

Going beyond the boundaries in Confucian studies^{*}

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Abstract: This essay aims at discussing the future of Confucian studies in the current context of a globalized world where a growing interest for Confucianism is shown not only in the academic field, but also in the general audience. Instead of presenting scholarly conclusions on a precise topic, it rather tends to propose some possible new perspectives of research. The characteristics, limitations and methodological problems of Confucian studies are briefly examined to discuss the interest of making intellectual history rather than a solely philosophical history. After showing that Confucian studies are a historically determined phenomenon, which features are much indebted to the context of its production in the 20th century northeast Asia, the hegemony of philosophical and notional approach that has been massively used by scholars is questioned. To find new perspectives that could enrich and develop

* The system of Korean Romanization used in this paper is the McCune-Reischauer, since it is the system used in the international academic world. This article is based on a paper presented at the 20th Yulgok Culture Festival: 2007 International Academic Conference, held in P'aju on October 11, 2007. The title was: Going beyond the limitations of Yulgok studies(超越栗谷学研究的境界). I have slightly modified the original topic, by enlarging the perspective from Yulgok studies to Confucian studies.

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Confucian studies in future, the example of French historiography, and especially the Annales School is presented. After a general reflection on the specific difficulties of studying the Confucianism of 16th century Chosŏn Korea, which shed light on specific and concrete methodological problems, a case study is performed on some of the vocabulary used by Yulgok Yi I. A method inspired by French historians is used to illustrate the main goal of the whole essay: studying the mentalities of past Confucian scholars could be a stimulating way to better understand the past Confucian phenomenon in its whole depth – both philosophical and historical – and then to better explain it for present and future society.

Key Words: The Annales School, Intellectual history, Mentalities, Yulgok Yi I, Confucianization

For several decades, Confucianism has become an important topic in public debate, mainly in Asia, but increasingly in Western countries as well. It is summoned to explain the supposed Asian mind, cultural tradition, and moral values. In a context of the so-called globalized world of the 20th and the 21st centuries, Confucianism is presented either as the main system of values that could be efficiently opposed to the Western values of democracy and liberalism, or it is conversely presented as a relevant means to find out a common ethical basis for a broad cross-cultural dialogue. Because of the complexity and the wide range of meanings underlying the very word, and the concept of Confucianism, specialists are often asked to give their expertise. These specialists are in most cases academic scholars, and they are invited to express their own opinions in the public sphere. They in turn are increasing their publications, the general ones in particular, in order to present Confucianism to a larger audience. In such a context, it is worth thinking about the role of these scholars, and their expertise, which is legitimated by this academic *aura*. Tracing back the historiography of recent Confucian studies is a good means to initiate a healthy self-reflecting process among scholars, for Confucian studies are an historical phenomenon determined by the history of the 20th century. To develop the Confucian studies and feed properly the increasing interest of the both general and academic audiences for Confucian thought and culture in future, some of the current limits of the field could be remedied. For this purpose, a survey of other methodological ideas and practices might be helpful. Looking at the contribution of historians can especially offers new perspective in Confucian studies. Applying some ideas and methods developed by the French Annales School and its successors shows that taking the approach of a broad intellectual history might lead to improve the study of past Confucian scholars' thought. 16th century Korean Confucianism, which is generally regarded as a turning point in Korean history, is one of the interesting periods that could be studied fruitfully through new methods, since it raises diverse

methodological questionings.

Confucian studies between history making and memory building: a general overview.

One major difficulty of Confucian studies is the superposition and the multiplicity of the possible approaches involved: mainly history, philosophy, sociology, anthropology, literature, and religious studies. This protean field is often divided into different disciplines that are intimately connected to the academic organizations of each country. In the Korean case, Confucianism has been studied by academic scholars since the Japanese Colonial period, when it became for the first time an object of study in itself. Because of this specific historical determination, the study of Confucianism in the 20th century Korea is much indebted to the Japanese model of the colonial period. But, as it has been reminded in recent studies^①, this Japanese model of academic classification was determined by the specific problems of the beginning of the 20th century in northeast Asia. To sum up, Japan, and in its wake, China and Korea, have tried to settle a supposedly Western academic system in order to be equal and gain respect. The concept and the category of philosophy/*tetsugaku* 哲學 was then created in Japanese, and Confucianism became an academic subject, classified under the respectable Philosophy. But the Western academic system was also determined by the specific development and tendencies of European philosophy. The major influence was German philosophy, which became the domain of professional philosophers; that is to say, university professors. By importing the German and European models, the

^① Anne Cheng (sous la direction). *La pensée en Chine aujourd'hui* (The thought in China today). Folio essais. 2007.

emerging Japanese, Korean, and Chinese academic systems have generally classified and defined Confucianism as philosophy, reducing it to an abstract theory. They have then tended to forget the anthropological and historical backgrounds of Confucianism.

