

The Empiricist's Progress:

Ch'oe Han'gi's Journey away from Confucianism

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Abstract: This article addresses conceptual changes in Ch'oe Han'gi's philosophy, applying a cognitive-historical approach to his works, along with the tool of conceptual analysis of relevant terms. For this reason, Ch'oe's works are examined in chronological order, with the aim of capturing changes, if any, to problems he perceived and his solutions to those problems. Reviewing as pseudo-autobiographical the prefaces and forewords from Ch'oe's collected works, I argue that his philosophical work should be distinguished into two stages in terms of his changing problematic and solution, and above all his changing frame of reference. Some benefits of this distinction will be clearly shown in my discussion of similarities and differences between the young Ch'oe (1830s-1840s) and the old Ch'oe (1850s-1860s).

Key Words: Ch'oe Han'gi, Conceptual change, Empiricism, Naturalism, Korean Philosophy, Confucianism, Western learning

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Ch'oe Han'gi (1803-1877) was a self-taught polymath, bibliophile and prolific writer, who was seemingly isolated from established scholarly communities of his time. However he was fortunately wealthy enough to collect thousands of books. He read almost all the books available to him within the Chosŏn Korea of the nineteenth century. In spite of his extensive knowledge of Western philosophy and sciences as well as Confucianism, he was unable to secure a position in any established communities. During his life, and even after his death, he and his work were ignored or at least not taken seriously until the 1960s. In this article, I explore some philosophical reasons why he was not well understood and accepted by Korean scholars for so long.^① The reason must be sought first of all in Ch'oe's own philosophical style, which can be characterized as mostly re-conception, re-making, and sometimes conversion.

In this article, I would like to address mainly conceptual changes in Ch'oe Han'gi's philosophy, applying a cognitive-historical approach to reading his works, along with the tool of conceptual analysis of relevant terms. For this reason, I will read Ch'oe's works in chronological order, with the aim of capturing his changing problematics and his changing solutions, if there was any change over time. By reviewing as pseudo-autobiographical the prefaces and forewords from Ch'oe's collected works, I propose that Ch'oe's intellectual biography must be distinguished into two stages in terms of his changing problematics and solutions, and above all his changing frames of reference: the young Ch'oe (1830s-1840s) as Confucian or meta-Confucian vs. the old Ch'oe (1850s-1860s) as post-Confucian. In the first section below, I discuss how Ch'oe's theory of cognition "ch'uchūk" [experiential observation and cogitative estimation] was

① I use the term "philosophy" in the broadest sense to include sciences as well as philosophy. My usage is similar to the English usage before sciences branched out into independent disciplines from philosophy about the mid-nineteenth century. For previous studies of Ch'oe Han'gi, see Kim Yonghŏn et al 2005, Ch'oe Yŏngjin et al 2000 and Kwŏn Oyŏng et al 2000.

conceived and developed, and its limitations when he suggested it as a Confucian theory of knowledge when he was a meta-Confucian. Then I shall explain in the second section how the Old Ch'oe solved philosophical problems that were raised both by the Christian communities and by the Confucian community, and consequently how he devised his own style of intellectual practice, known as *Kihak* [*Philosophy of Ki*, 1857], as a solution for those problems. Ch'oe's philosophy of ki was a kind of synthetic practice arising out of critical interactions between two different communities. Without experiencing another world in addition to his own Confucian world, his philosophy of ki would not have been born in nineteenth-century Korea.

Keeping in mind Ch'oe's philosophical character sketched above, let us now go into more details of Ch'oe's own works. First of all, we must be very cautious in reading Ch'oe's works in that we cannot give Ch'oe credit for the authorship of all the books listed in his collected works.^① Some were edited, some were simply hand-copied and collected, and of course, some were authored by Ch'oe himself. However, the prefaces and the forewords in his collected works were no doubt composed by Ch'oe himself. With these preface and forewords, we can obtain some information about why he wrote them and what he had read. I shall begin by pursuing what Ch'oe tried to achieve as his thought developed over the course of writing his essays. Otherwise, the changing of destinations (if any) which Ch'oe was purported to do there might not be captured. For this approach, I am basically analyzing the prefaces composed by Ch'oe. By so doing, I venture to show what he tried to achieve, what he counted as his problems and whom he targeted as his readers. What he achieved should be evaluated and judged in accordance with what he tried to achieve rather than what we would like to see as his achievements.

① In the present article, I am using the second edition of Ch'oe's collected works. (Ch'oe Han'gi 1986) Hereafter, I refer to this edition as *MCC*: *MCC* i (the 1st volume), *MCC* ii (the 2nd) and *MCC* iii (the 3rd).

In this respect, the prefaces and forewords are invaluable sources for my pseudo-autobiographical approach here, since we have no autobiography authored by Ch'oe himself, up to this point. Let us begin our pursuit from the year 1834.

Young Ch'oe: 1830s-1840s

Ch'oe wrote *Yukhae-pŏp sŏ* [the Foreword to *Irrigation Technology*] at the age of 32, in 1834. In this work he emphasized the importance of agriculture and especially of irrigation technology. He took it to be his duty to teach people (farmers) how to use irrigation machinery. This is understandable because he lived in an agricultural society, in which that duty was one of the important tasks for government officials. Here we can see evidence of Ch'oe's ambition to become an official, a hope shared by most Confucian scholars at that time. With this aim, he collected books on irrigation from China as well as Korea and, while adding his annotations, compiled them into a guidebook for farmers. Even though he did not indicate the source of his information for this book, we can trace some contents of it to *Xinzhi zhuqi tushuo* [新制諸器圖說, by Wang Cheng, 1626] and *Taixi shuifa* [泰西水法, 1612], two Jesuit publications.^① One thing to note here is that Ch'oe was eager to adopt any method, no matter where it came from, as long as it would help meet his aims. (*MCC* iii: 479)^② However, in this work, we cannot find any substantial difference between Ch'oe and any other Confucian scholars.

The year 1836 appear to have been a very productive year to Ch'oe. First of all, he

① Kwŏn Oyŏng 1999: 49. For the bibliographical information of the Jesuit books, see Chan 2002: 357-8 and 366-7.

