and the Way of our land.”<sup>13</sup> Thus, the old custom of sending emissaries to China in order to receive an investiture of title is faulted as a failure to properly understand the highest duty.

However, this sixth answer is notable because it is the first time that Korea is mentioned. It demands further attention because it offers a glimpse of the internal contradictions of Keisai’s criticism of the theory of civilized and uncivilized in *Chūgokuben*. These internal contradictions allow us to surmise the actual focus of Keisai’s arguments, which on the surface may appear to be aimed at universal principles. The corresponding passage is as follows:

Since the Han and Tang dynasties, stemming from the practice of everyone referring to China as the “master,” a country has been praised as a good country if it fell in line beneath China, without any regard for virtue. It would be good for us to call our land “master” and to soothe the other nations that submitted to us, so we are no different from them (referring to China: my note). For this reason, it is wrong for China to try to rule Japan, and it is unreasonable for Japan to try to rule China. Well, Korea submits to us because we have subjugated them, and thus they send emissaries to our land and pay tribute to us. This is a great achievement by our land. From the point of view of Korea, it is a great achievement for them to call their own lands “master.”<sup>14</sup>

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13. *Chūgokuben*, *Ibid.*, p. 371.

14. *Chūgokuben*, *Ibid.*, p. 372.

This passage contains two arguments, a universal argument and a specific argument, both of which are contradictory.

A. Universal argument: All lands are their own masters.

- (1) From China's point of view, China is the master.
- (2) From Japan's point of view, Japan is the master.
- (3) From Korea's points of view, they are their own masters.

B. Specific argument: If other lands should submit to Japan, it would be good to soothe them.

- (1) Korea has been subjugated by and submits to Japan.
- (2) This is a great achievement by Japan.
- (3) It is good for Japan to soothe Korea, as they are doing now.

Of these two, the universal argument shows the range of Keisai's thought and leaves no room for dissenting arguments. The problem is the internal contradiction between the universal argument and the specific argument, and the realistic validity of the specific argument itself. If the universal argument is the major premise, can the specific argument be logically sustained? It cannot. The specific argument is not part of the universal argument, but exists at a point some distance removed, and thus the two are in a contradictory relationship.

Up until now Keisai had said that each and every nation in the world was its own master, and that China's disdain for other countries or calling them uncivilized peoples on the basis of morality, size, or geographical position was unacceptable. This is the reason that the Japanese cannot be an uncivilized people, why Japan cannot be subordinate to China, and why Japan should resist courageously should China ever invade. When the relationship shifts to Japan/Korea in the specific argument, though, he suddenly changes his position. Seeing that he refers to the Japanese Invasion of Korea in 1592 as "Japan's great achievement," there is no doubt that he

regards this as a just war. We can assume that most of the Japanese intellectuals of the time agreed with Keisai on this issue, but that does not mean that all of them agreed. For example, those like Amenomori Hōshu [雨森芳洲] said in no uncertain terms that Toyotomi's invasion of Korea was a mistake. We can also find a problem in Keisai's perception of reality in his use of the term "tribute." If we look at a text written after *Chūgokuben*, Keisai says that if Korea "should come to respect Japan, soothing" Korea would be the right thing to do.<sup>15</sup> Based on these words, we can at the least infer that Keisai believes that Korea has shown submission to Japan after Japan's "subjugation" of Korea in 1592, by respecting them and sending emissaries, and that meanwhile Japan has been soothing Korea. Here as well, we can sense some weakness in his perception of history or reality.

Considering this, it would seem that the criticism of the theory of civilized and uncivilized in the universal argument focuses only on the relationship between China and Japan—that is, that it focuses on the pragmatic task of establishing a Japanese subjectivity outside of the Chinese theory of civilized and uncivilized. If he had pursued this universal argument in its full integrity, it may have allowed an escape from the conventional framework in yet another East Asian relationship—that of Japan and Korea—and revealed new aspects of that relationship. However, Keisai was unable to do this. He was able to break the Chinese theory of civilized and uncivilized through his universal argument, but in the relationship between Japan and Korea he contradictorily adhered to a new theory of civilized and uncivilized a Japanese theory of civilized and uncivilized. In the history of Japanese thought, this contradiction or duplicity was not confined to the case of Keisai, but, as seen later on, appeared in many variations as a sort of "archetype."

The seventh question asks how a country like the masters of heaven

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15. *Kettsai sennsē yawa* [網齋先生夜話], in *The Writings of Asami Keisai* (Published by Kokusho kankōkai), p. 640.

and a barbaric people with vulgar customs should act. “Masters of heaven” refers to the so-called southern barbarians, Western nations such as Spain and Portugal. In response to this, Keisai says that, no matter what a country’s customs are like, “one’s nation is a world unto itself.”<sup>16</sup> This is an application of the universal argument above. It is significant in that he applies the universal argument even to the West.

The eighth question asks if it would not then be better to call Japan the “central nation” and China the “uncivilized people.” The answer to this question is that such terms as “civilized nation” or “uncivilized peoples” are all names given to countries by China, and so if Japan were to call itself the “central nation” it would be imitating China. Thus it would be better to call Japan “our nation” and other lands “other nations.” In other words, he is proposing to get rid of such terms as central nation and uncivilized people and to instead use reasonable terms that can be acceptable by all. As was pointed out above, in the *Shoshi Ryuin Jo* of *Seikenigenkōgi*, Keisai rebelled against a Chinese theory of civilized and uncivilized, asserting that from Japan’s point of view Japan should be called the central nation and China the uncivilized peoples. His opinion here, then, can be seen as a revision of his former idea. This revision, which shows a maturity and development in Keisai’s thoughts on the theory of civilized and uncivilized, is significant in that it is an active response to increasing, controversial criticism — especially by Sato Naokata — of his former opinion, which may be summarized as “Japan=central nation, China=uncivilized people.” This is because Sato Naokata emphasized that China was the central nation and Japan was the uncivilized peoples without any relation to virtue.<sup>17</sup> Keisai’s proposal to eliminate the use of terms like central nation and uncivilized peoples put to rest

16. *Chūgokuben*, *Ibid.*, p. 372.

17. For Sato Naokata’s position, refer to “Chūgoku ronshū [中國論集],” in *Yamazaki Ansai gakuha* [山崎闇齋學派] (*Nihon shisō daikei* [日本思想大系] 31, Tokyo: Iwanami shoten [岩波書店], 1980).

what he may have felt to be an enervating argument over terminology, as well as showing his intention to objectify the perception of the self and the other.

The final question asks why then Confucius called China the central nation and other lands uncivilized peoples. This question naturally follows the eighth question. Why did he ask this question? Because the proposal to excise the terms central nation and uncivilized peoples is a denial (or “reinterpretation,” from Keisai’s point of view) of the paradigm presented by Confucius. Keisai must have kept this in mind and felt the need to defend his position. Thus he begins his answer to this question frankly: “If that was Confucius’ intent, it is only a personal opinion, even if it was the opinion of Confucius. If the Way says that my parents are unclean, then the Way is invalid, even if it is the words of Confucius.”<sup>18</sup> This is a very subjective attitude. In the history of Edo-period thought, there is probably no other quotation that so directly shows the tendency toward the de-Sinification and Japanization of Confucianism. However, his answer proceeds as follows: Confucius would not have said that. The highest duty that Confucius sought to express through the *Spring and Autumn Annals* was that it was natural for each country to call themselves master, and those Japanese Confucianists who forgot this and imitated China did so because they misread the Confucian writings.

It is not important that this interpretation of the *Annals* differs from Confucius’ original intent and seems to be somewhat unreasonable. What is important is the fact that Keisai is not attempting to free himself entirely from Confucius, but to carry Confucius along for a while, even while completely revising the point of view of Confucius’ theory of civilized and uncivilized. This predicament is responsible for Keisai’s unique position, and is also the source of a dilemma inherent in his arguments. The dilemma becomes clearer when we recall the Shintoist scholars, who attacked

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18. *Chūgokuben, Ibid.*, pp. 372-373.