This characteristic of the study of Confucianism is still true nowadays in South Korea. Although some research has been conducted and published for the past few decades in history, literature, linguistics, politics, anthropology and religious studies, Confucianism remains the domain of excellence for the specialists of philosophy - and of thought at large. Therefore, most books concerning Confucianism are written by these professors who, specialization oblige, stand mostly in the level of an erudite and scholarly explanation of theoretical concepts. As it is explained in their introductory and concluding pages, these books aim at enlightening today's Koreans with the benefits of a native, essential Korean wisdom. What is at stake in this massive publishing work since the 1990's is the concern to define a Korean identity inside and outside the peninsula. Toward the inner, Korean audience, the goal is to keep some traditional values, but also to build a collective memory that could be relevant for present and future Korean society. But the building of a collective memory is a complex process that suffers from ideological and contextual determinations.

One other striking feature of Korean Confucian studies is that the professors are also involved in proselyte activities in the different associations promoting one or another past Confucian scholar (*hakhoe* 學會). Participating in one of these specific associations, or studying one specific Confucian scholar, is mainly determined by regional and academic attachment. Then, it is tempting to compare the scene of Confucian studies in South Korea nowadays to what we are used to seeing as Chosŏn Confucianism's social and intellectual features: regionalism, factionalism, master-disciple lineages. Such a comparison is excessive, but it has nevertheless the merit to let us make one important statement: an evident equation is made today between studying

Confucianism and being Confucians. This equation is not necessarily problematic in its nature, for many professors were and are intellectuals engaging their own thought. But deontological problems may happen when the legitimacy of taking part in the public sphere is grounded on this professional status of an academic who is supposed to deliver knowledge, not wisdom.

In spite of its protean nature, Confucianism belongs to humanities or social sciences at large. The time of a blind belief in the objectivity in these fields is over now, but a total relativism is not fair either. The concrete and individual practice of research generally leads rather to a balanced position and a compromise between idealism and relativism. Total objectivity is not possible, but a certain effort to keep distance is always appropriate, for our own research is an historical and social phenomenon. Because Confucian studies are an historical object, the historiography of Confucian studies from the beginning of 20th century should be done today, in order to allow specialists to reflect on their personal and collective work, and to always try to figure out the meaning and implication of their academic and public activities.

Once the possible limitations generated from the social, ideological, and historical determinations of our work as academic scholars is acknowledged, we are led to an important question, which is directly connected to our daily practice: methodology. As noted above, the philosophical approach of Confucianism remains hegemonic in South Korea, where several books are published every year on the topic. The major problem with these publications, oriented both to the general and the specialized audience, lies in the uniformity of presentation that tends to become repetitive and mechanical. Confucianism is presented as a succession of concepts, and philosophical explanations and systems, generally centered on several great figures that are supposed to embody each trend. The division in different historical periods is often simple, and little effort is made to think Confucianism in its real historical depth. History and biography are

treated as a vague backdrop to which references are made at the beginning or at the end of each chapter – or at least of the book. These historical pauses in the text seem to be displayed to remind, and reconfirm, some historical assumptions. The best example is the dynastic transition from Koryŏ to Chosŏn, which is regarded as the necessary result of an ineluctable process, where the Confucian scholars play the role of the main dynamic agents. Their thought, or their philosophical ideals, would have therefore engendered a totally new social, moral and political organization of the society. One can easily notice that this explanation is teleological and ideologically biased. Because most Confucian specialists are not trained in historical methodology but solely in textual exegesis, this approximate historical perspective of the Confucian thought is still dominant in their research, both academic and general. One important consequence of this phenomenon harms Confucian studies as a whole. These studies resemble more and more hermetical and scholastic disputes that only address the corporation of specialists, and prevent any other researcher in other discipline from understanding Confucianism in its philosophical dimension.