② Such agricultural concerns of Ch'oe may be in connection with his own economic base. He was a wealthy landlord. (Yu Bonghak 1998: 241)

wrote *Ch'uchūk-nok sŏ* [推测录序, the Preface to *A Compendium of Knowledge*]. (MCC i: 73) From this work, we can see some emerging unique features of his philosophical inquiry. Unlike other Confucians of his day, he took epistemological issues seriously. That is to say, he asked questions about knowledge itself: *how* men can know *what*. While his Korean contemporaries endeavored to comprehend and thereby to realize the words of Confucian Masters in their daily lives, he searched for an explanation for how Confucian Masters acquired accurate knowledge of things and affairs. In a sense, he began slowly turning his eyes from words to things. For this reason, I mark that work as the starting point of Ch'oe's meta-Confucian inquiry. According to Ch'oe's preface, when human beings seek knowledge, they should seek to know about li [理, pattern or principle] in the operation of the natural world. Ch'oe was no different from mainstream Neo-Confucians in that his essay is filled with references to the Neo-Confucian dyad of li-ki (two primary agents in the construction of the world). Moreover, the primary subject of his inquiry was how cognitive agents came to comprehend li.^①

He however became to stray from the normal channels of Confucian thought when he proposed *ch'uch'ūk* [推测, experienced observation and reasoned estimation] by the human mind as his solution to how we know what we know.^② In doing so, he distinguished li into two kinds: li in the operation of nature (li^o) as the objects of human cognition and li generated by the human mind (li^c) as the result of cognitive processing.

① I treat Ch'oe's key terms as at first untranslatable, as if they were empty vessels, in which new meanings could be poured over the course of (re-)conceiving them. For, we are anyway in the early stages of learning about his usage of them.

② Ch'oe's usage of the *ch'uch'ūk* is hard to pin down. We can translate it as "making inferences and forming judgments" or as "inferring and evaluating mind/process." It can be also "ratiocinating mind/process." I acknowledge that my translation borrowed from scholastic terms is not broad to cover the full meaning of Ch'oe's usage. However, since my focus for the present work lies in the critical interaction between the Confucian community and the Christian communities, I will use Scholastic-Aristotelian terms in translating Ch'oe's concepts.

The first kind of *li*^o has ontological status, but the second *li*^c has no ontological status but only epistemological status. Some of the *li* generated during the process of human cognition coincide with the *li* in the real world independent of the human mind, but some do not. In other words, some *li*^c have correspondent reality [誠] and some *li*^c are merely mental constructs [偽]. At any rate, the *li* which Confucian sages in the past identified and articulated were considered to be the *li* of the real world. In this sense, his proposed epistemology is a version of the correspondence theory of truth. This kind of meta-Confucian research might not be necessary, if Confucians could extend their knowledge to things and affairs by extrapolating directly from the words of their Masters, and if there were no controversies among Confucians over how to interpret the *li* found in the Confucian Classics.

Mainstream Confucians feel warranted in ignoring that kind of meta-Confucian practice, inasmuch as they believe that the words of their Masters are *always* truthful statements about things and affairs, and that they comprehend things and affairs relevant to them via the hermeneutical analyses of such words alone. Looking back at Korean history, we can find unending debates over how to interpret *li* from the seventeenth century on, especially between Churip'a (School focused on *li*) and Chugip'a (School focused on *ki*). Such disputes even went often beyond philosophical discussion to bloody political strife. Ch'oe might have developed and proposed his version of epistemology in order to save Confucians entrapped in such hermeneutical predicaments. In this respect, it is no doubt that Ch'oe's intended readers of the compendium were Confucians.^①

After completing his compendium, Ch'oe was very proud of his work and hoped that it would be warmly received by the community of Confucians: "I have compiled

① In fact, Ch'oe criticized Churip'a for muddling together *li*^o and *li*^c while siding with Chukip'a. (MCC i: 114)

Ch'uchūk here in order to help those who are seeking the Tao [道] learn where they should begin, and to help those who have found the Tao never to lose it. Hence, this book is like the scales and rulers craftsmen use in measuring weight and area." (*MCC* i: 73) However, despite his orthodox aim, his efforts were all but ignored and even worse, what attention he did receive was harsh criticism accusing him being a follower of Wang Yangming [王阳明, 1423-1529] by a younger Confucian Chŏn U. (Yu Ponghak 1998: 244)

The problem, whether Ch'oe noticed it or not at that time, is that his epistemology is a double-edged sword. Even though he devised it to solve Confucian internal problems, it was, at the same time, a slap in the face of the Confucian community. For, if Confucians accept his epistemological proposition, non-Confucians could argue that they could ignore the Confucian establishment, on the grounds that they are equally able to know *li*^o with their own capacity of *ch'uch'ūk*, with no help from Confucian sages (*li*^c). In this respect, Ch'oe's theory of human cognition opened a personal path to the Sages at a basic epistemological level. I believe this point to be one of the grounds on which Chŏn U criticised Ch'oe's conceptions. For this same reason, I believe also that neglect of Ch'oe within the community of Confucians did not result from misunderstanding of his ideas, but from proper understanding of the risk they entailed.

Considering that such epistemological questions were almost ignored, or at least not encouraged, in the Confucian tradition, we must here raise the question of how Ch'oe could develop such an epistemology. We would mistakenly ascribe too much creativity and originality to Ch'oe's philosophy if we confined our purview to Confucian scholarship.^① Hence, it is desirable for us to refer also to Jesuit publications as well as Protestant works in tracing his ideas back to their source. In facts, Ch'oe was aware

① Indeed, many modern scholars committed such mistakes or errors. Yi Hyŏn'gu warns of it in his discussion of Ch'oe Han'gi's reception of Western scientific knowledge. (His 2000: 64-5)

even of publications by Protestant missionaries as early as 1836. (*MCC* i: 14) He included geographical and astronomical knowledge from Jesuit books among cases he cites of human cognition via *ch'uch'ük*. For instance, he accepted the theory of the spherical earth's revolution and rotation [地球日周之论] in missionaries' publications, as true *li*^c. (*MCC* i: 103) From this, we can see that he was not indifferent to such knowledge. Rather, Western knowledge was, in a positive way, relevant to the world as conceived by Ch'oe.