Keisai's "insufficiency" from the right,<sup>19</sup> and Sato Naokata, who attacked his "excessiveness" from the left.

2.4. Here we will summarize the results of the above analysis of *Chūgokuben* and add a few points of examination.

In *Chūgokuben*, Keisai denied the discrimination between nations based on level of morality and etiquette, geographical location, size of territory, and period of enlightenment, clearly stating that every nation on earth was its own master. By way of confirming this universal principle, he perceived China and Japan as being in an equal relationship. The central nation/uncivilized peoples theory of *Seikenigenkōgi* was not without its various weaknesses, and it could be said that Keisai did not offer sufficient objective support for his arguments, but he did surpass the limitations of *Seikenigenkōgi* and develop his arguments in *Chūgokuben*. With regard to this, we can make two observations.

Firstly, in *Seikenigenkōgi*, deriving from the premise that one's own parents are the most important, no matter how foolish they may be, and from Japan's historical as well as cultural excellence, Keisai deduces a theory of Japan as the central nation, but he is unable to go beyond such a direct eruption of patriotic pathos to discover a universal principle. In *Chūgokuben*, though, while he carries on this theory, he does not limit his field of vision to Japan and China but examines the issue from a global perspective and is thus able to transcend his simple subjectivity and reach objectivity. It would appear that the global geographic knowledge introduced from the West indirectly contributed to this development.

Secondly, he abandons his former theory of Japan as the central nation and proposes the use of the terms "our nation" and "other nations" instead of "central nation" and "uncivilized peoples." His theory of Japan as the central nation is a Japanification of the

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19. Tani Chinzan is a good example. As is well known, Keisai argued violently with Tani Chinzan over the issues of Shinto on several occasions, ultimately resulting in the ending of their friendship.

Chinese theory of civilized and uncivilized, and in that regard it exists to some extent within the structure of the Chinese theory of civilized and uncivilized. Keisai appears to have realized this, and thus he apparently decided to change the framework of the argument altogether. The alternative terminology of “our nation” and “other nations” is noteworthy because it was not confined merely to an issue of terminology, but comprised a concentration or crystallization of the philosophy at which Keisai had arrived.

It is only right for us to properly evaluate this development in *Chūgokuben*, and it is necessary that its significance be sufficiently recognized. And yet we cannot overlook the internal cracks and contradictions in its logical structure. These are found not in the opposition between Japan and China, but between Japan and Korea. That is, while we can observe the universal principle in the relationship between Japan and China, this universal principle is reduced to nothing more than mere rhetoric when applied to the relationship between Japan and Korea, and in practice it becomes only a parenthetical observation. From where does this duplicity, this self-contradiction originate? I realize that this will require much discussion, but here we will satisfy ourselves with a few interpretations. I will first note that the objective behind Keisai’s argument is the establishment of a realistic relationship between Japan and China. It was also ultimately for this reason that he went as far as establishing a universal principle. In other words, the establishment of a universal principle itself was not his goal. As one who had been baptized in Confucian universalism, he was not convinced that the theory of civilized and uncivilized could be denied by simply proclaiming with conviction — as those Shintoist scholars did — that Japan was the greatest, that Japan was from ancient times the land of the gods. Thus, it was necessary for Keisai to tear down the theory of civilized and uncivilized by means of the foundation of a new universal principle. It is precisely this fact that I believe we need to keep in mind. This also has to do with why the universal principle could be properly

invoked in terms of his original goal, the relationship between Japan and China, but could not but lose its appeal for Keisai when placed in terms of another axis in East Asia, the relationship between Japan and Korea.

Furthermore, this duplicity in Keisai's logical structure appears closely related to the traditional Japanese view of Korea. The tendency to regard Korea as an old tributary of Japan based on the traditional accounts of Empress Jingu's conquering expedition to Korea resurfaced in *Jinno Shōtōki* [神皇正統記], and it came to the forefront of history once again with Toyotomi's invasion of Korea in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Confucian intellectuals of the Edo period, from the 17<sup>th</sup> century on, were by no means free from this consciousness — or, more precisely, “image.” It consisted of nothing but a supposition, but the important thing is that such a supposition became firmly rooted in reality as a truth that had remained unshaken for ages. For example, even Hayashi Razan [林羅山] saw Korea in relation to Empress Jingu, so it is not difficult to guess what the other scholars thought. Keisai was no exception. Furthermore, because he took as the cardinal points of his scholarship the confirmation and veneration of the highest duty of respect toward the king, he was in a position where he could not but place great importance on the *Jinno Shōtōki*,<sup>20</sup> and thus it is highly likely that he prescribed a chauvinistic meaning to Toyotomi's invasion of Korea and the subsequent sending of emissaries from Korea. I think that his claim in *Chūgokuben* that Toyotomi's invasion of Korea was a great achievement for Japan, and his adherence to an attitude influenced by the theory of civilized and uncivilized — that it would be good for Japan to soothe those countries who submitted to Japan — must be understood from this angle.

Up until this point, some of those who have some knowledge of *The Writings of Asami Keisai*, even through a cursory reading,

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20. For Keisei's mention of *Jinno Shōtōki*, refer to “Tō Atobe Yoshiaki [答跡部良賢],” *The Writings of Asami Keisai* (Published by Kokusho kankōkai), p. 412.



might find this critical interpretation of Keisei's thought somewhat implausible, recalling that Keisai harbored feelings of respect for Yi Toegyeo of Korea, and further that in his writings Keisei once said, "It is a mistake to call Yi Toegyeo a citizen of the Eastern Barbarians. If each nation comes to believe that they are the "master," it does not matter where one lives. It is pointless for us to call Korea an uncivilized people."<sup>21</sup> However, though Keisei pronounced that "It is pointless to call Korea an uncivilized people," by no means does this statement overturn or nullify what I have argued thus far. The reason is that, from Keisai's point of view, this text and the texts introduced above do not in any way contradict each other. That is, in *Chūgokuben* he recognizes the submission of Korea to Japan as natural, but he does not call Korea an uncivilized people. Even though the terms "central nation" and "uncivilized peoples" have been abandoned, and even though the universal principle that each nation calls themselves "master" has been reconfirmed, we cannot say that the relationship between Japan and Korea is recognized as a relationship between equals in the above passage. As always, if we do not keep in mind the tension and contradiction between what has been said and what has been left unsaid, between what has been said on the surface and what is presumed beneath the surface, we will have difficulty comprehending the issue as a whole.

Early on, one of Keisai's disciples saw through this contradiction in *Chūgokuben* and raised a keen question about it. The question and Keisai's answer are as follows:

Concerning the central nation and uncivilized peoples, you said that if other nations submit to our land, we must soothe them. If such things as emissaries sent from Japan to other nations are unjust, then is it not unjust for other nations to submit to our land?  
The teacher says: If we speak of the exceeding good of this law, then

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21. "Zhōwazakki [常話雜記]," in *The Writings of Asami Keisai* (Published by Kokusho kankōkai), p. 566.

it is proper for one to hear it said that one's land is precious and then say that each land must regard itself as precious. If not, then if another land should admire our land and come to us, it would be better for us to soothe them and send them back.

- Kettsai Sennsē Yawa<sup>22</sup>

This kind of reasoning is part and parcel of Keisai's established theory.

### 3.

3.1. Hong Daeyong (1731-1783, pen name: Damheon) denied the Chinese theory of civilized and uncivilized and was well known as a scholar who clearly stated that Korea and China were equal nations. This philosophy of his is reflected in his later work, *Dialogue on Mount Uisan* [*Uisanmundap*, 鑿山問答].

Unlike Keisai's *Chūgokuben*, *Dialogue on Mount Uisan* is not a short treatise but a small booklet. At the very end of this booklet, Damheon makes a reference to the theory of civilized and uncivilized. Korean historians have long focused on this part of the text and the accepted theory has been that Damheon rejected Sinocentrism and advocated nationalism. This theory is not entirely without validity. However, *Dialogue on Mount Uisan* is not only about the theory of civilized and uncivilized, but also about an understanding of humanity, nature, the world, and the universe that Damheon arrived at in his later years, which are all brought together in a dramatically condensed form. Significantly enough, the discussion of the theory of civilized and uncivilized occupies the final place in this organic structure. Thus, attempting to discuss *Dialogue on Mount Uisan* by focusing solely on its

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22. *The Writings of Asami Keisai* (Published by Kokusho kankōkai), p. 640.

mention of the theory of civilized and uncivilized is both insufficient and may lead to misinterpretation, and I believe that its meaning must be understood within the context of the entire work.