Besides, a recent trend in South Korea is an increasing public interest in the culture, folklore, customs, and daily life of ancient Koreans, especially of the Chosŏn period. The main example is the multiplication and the success of the TV series (the *drama*, which play an important role in the popular culture in South Korea, but also in China, Japan and Taiwan since the spread of the famous Korean wave), focused on Chosŏn daily life, or on diverse scandals surrounding the royal court or the scholars-officials. The same interest for mysteries and popular culture can also be found in the recent books related to this taste for the *saenghwal* 생활 生活 (daily life), *p'ungsok* 풍속 風俗 (manners, customs and popular morals) and *sinhwa* 신화 神話 (myths and mythology). This interest is telling about the new demands and sensitivity of South Koreans. But, such a phenomenon is also true in Europe, and especially in France where

many books are published nowadays by historians or amateurs on past daily life, habits and mentalities. This collective, general passion for "our ancestors" in many countries today should be neither disregarded nor despised by academic scholars, for they have a role to play in answering to this demand. They mainly have to try to present the most accurate possible knowledge of this "history of our ancestors", in order to overcome, to a certain extent, the limits surrounding the building of a collective memory, and then participate in the elaboration of a common history.

The difference between memory and history, and the complexity of the relationship between these two ideas are well known in humanities. Specialists of Confucianism have to tackle both of these concepts in their research, for Confucianism is a topic related not only to academic and erudite knowledge, but also to the concerns of contemporary societies in Asia. In the building of a collective memory about the Confucian tradition, heritage, or moral values, the dialectic of past and present, and past and future, is at work; and this dialectic is a matter for both history and philosophy. Combining in one single approach these two disciplinary perspectives is the best way to study the Confucian phenomenon in its whole complexity, but also to properly cultivate the interest for Confucianism.

From philosophical history to intellectual history: the possible model of French historiography

To find new ways of examining and broadening Confucian studies, it could be interesting to take into account some Western methodological contributions. Looking at these methodologies does not intend to repeat them slavishly; it rather aims at getting useful and stimulating inspiration. The example of the 20th century French

historiography is specifically relevant, for French historians have discussed and practiced diverse methods in order to intimately combine history and philosophy. They have started to shape new forms of history, which can be tentatively called intellectual history. The very vagueness of this name reveals the exploratory nature of this history that deals with thought, ideas, culture, mentalities, sensitivity, mental picturing, etc. Moreover French historians have proposed a new vision of historical practice, which underlines the possibilities and the limits of scholarly work in humanities.

One of the most striking features of French academic development in the 20th century is a seminal change in historical studies. Since the beginning of the 20th century, French historians became aware of the necessity to integrate the contribution of the social sciences that started developing at that time and were challenging history. These historians were eager to develop a new methodology, with new problems, discourses and practices. This tendency is called the Annales School (*l'Ecole des Annales*), because of the name of the first scholarly journal that these reformists created in the late 1920's^①. The aim of these French historians was at first to criticize and turn back on the traditional historical science that they pejoratively called the positivist history. The main criticism was that this history, inherited from the German historiography of the

^① The Annales was founded and edited by Marc Bloch (1886-1944) and Lucien Febvre (1878-1956) in 1929. The first name of the journal was *Annales d'histoire économique et sociale* and was later called *Annales. Economies, sociétés, civilisations*; then renamed in 1994 *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales*.

About the Annales School, in English:

- Peter Burke. *The French Historical Revolution: The Annales School, 1929-1989*. Stanford University Press. 1991.
- François Dosse. *The New History in France: The Triumph of the Annales*. University of Illinois Press. 1994.
- Lynn Hunt and Jacques Revel (eds). *Histories: French Constructions of the Past*. The New Press. 1994.

late 19th century, was only focused on the surface events, that is to say on battles, wars, and sudden changes in political history. Such a unique focus on political history was leading to ignorance of what lies under the surface of the events: the deep structures of a society. The first Annales School historians successfully tried out new methods by borrowing concepts and ideas from economy, sociology, geography, ethnology, aesthetics, linguistics, literary criticism, etc. One important result of this integrating of allied social sciences' contributions in history is the showing of new theories on historical time (or temporality), which in turn led to the creation of the history of mentalities (*histoire des mentalités*).

This new realm, which developed from the 1960's in France and reached its peak in the 1980's, was a product of the predominance of social history – and it could be added of Marxist theories^①. Indeed, history of mentalities deals with the "third level"^②, or the superstructures of ideologies (collective, popular and even unconscious). These superstructures are regarded as being above the social structures, which are above the economical infrastructures in a three-level framework. If some studies did not always escape from the pitfalls of a mechanical application of this scheme that has been even called vulgar Marxism, the research on history of mentalities has offered interesting new perspectives. Indeed, the mentalities historians discovered the superposition of different temporalities in history (a long temporality for collective and popular mentalities, but also a short one for sudden and complex shifts) that are in addition in a dialectical relationship. This improvement in historical science enabled fruitful and still promising approaches in the history of thought, as, for example, the dialectic between

^① Michel Vovelle. *Idéologies et mentalités* (Ideologies and mentalities). Folio histoire. 1992.