The characters *ch'u* [推] and *ch'ük* [测] were repeatedly used in Jesuit books as terms for denoting some aspects of human cognition, especially those on observational sciences and psychology. The frequency with which those words were used in Jesuit publications contrasts sharply with their infrequent usage in Confucian writings. Ch'oe's usage of *ch'uch'ük* appears akin to the Jesuit one. Therefore, I shall first examine Jesuit usage. In the translated Thomist psychology *Ling-yan li-shao* [灵言蠡勺, *De Anima*] by Francesco Sambiassi (1582-1649), human cognition was divided into two levels sensual [觉] and intellectual [明悟]: Sensual cognition is processed through the sensory capacities of the soul [觉魂] or *anima* [亚尼玛], which require the appropriate bodily organ (for example, sight requires an eye). And sensation was again distinguished into external [外觉] via the external (or proper) senses [外能, that is, five organs] and internal [内觉] via the internal senses [内能]. The internal senses here were once more distinguished into *sensus communis* [公司, receptive faculty] and the cogitative/estimative power [思司, information-processing faculty]. Once sensory information is conveyed to the *sensus communis*, the process of sensation is completed. The next step is the process of *phantasia* [忆记] or of memory [推记] or of imagination [习像], by the cogitative/estimative power [that is, information-processing]. *Phantasia* are the generic images produced by the soul for sorting, rearranging, and presenting sensory impression. Memories are the products of the soul's corresponding capacity for

linking impressions with specific associations. Here *ch'uchük* was described as a function of the internal senses, which are shared with other animals as well.^①

Ch'oe's explanation for human cognition suggested in his *Ch'uchük-nok* is very similar to the process of sensual cognition explained in the Jesuit work: strictly speaking, they are the same on the structural level but different in specific operation and in detailed meanings. He must have borrowed some epistemological, explanatory schemes from the Jesuit work in conceiving his own theory of knowledge. Like the Jesuits, he believed that *ch'uchük* requires some bodily organs and that other animals can also carry out *ch'uchük*. For examples, they have the power of memory and judgment. Unlike the Jesuits, however, he did not accept a supposed fundamental divide between human beings and other animals at the cognitive level. Ch'oe asserted, "There is no knowledge without *ch'uchük* (observational experiencing and estimative cogitating)." (*MCC* i: 80, 81) Ch'oe seems to be uninterested in the section concerning the soul's intellective capacities which its translators considered the most important part of *Ling-yan li-shao* (Sambiasi 1965: 1168-89). According to the Thomist psychology, intellectual cognition—reasoning, conceptualization and categorization—by the soul is the essential identifying process of human cognition, to which bodily organs make only indirect contributions. This is what makes humans the only rational, intellective animals, the only animal with an immaterial [无质] soul which was created by God and which exists beyond the death of the body. According to this line of reasoning, even if there were a human being with no soul, it would be nothing more than a beast. This is a Thomist explanation for the origin and process of cognition by the human mind, which was available to Ch'oe before he compiled his compendium.

① Sambiasi 1965: 1150-52. In re-translating Chinese terms in the Thomist psychology into English, I am following Pasnau's English translation of Latin scholastic terms. (Cf. Aquinas 2002 and Pasnau 2002).

Then, why did Ch'oe selectively accept Aristotelian naturalistic explanations for sensual cognition but reject Thomist supernatural explanations for intellectual cognition? We can see here Ch'oe's naturalistic stance that human minds (the power of *sinki*, [神氣]) have evolved out of nature and depend upon the natural world (i.e. human bodies and their surroundings) for their continued existence.^① If minds are the products of natural forces alone, they need not depend on any extra-natural processes. Ch'oe wrote, "Knowledge via experiential observation and cogitative estimation is not given from Heaven, but we have acquired it by ourselves." (*MCC* i: 8) His position is obvious that knowledge is of 'artificial selection.' On this ground, Ch'oe would have dismissed any extra-natural explanation for the origin of cognition as illusionary. In this respect, his epistemological inquiry is closely interconnected to his ontological commitment. God [神天] as the ground of rationality and intellectual activities, and souls as the agency of human cognition and motion (ultimately, of salvation) in Thomism do not belong to Ch'oe's own ontology (relevant kinds of beings). Conversely, his epistemology needs no such concepts as God and Soul for knowledge-production practices. Therefore, he preferred an explanation for cognition based on concrete accounts of physiology, rather than a formal mode of explanation ignoring the body. Such a naturalistic stance of Ch'oe's is more clearly shown in his treatise *Sinki-t'ong* [神氣通, *A Treatise on Cognitive Systems*].

Later in the same year, Ch'oe wrote the preface to *A Treatise on Cognitive Systems*. There he suggested *sinki* [神氣] as the integrative agency that bound cognition and

① *MCC* i: 10. Ch'oe's approach to knowledge is naturalistic in the sense that he treats the conditions of knowledge production by cognitive agents as the starting ground for any explanation for knowledge. It is not naturalistic in the sense of taking knowledge as a natural kind whose essence can be discovered somehow. For Ch'oe, it is obvious that knowledge is of an unnatural kind, a product of human activities.

motion in the human body as a complex whole, which can be understood as the counterpart to the soul [灵魂] in Jesuit works. And sinki is described as well as the prime principle/cause of things and events, which can be understood as the counterpart to God in Jesuit works.^① However, this does not mean that sinki is to be understood as existing beyond embodied ki, and that sinki is immaterial and embodied ki is material. For sinki refers to just the operating power of ki itself. Without the power of sinki, ki cannot but be passive matter; without the bounds of ki, sinki is no different from the immaterial Divinity. Embodied ki is various units formed out of the undifferentiated, pervasive ki via the power of sinki. However, once ki is consolidated and stabilized into a unit, then such locally situated sinki remains within the bounds of that embodied unit and can act there in complex ways as the integrative, binding agency of cognition and motion. (*MCC* i: 4)

Following Ch'oe's notion, systems [通] are mechanisms of sinki: they are complete in each body. And systems are hierarchically organized: for example, the human-body system [体通] as a complex whole consists of various sub-systems, such as a Visual system [目通], an Auditory system [耳通] and a Haptic (touch) system [触通]. Each

① Ch'oe wrote, "'the so called Lord of Heaven' [主宰] and 'the so called Lord in Heaven Above' [上帝] simply refer to the operating power of sinki." (*MCC* i: 8) Ch'oe defined the term ki as the highest category of beings and in doing so he reduced God into simply a signifier for some aspect of operation through sinki. However, his usage of sinki is ambiguous: It can be interpreted as 'divine (or spiritual) ki,' if we want to define his position as a natural theology (or pantheism); and, it can be translated also as 'not-so-easily-sensible ki,' if we understand it through a natural philosophy (or atheism); or, it can be translated as well as 'ethereal ki,' if we suppose that Ch'oe was resisting the theory of a two-sphere universe from Scholastic-Aristotelian physics, by dragging the celestial spheres back to the terrestrial region or by extending the latter enough to incorporate the former, in order to produce a model of an un-divided universe. From now on, I will simply transliterate it, because I want to show Ch'oe's unsettled philosophical position as expressed in *A Treatise on Cognitive Systems*.