3.2. *Dialogue on Mount Uisan* is comprised of the following three major parts:

- (1) The theory of human and material<sup>23</sup> nature
- (2) The theory of astronomy and geography
- (3) The changes between ancient times and the present, and the division of civilized and uncivilized

Of these three parts, number (1), the theory of human and material nature, is both the starting point for *Dialogue on Mount Uisan* and its epistemological foundation. Hong Daeyong's theory of human and material nature can be summarized as the "equality of humanity and material nature." "In fundamental terms" (as opposed to the ephemeral terms of phenomena), humanity and the material are equal. This is the central point of the idea of "equality of humanity and the material." Damheon's idea of the equality of humanity and the material came about in the midst of the argument over whether the respective natures of humanity and the material were the same or different, a topic that had dominated the Korean philosophical world for almost a century and a half, beginning around the late 17<sup>th</sup> century. As is well known, this argument was fought fiercely by the two axes of the Nangnon [洛論] Faction and the Horon [湖論] Faction, the former maintaining that the nature of humanity and the material were the same and the latter maintaining that they were different. Damheon carried on the views of his teacher, Kim Wonhaeng (pen name: Miho), and was known to side with the Nangnon Faction. However, we must

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23. "Material" here refers to all that which is not human, animals and plants included.

take into consideration the fact that, while Damheon did carry on the tradition of the Nangnon Faction, he developed his unique thought in a way different from any other Nangnon Faction scholar, including his teacher. In this regard, Damheon occupies a very special position in the history of Korean thought. It is believed that there were several factors at work that led Damheon in a different direction from other contemporary Confucian scholars, and one of those factors is his research in “Western learning” and astronomy, which interested him from his youth. By combining his idea of the equality of humanity and the material, based on Neo-Confucian theories of human nature, with the knowledge of the natural sciences that he adopted from his study of Western learning and astronomy, Damheon was able to form a unique point of view in interpreting the relationships between the self and the other, the inner and the outer, and center and periphery.

Damheon’s idea of the equality of humanity and the material was founded on the idea that both humanity and the material are fundamentally good. We can substitute “the self and the other” here for “humanity and the material.” This relationship stands for all of the following binaries: myself and others, the self and the other, the inner and the outer, the center and the periphery, and the subject and the object. We can say that *Dialogue on Mount Uisan* is a text that offers a new conception and theory of values concerning the self and the other, but this new theory of values was not simply a new exploration of the relationship between humanity and the material—it transcended the distinction between the self and the other in terms of the relationship between one human and another, and between the civilized and the uncivilized, affirming their individuality and thus developing an ethic that respected the life of each individual entity. Below, we will briefly analyze *Dialogue on Mount Uisan* following the organic development of this thought from the idea of the equality of humanity and the material to the theory of civilized and uncivilized.

3.3. *Dialogue on Mount Uisan* is a conversation between Heoja and Sirong.<sup>24</sup> Heoja speaks for the scholars who accepted the conventional wisdom of the time. He thinks that humanity is the spiritual head of all creation, and that the earth is the center of the heavens, and he believes in the theory of the five elements (metal, wood, water, fire, and earth) and in the theory of civilized and uncivilized. Sirong refutes item by item the conventional wisdom adhered to by Heoja and presents different thoughts and different points of view. In this regard, Sirong speaks for Hong Daeyong.

The following is a conversation between Heoja and Sirong concerning the relationship between humanity and the material.

Heoja spoke: "Of all living things between heaven and earth, only people are noble. After all, the beasts have no wisdom and the plants have no emotions. Also, these have no etiquette. Thus, people are more noble than the beasts, and plants are more lowly than the beasts."

Sirong lifted up his head and laughed, answering:

"You are truly a person! If the five human relationships and the five matters<sup>25</sup> are the etiquette of people, then to travel around in packs and eat their food is the etiquette of the beasts, and to grow in groves and stretch out their branches is the etiquette of the plants. If you look at the material from the perspective of people, then people are noble and the material is lowly, but if you look at things from the perspective of the material, then the material is noble and people are lowly. From the perspective of the heavens, people and the material are the same.... [G]enerally speaking, nothing does more harm to the great Way than a proud heart. People thinking that they are noble and that the material is lowly is the root of a proud heart. ... why do you not regard the material from the perspective of the heavens, but view them from the perspective of people?"<sup>26</sup>

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24. The following discussion is based on my "The relativity and equality of the material and the self in Hong Daeyong's thought," in *Korean Ecological Thought*, Dolbegae Publishing, 1999.

25. According to the "Hong Fan" chapter of *The Book of Documents* (Shu Jing), the five matters related to moral culture are making one's face courteous, speaking frankly, seeing clearly, listening carefully, and thinking deeply.

26. *Dialogue on Mount Uisan* in *Writings of Damheon*, Vol. 4, pp. 18 rear-19 front.

The question of whether people are more noble than the material or the material is more noble than people is a relative one depending on whether you are looking at it from the perspective of people or from the perspective of the material, yet if you look at it from the point of view of heaven, that is, from an absolute point of view, then people and the material are neither noble nor lowly but the same. In the above quotation, Sirong rebukes Heoja, who holds fast to his anthropocentrism, saying, “Why do you not regard the material from the perspective of the heavens, but view them from the perspective of people?” In sum, Hong Daeyong takes issue with humanity’s egocentrism.

However, when he expounds that “From the perspective of the heavens, people and the material are the same,” what specifically does “the heavens” mean, and how is it that people and the material are the same from the perspective of the heavens? The answer is enclosed in the following passages:

- (1) The appearance of people and the material originates in heaven and earth.<sup>27</sup>
- (2) The great void is calm and remote, but is filled with the material force [chi, 氣]. It has no inside or outside, no beginning or end. This material force of the great void is brimming and congealing, taking form and spreading out throughout the void ... this is the earth, the moon, the sun, and the stars. The foundation of the earth is water and soil and its form is round, and it turns unceasingly, floating in the air. All creation lives on its surface.<sup>28</sup>
- (3) All material with form must eventually come to an end. Material force congeals into form, and form dissolves again into material force.<sup>29</sup>

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All references to *Dialogue on Mount Uisan*, even without clearly specified page numbers, are from Volume 4 of the 1939 edition of *Writings of Damheon* [湛軒書], published by Sinjoseonsa.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 19 front.

28. *Loc. cit.*

29. *Ibid.*, p. 23 rear.

As seen in (2) and (3), Hong Daeyong considers the origin of all creation to be the “great void.” Hong Daeyong inherited this concept of the great void from the Chinese material force philosopher, Zhang Zai of Northern Song, and the 16<sup>th</sup> century Korean material force philosopher Seo Gyeongdeok.<sup>30</sup> As the substance of material force, the great void has no temporal beginning or end, and no spatial limits. Material force in the phenomenal world is the operation of this great void, and existing form is the result of the congealing of material force. All things are finite and will eventually cease to exist. This cessation of existence, though, is the end of the form, not the end of the material force. Material force returns once more as its substance, the great void. The material force referred to in (3) is the great void.

Thus, when Hong Daeyong says in (1) that “The appearance of people and the material is founded in heaven and earth,” the great void is none other than the heaven. Accordingly, to view things from the point of view of heaven means to view things from the point of view of the great void, the source of all things. If we look at it from the point of view of the great void, all things are equal in spite of their differences in appearance. In other words, the great void is the ultimate foundation that proves the sameness of the self and the other, that is, of all things. In this way, by viewing the self and the other from the point of view of the great void, Hong Daeyong reconsiders anthropocentrism and is able to establish a theoretical framework that allows freedom from it.