^② This idea of third level was theorized by Pierre Chaunu, a specialist of social and religious history. He introduced the expression "histoire sérielle de troisième niveau" (serial history of the third level).

what used to be called the elite culture and the popular culture in the absence of certitudes and strict definitions regarding these two concepts. This topic in particular can be referred to by specialists of Confucianism, since Confucianism should be studied at both the elite and popular levels. To take a second example, reflection about the different time periods that are at stake when studying the forming of mental habits (*habitudes mentales*) is also worth considering for Confucian specialists concerned about the spread and the impact of Confucian norms and values on real society.

Another interesting statement that can be made in the survey of the 20th century French historiography is the reflection about the social role of academic scholars. In the 1980's and 1990's, the Annales School historians' world has been shaken by a crisis, because of a wave of salutary self-criticism breaking from both France and foreign countries, like Great Britain, the Netherlands, and the United States. Several historians started to criticize the institutionalization and the dictatorship of the well established French scholars jealously bred inside the Annales School^①. This criticism emphasized three features of the school that became hegemonic in French academic institutions: the illusion of objectivity and scientism in history generated from the use of quantitative approaches, the academic and institutional pressure over young researchers to study pre-defined subjects, and finally the mix of genres of some well established historians who flirted with media and politics without paying enough attention to ideological manipulations. In response to these sharp criticisms, historians began a reflexive process that is still going on, and they have probably gained an acuter sense of prudence and responsibility.

20th century French historiography is interesting, for it gives a good example of an innovative mindset that always tries to keep connected to methodological concerns. The

^① Guy Bourdé and Hervé Martin. *Les écoles historiques* (The historical schools). Points histoire. 1997. p.245-270.

diverse approaches tried in intellectual history are also exemplary, since they proceeded by trial and error, and by prudence and boldness. Confucian specialists could gain new ideas by learning from such an approach. The warning against the limits and the responsibility of history making, story telling, and knowledge building as far as past and tradition are concerned is important, for we have to deal with past Confucian thought and culture in a determined time and society.

For the last few decades, one large scale research project has been carried by academic scholars around the world in order to build and collectively write a world history that is based on transversal, comparative, multidisciplinary, and critical approaches of the different cultures, memories and histories. This project stems from the collective reflection on today's globalized world, and it has especially to deal with questions raised by culturalist (or essentialist) and, conversely, relativist approaches of different cultures. Because of the difficulty and the complexity of these topics, this project is still a work in progress. Likewise, Confucian studies constitute a protean and still vague field, whose outlines are not clear. However, this very vagueness fits well with the nature of Confucianism: a multi-faced, plural and complex phenomenon. Besides, Confucianism is inseparable from the history and culture of northeast Asia – of Korea in particular. In a context of the building of a common world history, making a precise and serious history of Confucianism is needed. In order to move beyond the ideological and nationalistic viewpoints of each country, some changes in scholarly practices are now needed, and specialists of Confucianism have a role to play in this process.

The philosophical approach of Confucianism is legitimate, and the development of the 20th century scholarly work in South Korea has most certainly allowed fruitful and interesting reflections that have improved the explanation and theorization of Confucian thought. In parallel, Korean historians have undertaken erudite and well documented

research on the history of Koryŏ and Chosŏn. In a larger perspective, several case studies using literary, linguistic, sociologic and political approaches have been also done successfully. But the persistence of the quasi-absence of discussion and exchanges between the different academic fields can be deplored. Indeed, only a multidisciplinary research can lead to an understanding of Confucianism in its entire complexity.

Philosophical history should become intellectual history, since Confucianism cannot be reduced to an exhibition hall displaying concepts. To be more precise, philosophical history should be open to a broad historical approach, and not solely consist of textual analysis and exegesis. The study of concepts, and philosophical discourses and systems should be combined with the historical survey of the biographical, economical, social, geographical, literary, linguistic, anthropological, aesthetical, religious, and even scientific analysis of the time of every single Confucian scholar, or group of scholars. Even if it sounds like a truism, it is worth reminding that Confucian scholars were not solely thinkers or philosophers. In the Korean case, they were members of an evolving aristocracy and, most of the time, high government officials. They were also linked to their familial, regional and scholarly lineages. They were sons, fathers, husbands, masters, and disciples. They were poets, philosophers, bureaucrats, professors, local elites, political counsellors, professional commentators, and experts in rituals, etc. As a philosophy, Confucianism might be featured as a continuous humanism, centred on humanity and human life. As a social phenomenon too, Confucianism is connected to social life in a broad sense, and therefore to human society. It is then relevant to study Confucianism through men – the so-called Confucians – instead of ideas.