system has its own sinki as the agency of operation and that sinki is diffused within the bounds of its own system. Each system can be *locally* integrated and coordinated by virtue of the sinki within; and the body system can be *globally* integrated and coordinated via sinki, by trans-connecting the sinki of sub-systems. Sensual cognition is produced out of sensual systems primarily through the co-operative interaction of sensual organs and their sinki. If organs are responsible mainly for sensation (that is, information from within and without), then sinki is responsible for memory and evaluation (that is, information-processing). (*MCC* i: 5)

In this sense, systems designate not only organs but also their function or their sensor—motoric operation through integrative trans-communication in complex ways: firstly between an organ and sinki within a system, secondly with other organs and their sinki, and ultimately the body as a whole system. These trans-communications are accumulated in the form of embodied knowledge, *locally* in each organ or *globally* in the body as a whole. And these become parts of our bodies as we learn about our trans-communicating. Cognition sensual and intellectual emerges from the communicative interaction between the sinki in a cognizer's body and the sinki in cognized things and events. This flexible and plastic character of cognition implies that knowledge is neither completely objective nor completely subjective. There is no single monopolistic agent of cognition and motion within the body and world of embodied ki.^①

To explain the structure of sinki and organs in scholastic terms, organs can be seen as the external senses and sinki as the inner senses. But the external senses and the inner senses have different capacities and different meanings in Ch'oe's treatise. According to Ch'oe's usage, the character t'ong (apprehension), which was used in the translated Thomist psychology for describing some aspects of intellectual cognition of the soul,

① My philosophical interpretation is based on Ch'oe's description in *MCC* i: 4-13

refers to the process of conceptualization and reasoning in virtue of embodied *ki* alone.^① Ch'oe transferred the intellectual cognition of extra-physiological souls in Thomism to the physiologically-situated operation of bodies. So he made no mention of the intellect, which was the essential capacity of the immaterial soul in Christianity. For Ch'oe, sensual cognition is not merely passive and intellectual cognition is not totally active. His naturalistic position is further emphasized with the last sentence of the preface: "Learning must be based on concrete, specified and materialized objects." (*MCC* i: 6)

Ch'oe bound the compendium and the treatise together into one volume and wanted to publish it under the title *Kichŭk ch'eŭi* [气测体义, *On Knowledge*]. He wrote a preface to this collection *Kichŭk ch'eŭi* in 1836. (*MCC* i: 3, 4) He prided himself on *Kichŭk ch'eŭi* and believed it would be recognized as a useful introduction to Confucianism [周孔之道]. From the first sentence of the preface, we can see what Ch'oe took as his problem at that time. His problematic was 'how Confucius became the perennial master.' By raising such a question, he set himself apart from mainstream Confucians, who instead asked how to understand the words of Confucian sages or how to act in their daily lives in accordance with those words. In any case, my focus is on the ascertained or to-be-ascertained shared assumption of the writer and his intended readers: "Confucius is the perennial Master." Up to this point, Ch'oe's Confucian

① Sambiasi coined new terms *chikt'ong* [直通], *hapt'ong* [合通] and *ch'ut'ong* [推通] in translating the three levels of intellectual operation in Thomism into Chinese. (His 1965: 1183-85) Thomism distinguishes intellectual operation into three levels: "1. The first operation of intellect, the simple intellectual grasp of some universal feature of an object. [*chikt'ong*, 直通] 2. The second operation, composition and division, which involves putting various concepts together, by either affirming one of another (composition) or denying one of another (division). [*hapt'ong*, 合通] 3. The third operation, reasoning, which involves a complex ordering of composite thoughts. [*ch'ut'ong*, 推通]" (Pasnau 2002: 273) For Aquinas' own account, see Aquinas 2002: 171-73.

commitment has not been shaken, even though he engaged in some meta-Confucian practices. Considering this fact, his meta-Confucian works must be intended as for the world of Confucians, never against it.

However, I am still curious to know why he launched such a meta-Confucian project, though I have already alluded to some inner-Confucian causes. As some external causes, Ch'oe might have taken Christian criticism of Confucianism very seriously and thereby may have tried to protect Confucian minds from Christianity, out of his conviction that Confucianism is superior to Christianity. In that case, his work can be seen as defending and legitimizing Confucian knowledge: the knowledge production practices of Confucians and the contents that produced. Without a sufficient understanding of (at least, having enough information about) Christianity, Confucians could not argue for their superiority to Christians at the philosophical level. Perhaps Christians, whether Korean or Chinese or Western, also might have been included among his intended readers. Then, Ch'oe's work *Kichūk ch'eŭi* may have a dual function: for Confucians, it was designed to convince the reader to believe what he does not understand (his assumed method of Confucian knowing), on the one hand; for Christians, it was intended to help the reader to understand what he does not believe (the contents of Confucian knowledge), on the other hand. However, this work attracted neither Confucians nor Christians; hence, Ch'oe as the writer of this work, despite his ambition, was not successful in the nineteenth century.

Before proceeding further we must consider some questions: whether Ch'oe's accounts of *ch'uch'ūk* (observational experiencing and estimative cogitating) are truly original, and whether *li*⁹ which was proposed as the generic object of knowledge by Ch'oe is really the same as the object of Confucian knowledge. I believe that *ch'uch'ūk* as an explanation for cognition was undoubtedly a sort of common assumption of the Confucian community, which was never questioned, examined or clarified until Korea's

Confucians encountered Western scholarly cultures. Only in the course of discursive interaction with another community could the epistemological methods assumed in the Confucian community be brought forward by Ch'oe for critical discussion. As he claimed, we may attribute Ch'oe's theory of observation and estimation to a certain Confucian (broadly, East Asian) methodological assumption of cognition.