3.4. Hong Daeyong not only rejects egocentrism in the relationship between people and the material, but in all relationships. This attitude is expressed in his statement of the relationship between the earth and other heavenly bodies. Let us look at the following passage:

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30. For more on this point, refer to “Seo Gyeongdeok’s natural philosophy” in *Korean Ecological Thought*.

Of all the bodies in the heavens, there is not one that is not a world unto itself. If we view the earth from other heavenly bodies, it is just another heavenly body. An unlimited number of worlds are spread out across the universe, and to say that only the earth is the center of that is not reasonable. Each heavenly body is a world and all rotate. Just as we see things from the earth, if we see things from another heavenly body, then we would say that another heavenly body is the center. This is because each heavenly body is its own world.<sup>31</sup>

Each of the countless heavenly bodies in the heavens is a world of its own, and if you look at other heavenly bodies from your own heavenly body, then your heavenly body is the center, just as we look at other heavenly bodies from the earth. He is pointing out the limitations of an egocentrically formulated understanding. What then is the truth? The truth is that everything is the center, or that there is no center. Saying that everything is the center may be the same as saying that there is no center. But will the lack of a center mean instability? Positing an inside and an outside, an above and a below, a center and a periphery, and a vertical, stratified order — is that not the way to achieve orderly harmony and to avoid plunging the world into chaos? Hong Daeyong thinks precisely the opposite. That is, the distinction between inner and outer and the distinction between center and periphery that comes from egocentrism caused peace to be broken and plunged the way of the world into decay.<sup>32</sup>

Hong Daeyong was able to free himself from the egocentrism of perception, and rather than recognizing a particular entity as the center, he recognized a horizontal network of relationships between all entities, because he firmly believed in the sameness of the self and the other. In other words, his perception of the sameness of the self and the other caused him to refuse a vertical or hierarchical

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31. *Ibid.*, p. 22 rear.

32. *Ibid.*, pp. 34-35. This point is also discussed in *Korean Ecological Thought*, pp. 290-292.



understanding of all beings. Not only that, but the sameness of the self and the other, even without a center — or, rather, precisely because there was no center — became his epistemological and ontological foundation for a world where coexistence, symbiosis, and harmony were possible. Although Hong Daeyong's view of human civilization is not without a somewhat pessimistic tone,<sup>33</sup> the reason that his thought did not stop at mere relativism or fall back on nihilism was his firm belief in the sameness of the self and the other that originated with his philosophy of the material force.

Hong Daeyong's ideas, which held that the perception of the self and the other was relative, and thus that the self and the other were ultimately the same, refuted in one stroke the firmly established theory of the civilized and the uncivilized, which had supported the international medieval order in East Asia. The following passage sheds some light on this:

China and the West differ in longitude by 180 degrees. The Chinese consider China to be the central world and the West to be the opposite world, but Westerners consider the West to be the central world and China to be the opposite world. In truth, though, life on this earth beneath the heavens is the same all around the world no matter the region, and all are central; there is no need to call anyone the middle world or the opposite world.<sup>34</sup>

The central world and the opposite world are two regions on opposite poles of the world — that is, two regions separated by 180 degrees longitude — while the middle world is in between the central world and the opposite world — that is, separated from each by 90 degrees longitude. Hong Daeyong says that other regions are called the opposite or the middle world from our point of view, yet from their perspective, our region is the opposite or middle

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33. *Loc. cit.*

34. *Ibid.*, p. 21 rear.

world, so in reality all regions of the world are central worlds. This means that the center is everywhere, and also that there is no center. It is the same theory which Hong confirmed through his idea of the heavenly bodies of the universe. This point of view, which says that all regions on the face of the earth are the center, or that no region on the face of the earth can be the center, is meaningful because it is a complete denial of the Chinese-centered world view—the world view of the theory of civilized and uncivilized. This point is made more clearly in the following passage:

All with spirit are brought forth by the heavens and raised up by the earth, and thus are the same people; all who stand out from the crowd to rule a nation are the same kings, all who make many gates and dig deep moats to defend the capital are the same nations; whether one wears a Yin Dynasty hat or a Zhou Dynasty hat, whether one tattoos the body or whether one tattoos the forehead, they are all the same customs. When seen from the heavens, how can there be a division between inside and outside? Thus everyone, whether Chinese or barbarian, is intimate with the people of their land, respects their king and defends their land, and is familiar with their own customs. Generally speaking, humanity and the material increase according to changes in the heavens and the earth. As humanity and the material increase, the division between the self and the other appears, and as the division between the self and the other appears, the inside and the outside are divided. The bowels and the arms and legs are the inside and outside of the body, myself and my wife and children are the inside and outside of our household, my brothers and my relatives are the inside and outside of our clan, our village and its surroundings are the inside and outside of our land, and those regions that maintain good relations with China and those that don't are the inside and the outside of China. Generally, taking what is not one's own is called "thievery," and to kill one without sin is called "villainy." When the barbarians of the north, south, east, and west invade China it is called "pillaging," and when China abuses its military might to attack the barbarians of the north, south, east, and west it is called "villainy." "Pillaging" and "villainy" are the same thing. Confucius was a native of Zhou China. With each day the royal family of Zhou sank lower and the feudal lords grew weaker, and the Wu and Chu from the south troubled China and did not cease their thievery. The Spring and Autumn Annals is a Zhou history book, so is it not natural for it to set a strict division between the inside and the outside? However, had Confucius crossed the ocean on a ship and come to live in the land of

the eastern barbarians, he would have changed the barbarians through Chinese culture and established the Way of Zhou China there, and there naturally would have been a “Foreign Spring and Autumn Annals” that spoke of distinguishing between inside and outside and the duty to respect or spurn. This is because Confucius was a sage.<sup>35</sup>

The above passage is from the conclusion of *Dialogue on Mount Uisan* and presents the so-called “Foreign Spring and Autumn Annals Theory.” It claims that all people, all kings, all lands, all customs (cultures) are the same, and there is no valid division between inside and outside. The division between inside and outside is only a division centered around the self. Thus it is relative and not fixed. From the point of view of heaven, insides and outsides do not exist; only equality within horizontal relationships exists. In a word, in the above passage, Hong Daeyong confirms the sameness of the self and others in terms of all humanity, peoples, nations, and cultures.

Although Hong Daeyong does not recognize the inside and the outside, he does not deny the individuality of all existence. All humans, peoples, nations, and cultures have individual importance. In this regard, Hong Daeyong does not understand the world as a conflict between the subject and the object, but as a “network of relationships” between a number of subjects. That is, he does not take the position that sets up the subject and the object against each other, but instead conceives of many subjects side by side. It is precisely in this regard that Hong Daeyong’s ideas offer a basis for the modern nation state, and yet also show an entirely different orientation than Western philosophy of the subject or of nationalism. That is, while Western concepts of the subject or nationalism begin with an affirmation of egocentrism, Hong Daeyong’s concepts are fundamentally different in that they are founded on a denial of egocentrism.

In *Dialogue on Mount Uisan*, Hong’s specific views on the

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35. *Ibid.*, p. 36 rear, p. 37 front.

relationship between humanity and nature form an inextricable part of the basis for Hong's perception of the relationships between the self and the other or between different ethnic groups. In Western philosophy or thought, built as it is upon a foundation of egocentrism, nature is regarded, like any other ethnic group, as simply the other. It is merely a target of use and domination. Strangely enough, the images of other ethnic groups, particularly colonized peoples, and nature overlap. According to Hong Daeyong, however, just as every ethnic group is its own subject, so nature does not occupy the place of the other but forms another subject along with humanity. In this way a symbiotic relationship is formed that attempts to achieve a harmonious coexistence of one's own people and other peoples, of humanity and nature. Thus, Hong Daeyong's understanding of nature, of humanity, and of ethnic groups, unlike modern Western nationalist thought, allows not even the slightest connection to imperialism.