Broadening the philosophical approach of Confucianism does not mean erasing or forgetting the philosophical, theoretical and notional aspect of this thought. This rather aims at better studying the Confucian thought by better understanding the culture where it was rooted. Such an understanding, which leads to a larger perspective, is not only

much more relevant for the amelioration of academic knowledge; it is also the best means to reflect on the becoming of Confucianism in present and future. In spite of the criticisms that have been addressed to the French historiography, and especially the history of mentalities, the possibilities and results shown are stimulating and seminal. Intellectual production – both practices and discourses – is indeed the final topic for researchers when a society and a culture have been examined in synchronic and diachronic approaches. The goal of making a multidisciplinary and transversal study of Confucianism, and adopting the larger perspective of intellectual history is to let the spirit of Confucianism shine in all of its facets and its depth. Historical depth can give acute insight into the spirit of Confucianism, rather than the letter, and then permits relevant philosophical reflection. By choosing the historical approach, specialists of Confucianism interested in thought will gain a solid basis for discussing Confucian values, tradition, and perspectives for present and future. Furthermore, they will be able to participate efficiently and properly in the building of a collective memory for their society, but also in the writing and the teaching of humanity's common history, in exchange with foreign specialists and intellectuals.

Example: the 16th century Chosŏn Korea, T'oegye Yi

Hwang, and Yulgok Yi I

The potential contribution of the Annales School to the Confucian studies could be illustrated by one example. The 16th century is an interesting turning point in the history of Korean Confucianism. It is the time of the maturity and the "Koreanization", or the "Chosŏn-ization" of the Neo-Confucianism received successively from Song, Yuan, and Ming China. In a philosophical perspective, the works of T'oegyeYi Hwang 退溪

李滉 (1501-1570) and Yulgok Yi I 栗谷 李珥 (1536-1584) are commonly regarded as the first great achievements of a properly Korean Confucianism. Their philosophical thoughts have been extensively studied in erudite works for several decades. But a few naïve methodological questions could still be asked. Is it relevant to study only great figures in intellectual history? Are the philosophies of Yulgok and T'oegye telling anything substantial about the evolution – that is to say, the history – of Confucianism taken as a complex historical phenomenon? And then, is it accurate to study only the philosophical content of their writings in order to understand the Confucianism of the 16th century Korea nowadays?

The famous work of Lucien Febvre on Rabelais, one great literary and intellectual figure of the 16th century France^①, has been criticized, but it has opened an important perspective in intellectual history. This historian of the first generation of the Annales School wanted to criticize the production of anachronisms in the historical study of past great intellectual figures. He addressed the problem of the religious viewpoint of Rabelais who had been depicted as an atheist, and an exception of his time. Lucien Febvre chose to study Rabelais as the complex and contradictory reflection of the 16th century European intellectual world, rather than as a single, isolated forerunner of the 17th and 18th centuries' philosophers. He demonstrated that the word atheist, which had been used by the contemporary contradictors and critics of Rabelais, cannot be understood in the meaning of "without religion", or even "against religion" of the 20th century. He showed that this word was part of the common insults used at the 16th century, in the specific context of internal criticism in the intellectual world of that time, and that it cannot be an evidence to prove the supposed atheism of Rabelais. On the

^① Lucien Febvre. *Le problème de l'incroyance au XVI^e siècle. La religion de Rabelais* (The problem of unbelief in the 16th century. The religion of Rabelais). Albin Michel, Bibliothèque de l'Humanité. New edition of 2003.

contrary, Rabelais was a man of his time, and this time was definitely religious. Rabelais did not have the intellectual tools (*l'outillage mental*) that could have allowed him to even think atheism. Lucien Febvre studied the mentalities of the 16th century France through and thanks to Rabelais, and he purposely combined different methodological approaches ranging from historical psychology, social history, biography, and linguistic and textual analysis. The whole work of Febvre illustrates the importance of taking into account the mental representations of a certain time in order to avoid certain false truths that can stem from a solely conceptual analysis of the masterpieces of past scholars. It also shows that studying a great figure in intellectual history gives an insight into two different levels that are intimately linked together: the collective level of the mentalities and mental representations of a certain time on the one hand, and the individual level of the intellectual production of a single person on the other hand.