Taking it for granted that Ch'oe's explanation of cognition is the Confucian method of knowing, how then could Confucians derive moral knowledge via 'observation and estimation' from the processes or phenomena of the natural world? Is moral knowledge the same kind of knowledge as natural knowledge? In other words, if we fully understand the natural world, then are we led without difficulty to Confucian moral knowledge? Conversely, if we fully understand Confucian teachings, then can we comprehend the natural world as well? At any rate, Ch'oe boldly asserts, "love and respect toward one's parent and siblings come from observation and reasoning." (MCC i: 37) In that Ch'oe used the word *li* (which has normative force in most (neo-)Confucian writings) primarily in a descriptive way, he seems to have risked committing the naturalistic fallacy of defining morality in terms of some natural property.^① However, we cannot see any fixed stance by Ch'oe on this issue in his 1836 works; rather, he appeared even not to notice such a problem at all at the time. He appears to me as if he were straddling the fence between naturalism (due to his ontological commitment to *ki*) and Confucian moralism (from his moral commitment to *li*), while leaning a bit toward the former.^② In this respect, Ch'oe's theory of cognition

① The naturalistic fallacy is proposed by G.E. Moore (1873-1958) in *Principia Ethica* (1903) to label the claim that the notion of moral goodness cannot be defined or identified with any natural property, in other words, that you can not derive an "ought" from an "is."

② We should understand that the problem of metaphysical indeterminacy is not Ch'oe's own, but of Neo-Confucianism itself. For Neo-Confucians, that problem may not be relevant to their world. However, Leibniz discusses this problem in his *Discourse on the Natural Theology of the Chinese*

is not sufficient for explaining even some aspects of Confucian knowledge. In other words, this means that Ch'oe's theory of cognition (the 1836 version) is not a usable weapon for a challenger, if any, to the cognitive and behavioral authority of Confucians within their world. Without establishing his philosophical position, his ideas could not be free from being a rough syncretism, which is seen commonly in interaction between different communities.

In the same year, he compiled and edited *Kanggoan-non* [*Discussion on Training Officials*] and wrote the preface. From this book, we can see that he then aimed at becoming a high official for the royal court. He was, like the usual Confucian, very faithful to Confucian scholarship in this work. In 1842, he wrote the foreword to *Simgi-to* [*Essential Mechanical Devices*]. *Simgi-to* was simply a selection on machinery from *Xinzhi zhuqi tushuo* [新制諸器圖說] and *Yuanxi jiqi tushuo* [遠西奇器圖說] published by Jesuit missionaries in the early seventeenth century.^①

(1716): "the opinions of modern Chinese appear to be ambivalent. ... Initially, one may doubt if the Chinese do recognize, or have recognized, spiritual substances. But upon reflection, I believe that they did, although perhaps they did not recognize these substances as separated, and existing quite apart from matter. ... with regard to God, it may be that the opinions of some Chinese has been to give Him a body, to consider God as the Soul of the World, and to join God to matter, as the ancient philosophers of Greece and Asia have done. ... It will be easier to persuade their [Chinese] disciplines that God is an *Intelligentia supramudana*, and is superior to matter. Therefore, in order to determine whether the Chinese recognize spiritual substances, one should above all consider their *Li*, or order, which is the prime mover and ground of all other things, and which I believe corresponds to our Divinity. Now it is impossible to understand this [correspondence] with reference to a thing purely passive, brutish and indifferent to all, and consequently without order, like matter. For example, internal order comes not from wax itself, but from whoever forms it." (Leibniz 1994: 76, 77) In constructing Confucianism as a natural theology, Leibniz defines *ki* as passive matter and *li* as active, ordering principles which transcend and regulate *ki*. Then, Confucianism can be classified as another version of rationalism akin to Leibniz's. However, Ch'oe is going directly against Leibniz's interpretation of Confucianism.

① Cf. Chan 2002: 356-58. Some illustrations there are traced back to the 1588 Italian edition of

In 1843, Ch'oe wrote the preface to *Sotap yuch'an* [*An Anthology of Messages to the Court*]. (MCC ii: 50) Memorials were significant tools for communication between the king, his officials and other Confucian scholars, and proved useful for those running the government of a Confucian kingdom. Through this anthology, we can see that his ultimate ambition as a Confucian scholar to become a royal official had not yet changed. Additionally, we can see that Ch'oe was obviously under the influence of Kao-zheng scholarship (historical and philological evidential studies) which was developed by Qing Chinese scholars. (MCC ii: 585)

In 1850, he edited a book on Western mathematics which was titled *Sŭpsan chinbŏl* [*Mathematics: Textbook*] and wrote a preface for it. According to the preface, that book was intended as a complement to his previous book on astronomy *Ŭisang lisu* [*A Companion to Mathematical Astronomy*, 1839]. (MCC iii: 3) The information sources for both books were mostly Jesuit works on science. However, his naturalistic notion for the origin of numbers was different from the formalistic explanation of the Jesuits. According to Ch'oe, numbers arose out of categorizing via observation and estimation of the process of the natural world. (MCC iii: 3)

From his meta-Confucian works in 1836 up to his mathematical work in 1850, Ch'oe seems not to be engaged in any serious philosophical inquiry. He tried to introduce Western knowledge to the community of Confucians while cultivating traditional Confucian scholarship within the Confucian community. However, the problematic he conceived in writing his meta-Confucian works could not be easily shaken off.

Old Ch'oe: 1850s-1860s

The year 1857 marked a turning point in Ch'oe's life. He finished writing two books that year at the age of 55. First, he wrote the preface to *Chigu chōnyo* [地球典要序, *Social/ Cultural Geography of the Terrestrial Sphere*]. (MCC iii: 225-228) For that geographical book, he collected and read many works published by his Chinese contemporaries and as those by Western missionaries.^① *Chigu chōnyo* is not just a geography book. It contains linguistic, historical, political and cultural accounts of many human societies. Ch'oe, in working on that book, might have come to understand that different societies have different hegemonic ideas and dominant traditions. This would have made it necessary for him to cope with the problem of differences across space, in addition to the problem of changes over time.