The reference to Confucius and mention of a "Foreign Spring and Autumn Annals" in the above quoted passage, however, cannot be entirely immune to all criticism, so it is necessary for us to ruminate on it again. Hong Daeyong's logic can be summarized as follows:

- (A) The civilized and the uncivilized are the same.
- (B) Confucius was a native of Zhou China, so it is only natural that his Spring and Autumn Annals views Zhou as the inside and the barbarians as the outside.
- (C) However, if Confucius had lived in the lands of the eastern barbarians (Korea) and established the Way of Zhou, he would have written a "Foreign Spring and Autumn Annals" that viewed Korea as the inside and China as the outside.

(B) states that even a sage like Confucius was not free from egocentrism, and so he distinguished the inside from the outside and respected some while spurning others. (C) says that Confucius divided the inside and the outside according to where the Way

was, not according to region or race (ethnic group). In other words, he divided the inside and the outside only according to cultural standards. However, just as in (B), (C) indicates that Confucius was unable to free himself from the egocentrism of perception. It is superficial to interpret (C) as expressing the idea that, regardless of geography or race, nations with high culture are civilized and nations with low culture are uncivilized, and to point out merely that Hong Daeyong overcame the theory of civilized and uncivilized based on geographical or racial standards. Through (B) and (C), Hong Daeyong made readers realize that if you looked at it from your own perspective, you were the inside and others were the outside, but if you looked at it from others' perspective, they were the inside and you were the outside—in other words, that the concepts of “civilized” and “uncivilized” are relative. Thus, what Hong Daeyong was ultimately trying to say was not that, from the perspective of Korea, Korea was civilized and China was uncivilized, or that Korea could become “civilized” through cultural efforts, but that the division between civilized and uncivilized itself was invalid. In this regard, we can understand (A) as a prerequisite to (B) and (C), or as the thesis which sublates [*aufheben*] (B) and (C). For this reason there is a possibility that the widely circulated “Foreign Spring and Autumn Annals Theory” might be misunderstood. If this work merely signified that what Hong Daeyong was ultimately trying to say was merely that the existing theory of civilized and uncivilized could be overturned and China could be “uncivilized” and Korea “civilized,” or if Hong Daeyong sought to establish the foundation for a nationalism centered on his own people, then we cannot but conclude that he was mistaken. If this is what the “Foreign Spring and Autumn Annals Theory” meant, then Hong Daeyong’s ideas would be no different from modern Western nationalist thought. This is precisely why we must understand Hong Daeyong’s view on the theory of civilized and uncivilized in its organic relationship to the doctrine of the sameness of the self and the other that runs throughout the whole

of *Dialogue on Mount Uisan*.

#### 4.

We have looked at the respective thoughts of Asami Keisai and Hong Daeyong on the theory of the “civilized” and “uncivilized.” Surprisingly enough, there are many similarities in the thoughts of these two scholars. We must not focus only on the surface similarities, though. If we do not take into consideration the basis for these similarities, or the wider context inherent to these similarities, or the other concepts and tendencies which exist “next to” these similarities and which form an inextricable relationship with them, then our efforts to confirm these similarities would be fruitless. In some ways, similarities and differences are like two sides of coin. Here we will keep this in mind while comprehensively examining the similarities and differences in the thoughts of Keisai and Hong Daeyong. In the process, we will also look at the historical circumstances which formed the background for those attempts in Japan and Korea to dismantle the Chinese theory of civilized and uncivilized during this period (that is, from the latter half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century to around the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century).

4.1. One thing these two figures have in common is that they were both very critical of the academic climate of their times. Keisai poured scathing criticism on contemporary Japanese Confucian scholars who had no awareness of Japan’s subjectivity and advocated the practice of unconditionally mimicking or following China. Keisai’s scholarship can be understood as the study of the “highest duty,” which stressed principles,<sup>36</sup> and in this case “highest duty”

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36. Keisai’s emphasis of the principle reason over the material force is confirmed

meant respect for the king, and this is linked to an emphasis on Japanese subjectivity. On the other hand, Hong Daeyong sharply criticized contemporary Korean Neo-Confucianism as futile learning, emphasizing that learning must not pursue that which is high and distant but pursue the study of realistic things with a sincere heart. This is why Hong Daeyong was called a Practical Learning (Sirhak) scholar. These two figures shared a reverence for Confucius as a sage on the surface, but internally, both sought to amend the original thoughts of Confucius.

And yet, while Keisai regarded the principle reason [i, 理] and the highest duty as primary,<sup>37</sup> Hong Daeyong made material force the center of his thought and attempted to tear down or loosen up the highest duty. What is meant here by the phrase “tear down the highest duty” requires explanation. The Korean academic world at the time was in the grips of a “little China” mentality, scorning the powerful Qing as barbarians and caught up in feelings of superiority. Thus they felt that spurning the Qing and respecting the Ming was the highest duty. Due to this sort of mentality and sentiment, thought and learning gradually became further removed from reality. It was within this environment that Hong Daeyong attempted to tear down the highest duty. It was an attempt to return thought and learning to reality.

Keisai and Hong Daeyong are also very similar in that they criticized unrealistic theories and idealistic learning<sup>38</sup> and placed great importance on practical scholarship. Keisai also showed interest not only in the study of war but in astronomy and geography,<sup>39</sup>

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in many places in *The Writings of Asami Keisai* (Published by Kokusho kankōkai). The final section on page 651 of this book is one example.

37. Keisai's high appraisal of Toegye was due to Toegye's emphasis of the principle reason.

38. For more on this aspect of Keisai, refer to “Bats daigaku bussets [跋大學物說],” in *The Writings of Asami Keisai* (Published by Kokusho kankōkai), p. 496.

39. For more on Keisai's interest in military studies, refer to “Kenjutsu hikki [劍術筆記]” and “Zenryū chōtō mokuroku kōki [然流長刀目錄後記]” in *The Writings of Asami Keisai* (Published by Kokusho kankōkai). For more on his interest

and he emphasized that the proper goal of Confucianism was in revealing moral principles and placed great importance on its practical aspects. Hong Daeyong also showed a deep interest in military science. Furthermore, he was also one of the foremost mathematicians and astronomers of the time in Korea. There were a number of factors that led these two scholars to relegate China to the status of just another nation in the world, but one common essential factor was their interest and research in astronomy.

There is no doubt that, regardless of the similarities and differences in their thoughts, Keisai and Hong Daeyong shared an academic tendency which rejected the Chinese theory of civilized and uncivilized and which contributed to their exploration of a new world view and a new East Asian view of order.

Keisai and Hong Daeyong's dismantling of the Chinese theory of civilized and uncivilized is closely related to the philosophical problems that Japan and Korea faced at the time, and furthermore to the political realities of contemporary East Asia. After the international war at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century was over, the Qing Dynasty replaced the Ming Dynasty on the Chinese mainland, and in Japan the Tokugawa Bakufu rose to power. It was at this time that the study of Song scholarship truly got underway in Japan. As is well known, though, Song scholarship—in particular Neo-Confucianism—heavily emphasized the highest duty and the division between civilized and uncivilized, colored by a nationalism centered around the Han people. I believe it was precisely this which confronted Japan's philosophical world as an important problem to solve during the period in which Japan was adopting Neo-Confucianism. Furthermore, Japan had historically had a strong sense of self, and the ruling class of Japan at the time, the warriors, took great pride in that mentality. Not only that, but the fact that Japan had fought Ming China on an even footing and the

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in astronomy and geography, refer to *The Writings of Asami Keisai* (Published by Kokusho kankōkai), pp. 628, 641.



fact that a new political reality emerged in which the barbarian Jurchen tribe ruled China were both conditions which gave Japanese intellectuals an advantageous opportunity to relativize China. In other words, it is possible to argue that, under such circumstances, Keisai inherited the thoughts of his teacher, Yamazaki Ansai,<sup>40</sup> and used them in a clearer and more systematic form to answer the questions of philosophical history facing Japan at the time.