Just like Rabelais, T'oegye and Yulgok can be studied for a double purpose. Their works are giving access not only to their individual thoughts, but also to the 16th century mentalities to which the development of Confucianism as a social and intellectual phenomenon is basically linked. Another reason to study these great figures in order to understand Confucianism is less theoretical than practical. This reason is connected to the lack of available sources for some historical periods. The Confucianism of the beginning of Chosŏn, until the 17th and 18th centuries, is especially difficult, since most of the sources are only textual. Besides, some of these sources were often written and compiled after the period they are describing, as for example the official historic records. Scholars have to face the problems of authenticity, interpretation and accuracy of the texts. Therefore, making a precise social history of Confucian scholars of the time is a difficult task. However, studying these textual sources with new methods can lead to explore new facets of the intellectual world and the mindset of the Confucians.

As for T'oegye and Yulgok, a huge amount of diverse textual sources is available, ranging from personal correspondence, official works, royal commands, collective works, poems, memoirs, historic records, dissertations for civil service examinations, textbooks for students, etc. But these resources have not been fully studied yet. More precisely, they have mainly been studied as philosophical texts, whatever their very nature. One main feature of the Annales School was to see history as problem (or asking questions), opposed to history regarded as a fixed and definitive tale^①. Specialists of Confucian texts should take this attitude as an example in their own approach to sources and their textual analysis. Instead of staying at the conscious level of a given text, which is only seen as a neutral transcription of a conscious mind, they should show greater interest to what is beyond the words, what lies under the surface of wording and rhetoric. A text is not only a written record of rationalized thinking that opens way to the abstract realm of ideas; it is also the expression of the complex alchemy between the individual mindset of its author and the mentality of his specific time.

The work on Rabelais by Lucien Febvre is especially useful for Confucian specialists, since it underlines the importance of the words that have been used in a specific period and that are expressing the mentality of this time. Another French historian influenced by the Annales School, Georges Duby, has also analyzed the vocabulary and the words commonly used by the French chivalry at the Middle Age^②. As a researcher in social history interested in social psychology – or historical psychology – he made a semantic study on the vocabulary used by the members of the

^① Lucien Febvre enunciated this idea of history as a problem (l'histoire-problème).

^② Georges Duby. « La féodalité. Une mentalité médiévale » (Feodality. A medieval mentality). *La société chevaleresque. Hommes et structures du Moyen Age 1* (*The society of chivalry. Men and structures of the Middle Age 1*). Champs, Flammarion. 1988. p.70-79.

chivalry to define themselves. He showed that studying vocabulary is one of the means to understand the mentality of a certain social class. These two models of study, which are focused on the Middle Age and the 16th century France, can be used for the study of the Confucian scholars of the first half of Chosŏn, since there are many similarities in the evolution of social structures and the formation of a social and intellectual elite between France and Korea at first sight.

In philosophical perspective, T'oegye and Yulgok can be described as the first great scholars who paved the way for the Korean Confucianism. But in a broad historical perspective, they can also be regarded as the forerunners of a fascinating phenomenon: the Confucianization, or the Confucian transformation of the Korean society^① that is thought to have been achieved in the 17th century. The problem of the Confucianization of the Korean society – or conversely of the Koreanization of Confucianism – is one of the most interesting phenomena of the history of Confucianism. Not only is it interesting for contemporary Korea, where many consequences of this past phenomenon can still be noticed, it is also worth studying for specialists of Confucianism at large. But this complex problem raises a multiplicity of questions. For example, is it relevant to consider that this Confucianization is the natural result of a conscious project? Or is it conversely a process, which is deeply linked to the social, political, cultural, economical and intellectual context of its development? Is the Confucianization only a mechanical application of the theories and philosophical systems developed by great Confucians like T'oegye and Yulgok in their philosophical "masterpieces"? A first attempt to answer these questions can be made in the following case study that is inspired by the study of words and vocabulary made by the Annales School's historians.

^① Martina Deuchler. *The Confucian Transformation of Korea. A Study of Society and Ideology*. Harvard-Yenching Institute Monograph Series 36. Harvard University Press. 1992.