From the preface, we can see his emerging concern with the social conditions of human cultures (of knowledge), and his naturalistic position that cultures, including the Confucian culture, are grounded in natural processes. In other words, culture should be nature-friendly. First, we should note that he was not much concerned about the problem of 'how to justify what one believes one knows,' as he had been in his previous version of cognition theory. His theory of *ch'uchūk* was focused mainly on the process of knowledge production practices. Extending beyond knowledge production, after pointing out the historical and geographical limitations of the experiences of an individual, he had begun grappling seriously with broader problems of epistemology. In other words, he then must have needed some device to discriminate true *li^c* from false *li^c*,

① It is interesting that he began using the Confucian-valued term scholar for Westerners starting from that work. Ch'oe used Wei Yuan's *Haiguo tuzhi* [海国图志, Illustrated treatises on the maritime countries] and Xu Jiyu's *Yinghuan zhilie* [瀛环志略, A brief survey of the maritime circuit] as well.

which are both equally mental constructs. He proposed 'confirmation with relevant experiential evidence' [验证] as the criteria for distinguishing between the truth and the false. However, he argued that, if it were to be more reliable, confirmation could not be done by one individual but had to be done by a community and moreover had to be done in the present, not in the past.^① And he also argued that human knowledge has evolved through cooperative and discursive interaction among wise men on the globe [宇内贤知].^② Such ideas were developed and consolidated into his *Kihak* [气学].

We now can see the birth of the philosophy of ki in 1857. He coined the term *kihak* for his own style of intellectual practice and wrote the preface to *Kihak* [*Philosophy of Ki*] in 1857. (MCC i: 197-98) That book should be understood as Ch'oe's ki-philosophical manifesto of 'a new start.' With his newly conceived ki-philosophical frame, he reviewed and examined the limitations of all the preceding intellectual traditions within as well as outside the Confucian community. For example, he cited Christianity [西洋学] and Zhuxianism [理学] as instances of medieval scholasticism [中古之学], and criticized them as unrealistic on the ground that they were founded on what is not confirmable empirically—that is, the disembodied principles in Zhuxianism and the immaterial God in Christianity. In opposition to these teachings, according to Ch'oe, Zhuxian moral principles and Christian God's intelligence are normatively or

① We can see Ch'oe's using 'confirmation with relevant experiential evidences' [验证] as well in his earlier works; but, it was not a serious part of his previous theory of cognition. Fallibility of cognition was not much discussed in his works before 1857. That may indicate that his earlier version of cognition theory was intended to construct a Sage epistemology.

② MCC iii: 225. From his ideas there we can logically deduce: what is believed to be known via cognitive processing becomes a knowledge-claim (in other words, conjectures) and this claim is ascertained as knowledge, only when it is certified by some other agency (i.e. natural processes or a community of cognitive agents). Thus, any individual as a cognitive agent is simply a knowledge-claims producer. Confucius is no exception.

regulatively imposed on the processes of the natural world by human minds.^①

His philosophical indeterminacy was finally consolidated into naturalism through the *Philosophy of Ki*. His naturalistic position was accordingly reinforced, at the level of ontology as well as at the level of epistemology. Ki, as the earthly element 'air' as defined by the Jesuits, is nonsense in Ch'oe's naturalistic ontology which has no extra-natural Creator; hence, in order to respond to the Christian challenge, he needed to re-define ki as "that which is dynamic, in motion, operating, and transforming" in explaining the intra-natural causation of being and becoming.^② It makes no sense for Ch'oe to speak of 'before ki' or 'after ki,' For ki is in perpetual motion and the principle, power and cause of the operating ki is immanent in each thing and each event of the shaped ki; though its nature is as yet unknown to men.^③ If the Jesuits deflated the meaning of ki, then Ch'oe by contrast inflated to cover fully the universe of beings and becomings. In so doing, he endeavored to make a naturalistic sense of ki within his

① MCC i: 197. Though Ch'oe was in no position to access secular philosophers in Europe during his life, his idea seems to be similar to European atheists who were his contemporaries. Cf. D'Holbach's *System of Nature* (1834, I: 9): "Man always deceives himself when he abandons experience to follow imaginary systems. — He is the work of nature. — He exists in nature."

② Matteo Ricci defined mistakenly or intentionally ki as one among the four elements fire [火], air [气], water [水], and earth [土] that are perishable bodies in a pure state. (Cf. Ricci 1985: 193) Zhang Qiong characterizes this Jesuit translation project as 'de-mystifying Qi' in her 1999.

③ Ch'oe replaced the previous ambiguous and vague term 'sinki' with 'unhwa-chi-ki' [运化之气, the operating ki] in *The Philosophy of Ki*. One possibility of interpreting Ch'oe's philosophical stance as a natural theology is eliminated with that new term. The relationship between the operating ki and the shaped ki is seemingly equivalent to the one between *natura naturans* and *natura naturata* in scholastic terms. However, Ch'oe's conception of the operating ki is neither like Leibniz's *natura naturans* as an *Intelligentia supramundana* (a supernatural Intelligence), nor like Spinoza's *natura naturans* as "a being that we conceive clearly and distinctly through itself, without needing anything other than itself, that is, God." (Spinoza 1994: 57) For Ch'oe, the operating ki and the shaped ki are interdependent and interactive. In other words, both are mutually implicative and jointly exhaustive, in all the units of embodied ki as well as in all its operations.

commitment to naturalism, making it the foundation of his new conception of the world. Making sense of ki meant identifying ki with something specifiable, sensible and thereby confirmable through empirical studies.

It is however noteworthy that ki ontology is not his own creation but is based on the background assumption shared among Sinograph users at large. Before it was challenged by extra-naturalists, ki ontology remained on the margins of philosophical inquiry as an unexamined assumption behind the metaphysical matrix of Sinograph users. It did not need to be re-examined and thereby no critical examination of it was tried. Ki is deeply embedded in the culturally-determined common sense view of nature shared among the Sinograph users. The attempted solution Ch'oe offered comes from the Sino-conventional metaphor of the ontological ground: 'Self-so-ness' [自然] of being and becoming. For this reason, the originality of Ch'oe's philosophy of ki at the metaphysical level can be seen in his remaking of ki ontology to provide an alternative to extra-naturalistic explanations, erecting defensive barriers to the new challenge to the Confucian community from the West. His philosophy of ki provided a certain metaphysical basis for his rejection of the argument that God was the creator of the universe, and of the style of reasoning which made God the foundational premise of ontology.

Ki is clearly set as the all-inclusive category of "being" and "becoming." Nonetheless, ki itself is not the object of study but an ontological commitment which he believed relatively reasonable. Experiential observation cannot lead to the knowledge of the essence of ki itself, because such an essence cannot be observed. Therefore, the objects of his study become the specific things and their operating processes, that is, locally organized bodies which are differentiated out of pervasive ki, via the power of ki itself. By doing so, Ch'oe could also reject ki mysticism as well as the holistic-reductionism of ki, with which empirical research of the natural world (including our

bodies) are unfeasible. We can see here again his turning from abstract or speculative entities to concrete, specified things as the single ground on which any empirical study must proceed.