What about Hong Daeyong? The society of Hong Daeyong's 18<sup>th</sup> century Korea also faced the question of how to deal with Sinocentrism. This Sinocentrism, which dominated the idea of the new East Asian order from the 17<sup>th</sup> century, strangely enough led to the formulation of a "little China" mentality among Koreans. Korea in Hong Daeyong's time, unlike Japan during the early Tokugawa period, was not at the early stage of accepting Neo-Confucianism but at a period when Neo-Confucianism was rather in decline. Contemporary Korean Neo-Confucianism had lost its flexible attitude toward reality and had degenerated into self-justification and self-absolutization. The direct expression of this was what termed the "little China" mentality among Koreans. Of course, it must be acknowledged that the sense of pride and cultural superiority which was inherent to this mentality led to some positive contributions by stimulating the Korean nation to artistic and cultural achievements. But, at the very least, as a system of thought that took as its function the perception of reality and the understanding of the "world," the "little China" mentality was severely flawed. It is for this reason that the revision of the Korean worldview, which was a condensed version of this "little China" mentality, was a principal task faced by the contemporary Korean academics in the history of thought. Overcoming the "little China" mentality required a simultaneous

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40. For more on Yamazaki Ansai's theory of civilized and uncivilized, refer to Bak Honggyu, "Zhūnana seiki higashi Asia chitsujo no mondai—ka-iron o chūshin ni [十七世紀東アジア秩序の問題—華夷論を中心に]," *Seikei kenkyū* [政経研究], Vol. 38, No. 3, 2001. 11.

overcoming of Sinocentrism. Hong Daeyong's work helped to solve this problem.

4.2. Hoping that the problem has been sufficiently defined above, let us now narrow our argument by discussing the specific similarities and differences between the respective inner workings of Keisai and Hong Daeyong's attempts to overcome the theory of civilized and uncivilized.

In relation to this, we must first point out that, while Keisai dismantled the theory by confirming egocentrism, Hong Daeyong did precisely the opposite, dismantling the theory by denying egocentrism. The results (i.e., the dismantling of the theory of civilized and uncivilized) appear to be similar, but the processes by which these results were reached were entirely different.

In Keisai's case, the starting point and ending point of all his arguments is the subject. This is because his ultimate goal was to confirm and affirm a Japanese subject. Yet was not the confirmation and affirmation of a Japanese subject already achieved by the Shintoists prior to Keisai's work? Keisai did not think so. Although he did not deny that the Shintoist approach had its advantages, he felt that they were narrow-minded and shallow in that they exaggerated the specific as the universal or did not sufficiently understand the equality of the universal and the principle reason.<sup>41</sup> He felt that the task of confirming and affirming the Japanese subject<sup>42</sup> had not yet been properly achieved in light of

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41. For more on his insistence that Japanese Shinto had "leaned toward mysticism and become shallow," refer to page 282 of "Tō Atobe Yoshiaki mon noku dai ni [答跡部良賢問目第二]," in *The Writings of Asami Keisai* (Edited by Tazaki Masayoshi). For his criticism that Shinto lacked sufficient appreciation of the principle reason, refer to the final section on page 597 of *The Writings of Asami Keisai* (Published by Kokisho kankōkai). His criticism that Shinto failed to correspond with human life can be found in the same book on page 599.

42. For example, in the second answer in *Chūgokuben*, the following is a meaningful passage that requires close examination in relation to Keisai's understanding of the issue: "If there is no distinction in the Way between master and guest and the self and the other, if we learn the Way from a book that teaches it, then that Way becomes the way of our universe. Whether from

the universal principles that held true throughout heaven and earth, and thus he felt a responsibility to carry out this task.

Keisai attempted to break through the existing Chinese theory of civilized and uncivilized by placing the subjects in an absolute position and then setting them up against each other. In this case, the subject and another subject (i.e., the object), are unavoidably placed in a relationship of mutual conflict. Further, the overemphasis of one's own subject can lead to failure of the universal principles and admit yet another unequal relationship between a subject and an object. We are constantly observing this contradiction in international relations in the modern era. In this case, the universal principle becomes nothing more than a fantasy, and the real principle in operation is based on egocentrism. Keisai's attempt to go beyond the theory of civilized and uncivilized relied on this universal principle, and so he was able to establish a new perception of the relationship between Japan and China, as was his goal, but his overemphasis of his own subject paved the way for an internal breakdown in the perception of the relationship between Japan and Korea. This is ultimately the result of emphasizing universalism and yet at the same time clinging to egocentrism.

Hong Daeyong developed his thoughts in a different direction from Keisai. Hong Daeyong saw through the problematic egocentrism of all beings and the problem of the limitations of egocentric perception, and yet on a higher level he saw that those things must ultimately be sublated. In a word, Hong Daeyong affirmed all subjects from a perspective which sublated egocentrism, rather than emphasize it, and thus he sketched out mutually equal relationships between subjects. If we look at it this way, the "subjects" in Hong Daeyong's attempts to supercede the theory of civilized and

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China's point of view, from our point of view, or from India's point of view, none can say that the facts that fire is hot and water is cold, that crows are black and herons are white, or that our parents are dear and it is difficult to leave one's ruler are exclusive to anyone." *The Writings of Asami Keisai* (Published by Kokusho kankōkai), pp. 369-370.

uncivilized were not mutually conflicting subjects but “relational” subjects that stood side by side within a network of relationships. In this regard, we can say that his attempt to overcome the theory of civilized and uncivilized corresponds precisely to his basic idea of the equality of humanity and the material. In other words, we can say that the application of his idea of the equality of humanity and the material to relationships between peoples or nations was the essence of his attempt to rethink the theory of civilized and uncivilized. If the current world situation allowed us to appreciate the methods adopted by Hong Daeyong, the ethnic subject established by Hong Daeyong would most likely be dubbed a “mild” or “soft” subject.<sup>43</sup>

There is a clear contrast between the two in that, in their attempts to interpret the theory of civilized and uncivilized, Keisai relied mainly on empirical grounds while Hong Daeyong, although he did not completely avoid empirical grounds, ultimately relied on transcendent (or “superempirical”) grounds. For example, when Keisai emphasized the Japanese subject he offered as his support the fact that one likes one’s own parents the best, that when looking at a map of the world China was not the center, that, unlike other nations, since the founding of the Japan, “the orthodoxy of our land has been unbroken and the fundamental principle of the relation between the lord and his vassals has been unchanged for ten thousand years,” and furthermore that “the attitudes of honesty and uprightness as brave samurai have become rooted our nature.”<sup>44</sup> These are all empirical observations. On the other hand, Hong Daeyong’s support for his rejection of the division of civilized and uncivilized is not simply that “The earth is round. Thus there is no specific center of the nations on earth.” His reconsideration or

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43. On pages 174-175 of my *The Circulation of Chi and the Modern Era* (Dolbegae Publishing, 2003), I used the word “weak” instead of “mild” when examining the concept of subject in the philosophy of Choe Hangi (1803-1877) in relation to Hong Daeyong’s concept of the subject. Choe Hangi’s concept of the subject is characterized by humility.

44. *Chūgokuben*, *Ibid.*, p. 369

sublation of egocentrism is ultimately supported by his ideas of the equality of humanity and the material and the basic goodness of humanity and the material, and these theses are supported by the transcendent entity of the heavens. In this regard, Hong Daeyong's method of reasoning is highly deductive. While Keisai's attempt to overcome the theory of civilized and uncivilized has strongly realistic tendencies, Hong Daeyong's attempts appear to be more idealistic, and that is likely related to these differences. Both realism and idealism each have their respective advantages and disadvantages.

Keisai's empirical perspective and Hong Daeyong's idealistic perspective are also closely related to the way they viewed domestic problems and ruling power relationships within their own nations. In Keisai's case, his discussion of one's own father, orthodoxy, the unchanging nature of lord and vassals for ten thousand years, and the attitudes of honesty and uprightness of brave samurai, are related to a strong respect for the king, a familial view of the lord/vassal relationship based on lineage,<sup>45</sup> a negative attitude toward revolution,<sup>46</sup> and a rationalization of rule. In other words, it would appear that Keisai's point of view on domestic problems and history is unable to free itself at all from the framework of the ruling discourse. Hong Daeyong is a little different. Hong Daeyong explains the establishment of nations as the emergence of rulers with the collapse of a primitive communist society with no division between humanity and the material or the self and the other, and thus he reminds us how severe the exploitation of the people was even in Zhou China, which was idealized by Confucius, as can be seen in that era's large-scale, labor-consuming public works.<sup>47</sup> As

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45. Just how much importance Keisai placed on the purity of bloodlines is evident in "Shizoku benshō [氏族辨證]," in *The Writings of Asami Keisai* (Edited by Tazaki Masayshi), which deals with the issue of adopted sons.