The words of Yulgok Yi I: an attempt to study the mental representations of the Confucian scholars in the 16th century

Generally speaking, the 16th century can be seen as a turning-point in the process of Confucianization. While the Confucianization of the court is generally considered as achieved, the growing power of the Censorate – and especially the *samsa* 三司 – endangered royal effective power. Factional strives were emerging, and they created a sort of breakdown in the balance of power at court. In a very short period of time, these conflicts spread to local areas and they divided the whole world of *literati*. Finally, the scholars started to lead by themselves the Confucianization of the country. They created *sŏwŏn* 書院 and *hyangyak* 鄉約 and developed their educational and social activities independently of the State. To sum up and to have a very general picture, the 16th century was the scene of a crisis in the history of Chosŏn political functioning, and the scene of the beginning of an active Confucianization of the society. This Confucianization was not only led by the State, but primarily by the scholars-officials who also tended to create a new identity for themselves. That is why it is interesting to examine the Confucianization through the very eyes of its initiators. The case of Yulgok Yi I, taken as an example, can be used for the following main reasons. He was a high official, he faced the beginning of the factional strives, and he experienced the problems caused by this phenomenon at the very heart of the court. He also participated in the creation or the redefinition of the rules of the *sŏwŏn* and the *hyangyak*. Finally, he left many writings that give the opportunity to confront and compare different kinds of sources. The aim of the study is to draw a general picture of the mental representations of that period through a study of the terminology used by Yulgok in his various writings

collected in the *Yulgok chŏnsŏ* 栗谷全書: mainly his dissertations, and his personal and official correspondence. Such a picture of the mental representations could be interesting in order to better know what it means to be a Confucian scholar-official at the end of the 16th century, and to what problems the Confucianization is connected with, when we try to think about this phenomenon from the inside, or from the scholars' viewpoint.

At first, it can be noticed that a very few explicit mentions are made in Yulgok's writings to what we call nowadays the Confucianization. This Confucian mission of the scholars-officials to civilize their country could however correspond to the well-known idea of *p'ung* 風 (the wind), which comes in the following variety of compounds: *munp'ung* 文風 (related to *yusŭp* 儒習), *yup'ung* 儒風 (related to the civilization, *mun* 文), *sap'ung* 士風. These three terms are used equally by Yulgok, just as if they were synonymous. However, in the case of *sap'ung* 士風, the term is linked in the texts with three main ideas. The first one is that of officialdom, which mainly expresses the fundamental unity between the *sap'ung* and the activity of the central government at court (*ch'ŏngjo sap'ung* 清朝士風). The second idea is the educative and civilizer mission of the elite (*kyohwa* 教化). The last idea is the spread of Confucian education (*sado* 師道). Besides, when Yulgok is speaking about this "mission", this *p'ung* 風, he is stressing the deficiency of contemporary *yusŭp* 儒習, the habits and attitudes of the Confucians. For him, improving the *sap'ung* 士風 needs to "cultivate the scholars, the *sa*" (*yangsa* 養士). *Yangsa* 養士 needs in turn to transform radically the *yusŭp* 儒習 or *sasŭp* 士習 through a beforehand reformed educational process. This preliminary remark shows that for Yulgok, the Confucianization is led by the scholarly trained Confucian officials (*yu* 儒 or *sa* 士), and his major concern is the education of this specific social group that shares the power with the king. So the Confucianization of the society starts with the Confucianization of the scholar-officials, and these men are the

main focus of interest for Confucians like Yulgok.

Another study of the words used by Yulgok can lead to much more interesting conclusions about the Confucianization seen from the inside. It is the study of the terms designating what we call in Western languages the scholars-officials. The purpose of such a study is to know much about the self-awareness of this social group. Indeed, if the mission of Confucianization, considered as an educational project based on Confucian values, is commonly and explicitly shared by all the scholar-officials of the same aristocratic class, how does this elite actually picture herself?

When Yulgok is talking about the scholars-officials as a social class, in contrast to common people or the rest of the country, he uses the following terms: *yu* 儒 (identified with *munban* 文班), *sega chi ye* 世家之裔 (the men who have an “aristocratic” ascendancy, that is to say a high officials’ lineage), *nongmin* 農民 (in the sense of gentleman farmer or land owner), *sasŏ chi ka* 士庶之家 and *hakcha* 學者. As regards the case of *hakcha* 學者, Yulgok contrasts it with the *sok’in* 俗人 (common people), and the *ya’in* 野人 (a term referring to the idea of the decay of a scholar-official). *Sok’in* 俗人 and *ya’in* 野人 imply moral and social connotations. So the main terms designating the scholars-officials (*yu* 儒, *ka* 家, *min* 民, *sa* 士, *hak* 學), when compared to what Yulgok is explicitly saying, tend to show that this social class is anxious to be thought honourable, and defines itself as a *ka* 家 (or *kamun* 家門) identified as a high-officials’ lineage. The specificity, and also the legitimacy of this class lie in an expertise (the scholarly expertise, *hak* 學 and *yu* 儒) and the corresponding attitudes and habits (ritual practices for example). So the group seems to be homogenous and unitary, compared to the lower classes, which are not at all discussed in detail.