In another respect, ki itself is complex, neither simply ideal nor simply material, and is neither completely passive nor completely active. The ki concept for Ch'oe is a kind of safety device to keep him falling either into a formalistic-idealistic commitment or into a deterministic-materialistic commitment. For his proposed approach, an empirically reliable epistemology, or trustworthy cognitive frame, is crucial from the outset. Reasonable metaphysics is not any object of research but a sort of commitment or belief, which is changeable as our cognition or understanding changes. Metaphysics should be built on the foundation of epistemology. In this way, he did not solve the metaphysical problem; rather, he dissolved and subsumed it into an epistemological one. So the search for 'Being' or 'God' as the ultimate causal source and sustainer of all that is, or 'moral principles' as the ultimate source of all that is good seemed for Ch'oe to be idealistic, impractical and unrealizable.

In the *Philosophy of Ki*, he never used li as an ontological term but only as an epistemological one. This means that he eliminated one ontological sense of li from the dual usage of li in his previous works and li could have nothing but epistemic status (that is, conjectured li) after the *Philosophy of Ki*. And for Ch'oe, reasoning itself is an acquired capacity of mind embodied in the body as a whole. This basic tenet makes the Cartesian method of introspection untenable, since it presupposes the rational God and the rational soul from the outset. Just by reflecting on our own ideas and the thought operations of our own minds with care and rigor, we can never come to understand the mind accurately and with absolute certainty. The very experiential study of body as well as of brain is necessary for understanding our minds.

Besides that, another important thing to note in his *Philosophy of Ki* is that we

cannot find any reiteration of his previous conviction that Confucius is the perennial master. For Ch'oe then, Confucian teachings are workable, but not necessarily at every time and every place. In other words, Confucianism is trustworthy in some contexts, but not in all contexts. Confucius as the ultimate authority of cognition and of behavior is now limited to some specific situations. We can see then that even Confucianism itself has been demoted into one localism among many, including of course Christianity. Ch'oe appears to have begun stepping out of the community of Confucians at this time. This ki-philosophical manifesto was, in this aspect, a declaration of his re-orientation to 'things and affairs of the present day,' leaving behind words (artificially selected edifices) from the past which had grown out of diverse local contexts, historically, socially and culturally separated. In other words, this was a declaration of the end of Universal learning, whether Confucian or Christian. Past knowledge, past words and past ideas via ch'uch'ük (that is, mental conjectures), whether Western or Eastern, should be re-examined, re-evaluated and re-selected in accordance with the standard of present-day things and affairs. The current processes of the natural world were clearly set as the primary criterion of human knowledge claims. (MCC i: 199)

Thus, from Ch'oe's proposition, we can infer that confirmation as a knowledge-justification practice is a never-ending process of co-operative interaction between the cognizer and the cognized *individually*, and among cognizers *communally*. Although such contextuality and provisionality characterize the fate of human knowledge, there could be agreement about some things in some contexts, to a cognizer at the individual level and among cognizers at the communal level. The implication of provisionality is that what was confirmed need not remain the same over time or across space. Though there must be some constancy from one historically or socially or culturally separated context to another, it does not necessarily follow that what remains constant must be the same across all contexts. For this reason, Ch'oe must have found a new context (some

higher-order context) broader than he had assumed before, in order that confirmation of knowledge-claims can proceed anew.

His post-Confucian position can be seen more precisely in his language. He invested old vocabulary with his own meanings when he wanted to signify what was newly conceived. He boldly coined new terms whenever he needed them: contrary to the conventional preference of Confucians for transmitting what was traditionalized. New terms presuppose new conceptualizations and new conceptualizations presuppose new cognition. A new sense could be made of by a new sensibility and a new sensibility could be cultivated by a new style of feeling or cognition. For instance, 'men under heaven' [天下人] which is closely tied to the traditional denotation of humanity in the Confucian usage was replaced by his new coinage 'men within the universe' [宇內人]. Ch'oe signified with this coinage a new context (to say, a global context) in which he began the practice of confirming words and ideas which had been introduced to him by then. The increasing frequency of his new expressions implies his intention to go beyond the boundary of established habits of scholarly practice and not to let his newly conceived ideas be lost in the nets of traditional frameworks of cognition, whether Asian or Western. This may be one of reasons why Ch'oe's works were welcomed neither by Sinograph users who remained within traditional Confucian intellectual practices, nor by Christians who sought to convert naturalists (defined as materialism, pantheism, or atheism) to their "Divine revelation."^① Nevertheless, his philosophical turn was never given up in his later works.

In 1860, Ch'oe wrote the preface to *Inchŏng* [*Human Governments*], (MCC ii: 3-4) which is a sort of comparative study of the organization and management of human communities. One thing to note there is his notion that societies ought to be constructed

① For a Protestant missionary's discussion of Confucianism in the nineteenth century, see Wylie 1966.

and managed in accordance with the processes of natural world. If there is any ideal society for Ch'oe, it must be nature and inhabitant friendly. In the same year, he wrote the preface to *Unhwa ch'ükhöm* [*Operation and Transformation of the Natural World*], (MCC i: 253) which is a work of natural philosophy. His epistemology was completed there as an empiricist version of cognition: the "observation [推] - inference [测] - confirmation [验] theory" of three inter-dependent and inter-active levels, adding höm [验] to ch'uch'ük from his works before ki-philosophy. Inference is made via the observational practice of comparing one thing with another; confirmation can be arrived at in experiencing a thing or an event again and again.^① Here inference means not only 'inductive generalization' from what has been observed and experienced, but also 'deductive but moderated hypothesizing' toward what is to be experienced and confirmed. He proposed there also that Westerners should accept what is confirmable among Eastern books and Easterners as well should accept what is confirmable from Western books. This proposal was put into practice for himself in his later works.