46. Sato Naokata, who thoroughly rejected Shinto, actively supported Mencius' theory of revolution.

47. "The relativity and equality of the material and the self in Hong Daeyong's thought," in *Korean Ecological Thought*, pp. 290-292.

is confirmed here, Hong Daeyong did not view civilization or history from the point of view of the ruling discourse or the mainstream. It is clear that his arguments had a non-mainstream character. And although we might not be able to define it as “anti-ruling,” at the least it is clear that he reflected on and re-contemplated the power relations that dominated the political reality of his times and raised a scathing criticism of that relationship. Also, Hong Daeyong’s support of the idea that the entire population should work,<sup>48</sup> rare among pre-modern Korean thinkers, cannot be understood properly outside this context.

The differences in the positions of these two scholars also resulted in a great disparity in their attitudes toward philosophy. Keisai, for example, rejected heterodoxy with extreme severity and clung to Neo-Confucianism (of course this Neo-Confucianism is a Japanized Neo-Confucianism), while Hong Daeyong advocated accepting the strengths of others with an open mind<sup>49</sup> and opened the doors to Buddhism, Lao Zhuang philosophy, the ideas of Wang Yang-Ming, and Western Learning. In other words, Hong Daeyong harbored a deep skepticism of the idea of absolute truth. This was likely the result of a deep introspection concerning the Korean academic trends of the time, which supported Neo-Confucianism with the dogma of the absolute and suppressed other philosophies. In this way, Hong Daeyong felt that the only way to achieve truth was not to reject heterodoxy but to learn from all philosophies with an open mind, adopting their good points.

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48. Hong Daeyong, “Discussions on Developing the Nation Written in Retirement” [Imhageongnyun, 林下經綸], in *Writings of Damheon*. In Hong Daeyong’s time, the ruling class of Joseon society was in essence forbidden to undertake any physical labor, such as agricultural, commercial, or manual labor.

49. I discussed this point in “Hong Daeyong’s ecological world view – approached through an examination of the history of research,” in *Korean Ecological Thought*, p. 266.

## 5.

To this point, we have briefly examined the similarities and differences in Keisai and Hong Daeyong's attempts to overcome the theory of civilized and uncivilized. An examination of the similarities and differences themselves is not our goal. That is merely a method, that is, a method to arrive at a perception of the general and essential aspects of the phenomenon. If, through this method, we can make it more feasible for us to challenge the one-sidedness of our perceptions and understand ourselves and others a little better, then this study will be truly meaningful. A true understanding of oneself is possible through an understanding of the other, and in turn the depth of one's understanding of the other depends on how well one understands oneself. I hope that the preceding arguments will be understood in this light.

Finally, I will broaden my view somewhat and, keeping in mind the situation from the 18<sup>th</sup> century and on, present a somewhat critical outlook.

5.1. Keisai's scholarship, which sought to elucidate Japanese subjectivity within universality, was not only reasonable; it was also very meaningful in the history of thought in 17<sup>th</sup> century Japan. In Japanese thought, there was a tendency to regard and absolutize Japan as a divine nation. For example, before Keisai, *Genkōshakusho* [元亨釋書] and *Jinno Shōtōki* were representative of this trend. However, while Keisai may have emphasized the establishment of a Japanese subject, he distanced himself from the perspective that absolutized Japan out of feelings of superiority. It is precisely this fact that secures his unique place in the history of thought. Keisai later parted ways with his teacher, Yamazaki Ansai, who advocated Suika [垂加] Shinto, but this is also part of the

reason why he could not accept Shintoism. In other words, Keisai looked at Japan from a universal perspective and sought to acknowledge its distinctiveness. It is this which we must call Keisai's greatest achievement.

At the same time, however, Keisai's position made it difficult to maintain such uniqueness, and his argument is not without its risks. This is because his position appeared to contain the foundations for a shift, if he lost his balance just a bit, toward the Shintoist school on the right. Thus, perhaps there is some truth in the words of the Shintoist scholar Tani Chinzan [谷秦山], who said that Keisai turned to Shinto in his later years but died within only a year or so and left no works behind.<sup>50</sup> However, there is no hard evidence to back up this point. If we examine Keisai's sayings, even during the period when he clearly maintained a fixed distance from Shinto, he by no means completely denied its significance. He advocated the idea of respect for the king and felt a great pride in the unwavering orthodoxy of the Japanese Imperial throne, and thus, at least in a context related to these institutions and ideas, he had no choice but to actively affirm the significance of Shinto. We cannot completely rule out the possibility that, perhaps because of this, he took a greater interest in Shinto and was inclined toward it in his later years. If that was the case, then his philosophy would have been further to the right.

Although his arguments are not without internal contradictions, Keisai's precious contributions, which sought to confirm and acknowledge a Japanese subject while adhering to universalism, were somewhat overshadowed by the rising attraction of national study which became a trend in the latter 18<sup>th</sup> century. In an academic milieu where an emphasis on distinctiveness replaces the attention to universality, there is no place for an interest in and a quest for universality. To analyze it from a different angle, one can

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50. Tani Chinzan [谷秦山], *Hoken daiiki daman* [保建大記打聞] (Nihon kokusui zensho [日本國粹全書] dai 17 shū [第17輯], Tokyo: Nihon kokusui zensho kankōkai [日本國粹全書刊行會], 1916).



interpret the emergence of this philosophical environment as a symptomatic process which magnifies the internal contradictions inherent in Keisai's thought.

In a word, Keisai's thought fundamentally opened up two paths, and it is this fact that makes it problematic. The first path is the path toward overcoming that contradiction and problem while inheriting and developing what I called above Keisai's greatest achievement, while the other path is to inherit and expand on the elements in his thought which were more obviously and immediately relevant in terms of power and politics, that is, the emphasis on Japan's distinctiveness. The first path requires a constant maintaining of balance, tension, and introspection in order to succeed. The latter path unavoidably expands on and re-enacts Keisai's contradiction. Which direction did the history of thought in Japan take? I think that the intellectual history of Japan followed the second path. Here I will just point out a few things regarding the methods by which future generations may apply Keisai's theories.

It is well known that, in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Yoshida Shoin, a prominent proponent of reverence for the king, fervently studied Seikenigen.<sup>51</sup> As can be seen in his *Yūshuroku* [幽囚錄], Yoshida Shoin not only reaffirmed the historical view that Korea became tributaries of Japan after Empress Jingu's conquering expedition to Korea, he goes one step further to stress that Japanese-Korean relations must return to their original state. Yoshida had advocated this position long before it was suggested by other scholars. This point of view of his is an expansion and succession of the negative aspects of Keisai's theories. On the other hand, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as a result of nationalist ideologies, Keisai and Yamazaki Ansai were interpreted as pioneers of a theory of national subjectivity and were idealized. Hiraizumi Kyoshi [平泉澄] and Uchida Shuhei [内田周平], who were active before the end of the war, and Kondo Keio, who faithfully succeeded them

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51. Tazaki Masayoshi, "Asami Keisai shū kaidai [淺見綱齋集解題]," in *The Writings of Asami Keisai*, p. 134.

after the end of the war, were such representative figures. As we can see directly in Kondo Keio, they generally took Shintoism as the ultimate foundation of their interpretations of Keisai. They expressed their regret that such a splendid Japan specialist as Keisai could not accept Shintoism and be just a little more thoroughly Japanese, and they also strove to emphasize the fact that Keisai in his later years turned to Shintoism, apparently in an attempt to console themselves.

5.2. *Dialogue on Mount Uisan* confirms the universal principle between nations, but it does not offer a specific alternative to the problems of reality. It is difficult to find any practical applications of his ideas comparable to, for example, Keisai's proposal to use the terms "our nation" and "other nations" instead of "central nation" and "uncivilized peoples." This is also related to the fact that, while Keisai's method of discourse is thoroughly specific and realistic, Hong Daeyong's method is allegorical and metaphorical. In this way, the contrasting ways in which these two scholars developed their ideas might be reflected in the differences in the philosophical climate in the two nations.

In *Chūgokuben*, which consists of specific questions about facts and specific answers to those questions, there is a mention of the relationship between Japan and Korea. On the other hand, there is no mention of the relationship between Korea and Japan in *Dialogue on Mount Uisan*, which develops its argument on an abstract level. It is well known that Korean intellectuals had long regarded Japan as being on the periphery of Chinese civilization and thought of them as an "uncivilized people." When we consider this, we cannot help but wonder how Hong Daeyong perceived the relationship between Korea and Japan. This point may turn out to be an Achilles heel in Hong Daeyong's attempt to overcome the theory of civilized and uncivilized, a contradiction of theory and practice, and of general theory and specific theory, as was the case with Keisai. Fortunately, there is one text that allows us to learn more

about his thoughts on this issue. This is the postscript to *Japanese Writings in Chinese* [*Ildongjoa*, 日東藻雅], which is contained in the *Writings of Damheon*. This was a postscript written by Hong Daeyong to a book compiled by Won Junggeo. Won Junggeo was a Practical Learning scholar who visited Japan in 1764 as a scribe to a party of emissaries, and it is thought that he compiled *Japanese Writings in Chinese* after returning to Korea. It is presumed from the contents of the postscript that this book introduced and evaluated Edo period Japanese scholarship and arts with the objective of “revealing the true scholarship and eliminating false words.”<sup>52</sup> In Hong Daeyong’s postscript, though, he discusses a number of Japanese scholars and writers, praising them very highly and saying that it would be difficult to find such figures in China, let alone Korea. He then says that we must not look down on them because they are across the ocean, that Ito Jinsai and Okyu Sorai are worthy of respect in Korea, that although Won Junggeo says that he is going to reveal the true scholarship and eliminate false words, in as much as the cardinal points of Jinsai and Sorai’s scholarship involve training the body and succoring the common people, they are a group of sages, and thus it is acceptable for the Japanese people to be ruled by their scholarship. He also says that Korea is Japan’s “western neighbor.” This term could not possibly have been used unless it was premised on a perception of equality between the two nations. It is difficult to find such an embracing perception of Japan among other contemporary Korean intellectuals.

We do not know exactly when the postscript to *Japanese Writings in Chinese* was written. However, at the least it allows us to confirm that the metaphysical and universal thoughts in *Dialogue on Mount Uisan* maintained their consistency when applied to a specific and realistic level as well. In other words, his general theory and specific theory are in agreement.

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52. “Postscript to *Japanese Writings in Chinese*,” in Volume 3 of *Writings of Damheon*, p. 30 rear.

It appears that *Dialogue on Mount Uisan* was not made public at the time but was handed down within Hong Daeyong's family. It was first mentioned in literature when its title appeared in a work by Bak Gyusu, Bak Jiwon's grandson. Hong Daeyong and Bak Jiwon maintained a friendly relationship both academically and personally throughout their lives, and this friendship was carried on by their descendants. Perhaps it was for this reason that Bak Gyusu was able to read *Dialogue on Mount Uisan*. Bak Gyusu's times, unlike Hong Daeyong's times, were not peaceful, and the so-called eastern movement of the Western powers was shaking East Asia. Newly formed international relationships demanded the end of the theory of civilized and uncivilized and a new understanding and definition of the self and the other. What suggestions and influence did Bak Gyusu receive from *Dialogue on Mount Uisan* regarding these demands of the times? At present, we cannot know for sure.

Hong Daeyong's *Dialogue on Mount Uisan* was first made known to the world in 1939, when Jeong Inbo published the *Writings of Damheon*, a collection of Hong Daeyong's works. Thus, we must conclude that the ideas of *Dialogue on Mount Uisan*, unlike Keisai's ideas in Japan, had no real influence on Korean intellectuals during the period of violent upheaval at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

And yet, the ideas presented in Hong Daeyong's *Dialogue on Mount Uisan* may be an important guidepost in our search for a new view of East Asia and a new worldview that goes beyond aggressive nationalism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and is based on coexistence and peace, mutual respect and introspection. Even if we cannot observe the ideal in this fallen world, the ideal must exist as an unceasing discourse of opposition, and in the very least it may in that regard give us the strength to prevent the deterioration of the problems of reality, or perhaps even remedy them.

(Translated by Charles La Shure)

ABSTRACT

Asami Keisai and Hong Daeyong:  
Dismantling the Chinese Theory of the  
“Civilized” and “Uncivilized”

Park, Hee-byoung

Asami Keisai, born in 1652 and died in 1711, was primarily active around the Genroku period, the golden age of the Edo period. Hong Daeyong, born in 1731 and died in 1783, was active during the reigns of King Yeongjo and King Jeongjo, when the “little China” mentality was at its height.

These two figures were born almost 80 years apart. In addition, Asami Keisai was an intellectual from a military family, while Hong Daeyong was an intellectual from a literary family. Asami Keisai carried a sword with him wherever he went, while Hong Daeyong never forgot his geomun-go even when he traveled. In spite of these differences, however, the two had quite a few interesting similarities, and these similarities can be confirmed in their scholarship, their attitude toward the perception of reality, and in their thoughts on Hwairon [華夷論], i.e. the theory of “civilized” and “uncivilized.”

In this paper, I intend to center my argument on the attitudes of these two toward the theory of civilized and uncivilized. First, I examine Asami Keisai and Hong Daeyong, and then I compared the two.

Keisai and Hong Daeyong are also very similar in that they

criticized unrealistic theories and idealistic learning and placed great importance on realistic scholarship.

There is no doubt that, regardless of the similarities and differences in their thoughts, Keisai and Hong Daeyong's academic tendencies contributed to their rejection of the Chinese theory of civilized and uncivilized and exploration of a new world view and a new East Asian view of order.

Keisai attempted to break through the existing Chinese theory of civilized and uncivilized by placing the subjects in an absolute position and then setting them up against each other. In this case, the subject and another subject (i.e., the object) are unavoidably placed in a relationship of mutual conflict. Further, the overemphasis on one's own subject can lead to failure of the universal principles and admit yet another unequal relationship between a subject and an object.

Keisai's attempt to overcome the theory of civilized and uncivilized relied on the universal principle, and so he was able to establish a new perception of the relationship between Japan and China, as was his goal, but his overemphasis on his own subject paved the way for an internal breakdown in the perception of the relationship between Japan and Korea. This is ultimately the result of emphasizing universalism and yet at the same time clinging to egocentrism.

Hong Daeyong developed his thoughts in a different direction from Keisai. Hong Daeyong saw through the problematic egocentrism of all beings and the problem of the limitations of egocentric perception, and yet on a higher level he saw that those things must ultimately be sublated. In a word, Hong Daeyong affirmed all subjects from a perspective of the sublation of egocentrism, rather than through an emphasis on egocentrism, and thus he sketched out mutually equal relationships between subjects. If we look at it this way, the "subjects" in Hong Daeyong's attempts to overcome the theory of civilized and uncivilized were not mutually conflicting subjects but "relational" subjects that stood side by side within a

network of relationships. In this regard, we can say that his attempt to overcome the theory of civilized and uncivilized corresponds precisely to his basic idea of the equality of humanity and the material. In other words, we can say that the application of his idea of the equality of humanity and the material to relationships between peoples or nations was his attempt to overcome the theory of civilized and uncivilized. If the current world situation allowed us to appreciate the methods adopted by Hong Daeyong, the ethnic subject established by Hong Daeyong would most likely be dubbed a “mild” or “soft” subject.

**Keywords:**

Asami Keisai, Hong Daeyong, Chinese Theory of Civilized and Uncivilized, Soft Subject