In 1866, he wrote the preface to *Sin'gi ch'önhöm* [An Empirical Examination of the Human Body], (MCC i: 319-20) which is a comparative study of Western and Chinese medicine. Almost all the accounts of Western medicine in *Sin'gi ch'önhöm* come from the medical missionary Benjamin Hobson's books in Chinese: *Treatise on Physiology* [全体新论, 1851], *Practice of Medicine and Materia Medica* [内科新说, 1858], *First Lines of the Practice of Surgery in the West* [西医略论, 1857], *Treatise on Midwifery and Diseases of Children* [妇婴新说, 1858], *Natural Philosophy* [博物新编, 1855]. (Cf.

① I am now translating the same character ch'ük [测] differently from my earlier translation as 'estimation/cogitation' for Ch'oe's previous version of cognition theory. It is now best translated as 'inference' for his finalized empiricist theory of cognition. For Ch'oe's philosophical position was firmly settled down to naturalism after his philosophy of ki. He examined the fallibility of cognition and then proposed another procedure as a solution for such a problem.

Wylie 1967: 125-28) Hobson tried, with those books, to convince his readers of the existence of God as the rational Creator: each part of a human body was adapted to perform the purposed function, and this adaptation of structure to function was evidence of the providence and love of God. His argument from design was no different from William Paley's natural theology that was popular in nineteenth century Britain. As could be expected, Ch'oe rejected such a Christian teleological explanation, though he accepted most of the physiological accounts of the body contained in Hobson's works. His naturalistic position can be seen in *Sin'gi ch'ŏnhŏm* as well: "accept only what is confirmed empirically." In 1867, Ch'oe wrote the preface to *Sŏnggi unhwā* [*On Celestial Movement*]. (MCC iii: 83-84) This book consists of John Herschel's Chinese edition of *Outlines of Astronomy* [談天, 1859] and Ch'oe's comments.^① His experiential confirmation with relevant evidence was emphasized again and again in that preface. In this respect, Ch'oe's last two works could be counted as his ki-oriented philosophical readings of Western scientific knowledge.

So far we have reviewed Ch'oe's works from 1834 to 1867. During that period, Ch'oe's guiding frames for cognition metamorphosed from Confucianism to meta-Confucianism, finally to post-Confucianism (in his terminology, philosophy of ki). This change was closely related to his changing problematic. Some problems were inherited from the Confucian community, some were consciously adopted from or unconsciously

① The Chinese translation was based on Herschel's 1851 edition. A detailed study of Ch'oe's review of Herschel's astronomy will be useful for understanding Ch'oe or Herschel on a broader horizon. That book is an invaluable source for a student to compare the early Victorian philosophy of science with Korean or Chinese philosophy. I am curious about how Ch'oe evaluated British empiricism which was introduced to him by Herschel's Chinese edition. (Herschel's British empiricism was discussed in his 1830 edition of *A Preliminary Discourse on the Study of Natural Philosophy*.) But, this goes beyond the present study. I shall leave it for a future study.

affected by the Christian communities, and some were newly conceived in reformulating his cognitive capacities through interactive practice in complex ways across different communities. His problematic and its solution were at last synthesized and finalized into his *Philosophy of Ki* in 1857, which must have been a major turning point in Ch'oe's intellectual practice.

It is needless to repeat that Ch'oe proposed many new ideas and insights in the twilight zone between the Western and the Eastern, as seen above. But such ideas were, nonetheless, not developed into more persuasive arguments. This is understandable in light of the fact that he had no serious reader to argue with about his re-conceptions and re-makings. He may have been concerned about that, but he unfortunately had no such opportunity in his own social and historical situation. This was caused neither by lack of intelligence, nor by lack of determination and courage to use his own intelligence, but by the lack of a community in which critical interaction could proceed. So, in a strict sense, he may not be classified as a philosopher, unlike the conventionalized scheme of classification in the late-twentieth century; rather, he was more like a journalist or an ideologue in eighteenth- or nineteenth-century Western history.

Now, let us turn our eyes to Ch'oe's hopes. For we can understand more about him when we learn about his hopes than when we count his achievements; in other words, the best of what his philosophy of ki is lies in what he wanted it to be. Indeed, with the philosophy of ki, he tried to *re-orient* our intellectual activities in a new direction, rather than constructing his own philosophical system (the practice of conceptualizing philosophically-relevant types and organizing them) to replace the preceding ones. In other words, he meant to initiate, not to complete, a new style of philosophical work.

The manifesto of his new start encourages readers to dream new dreams in a new cognitive environment instead of rehashing old dreams: but to do so without expecting their immediate or unilateral realization. Making a new world is not the writer's task,

but that of his future readers' in renewed local contexts. The writer was in the beginning of constructing a new world, in a newly conceived context. In other words, making up a new text is not what the philosophy of ki is about; rather, it offers readers some moments to reflect on the limitations of their traditionalized, naturalizing texts and the undue partiality of their naturalized or established habits, by leading them to the newly integrated global context, and thereby encourages them to construct a new text of global applicability. This is the reason why Ch'oe's reasoning is loose and un-conclusive, his writing is plain and simple, and his argumentation is not persuasive but declarative, in his ki-philosophical works. Nonetheless, we can enhance our philosophical vision from his steps toward a global perspective.

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从经典到经验 ——对崔汉绮认识论的探究

Unsok Pek

中文提要：本文主要探讨崔汉绮（1803-1877）著述中出现的概念变化。笔者主要的意图在于阐明崔汉绮学问活动中出现的变化。另外，为了抓住其使用概念的细微变化，本文中除了对基本概念加以分析以外，还使用了最近认知科学领域关于崔汉绮研究的最新成果，试图从新的角度来接近并考察其思想。从这一角度讲，本文的方法论可谓是“认知—概念—历史性接近法”的尝试。具体来讲，本文首先按照年代顺序考察了崔汉绮的著作，然后指出了其问题意识以及解决对策的变化。通过通读收录在其全集中的文稿，笔者认为，崔汉绮的哲学思想依据其问题意识、解决问题对策的变化、认识论的基准框架可以分为两个阶段，即1830-1840年为前期，1850-1860年为后期。如此区分的理由是，前期崔汉绮思想中是多种哲学思维混在的，而发展到后期，他的思想逐渐集中到一个框架体系之内而得以确立，这一点通过他的认识论明显体现出来。崔汉绮哲学思想认识论的基准框架从“经典”这一认知活动的产物向“经验”这一现在认知活动的变化，也更加验证了笔者这一前后期区分的正当性。

关键词：崔汉绮，概念变化，经验主义，自然主义，韩国哲学，儒学，西学