When Yulgok talks about the people or the nation, in contrast to the king, he does not care either about lower classes called by a generic term: *min* 民. But he does make

a difference between the *sin* 臣 (ministers/officials) and the *sa* 士, or between *sa* 士 and *cho* 朝 (the “court”, an equivalent of *sin*/officials). Moreover, he makes a difference between the *sa* and the *cho* on the one hand, and the *chija* 智者 (the “capable men”, the true Confucians) on the other hand. He is contrasting the scholars-officials taken as a group, to the true Confucians who are regarded as outstanding individuals. So we can notice that, depending on the viewpoint, differences are made among the unitary social group of scholars-officials.

A further analysis of the terminology used for the scholars-officials in Yulgok’s writings can be carried to deepen these results. The following four major groups of terms will be examined successively: *sa* 士 (designating a social group in relation to specific skills and practices), *sin* 臣 (taken in the *sin/kun* 臣君 relationship, or related to officialdom), *yu* 儒 (related to Confucianism and scholarly expertise), and several terms formed from the notion of *hak* 學 (Learning, also related to Confucianism).

The terminology based on the term *sa* 士 is certainly the most complex and difficult to define. These numerous terms designates a general and homogenous social group (*sa* 士, *saja* 士子, *wuisaja* 為士者, *sasŏ* 士庶, *saryu* 士類), but also a group that can be divided in different categories (*hakmun chi sa* 學問之士, *sarim* 士林, *sallim* 山林 or *sallim chi sa* 山林之士, *ch’usa* 處士). Besides, the moral value of the distinctive *sa* is often underlined by qualifying adjectives: *chisa* 志士 (authentic, true scholars), *chiksa* 直士 (upright scholars), *hyŏnsa* 賢士 (worthy scholars), *ũisa* 義士 (righteous scholars) just as if being a *sa* does not necessarily match moral qualities. But, on the contrary, *sa* is also used to designate specific features or specific skills inherent to the *sa*’s status or identity: *sasŭp* 士習, *sagi* 士氣, *sasim* 士心, *sap’ung* 士風, *sap’ip* 士乏, *saron* 士論.

The terminology based on the term *sin* 臣 (taken in contrast to the king, *kun/wang* 君王) is at first sight easier to characterize. Firstly, generic terms are designating some

specific officials at court: *taesin* 大臣 (high officials of the *samsa* 三司), *myōngsin* 名臣 (high officials of the Ming court), *nansin* 亂臣 (the bad officials who are responsible for the *sahwa*). But the most important term is certainly *sega chi sin* 世家之臣 and its abbreviation *sesin* 世臣. These terms designate a *sa* who became an official because of, or thanks to his high officials' ascendancy. So the expression is linked to the problem of the legitimacy of the high social status. The antonym of *sega chi sin* 世家之臣 is *sallim chi sa* 山林之士, or even *pulsu sallim chi sa* 不售山林之士 (the scholars who refuse to be sold as common goods, who refuse to prostitute their ethical and scholarly life to the administration). We can notice that the expression *ch'oya chōksin* 草野遜臣 refers to the retired scholars who have been officials and have deliberately chosen to retire for moral or vital safety.

The terminology based on the term *yu* 儒, usually translated by Confucian, reveals an interesting polysemic use. *Yu* designates a social class, that of the *munban* 文班 in contrast to the *muban* 武班. It designates also the school of the Confucians (*yuja* 儒者, *sōnyu* 先儒, *kuyuja* 古儒者). But some terms refer to specific contemporary Korean scholars: *yusaeng* 儒生 (official students in state schools or in *Sōnggyungwan*), and *noyu sōnsaeng* 老儒先生 (local scholars who teach basic knowledge for the *kwagō* examinations, but are ignorant of the real Confucian learning). Just like in the case of the term *sa* 士, a *yu* 儒 is not necessarily synonymous with inborn moral skills and true abilities for officialdom. The examples of *t'ongyu* 通儒, *uyu* 迂儒, *puyu* 腐儒 or *paekmyōn puyu* 白面腐儒 reveals that qualifying adjectives are often used. But just like *sa*, *yu* can on the contrary express specific and remarkable qualities: *i yu myōng se* 以儒名世 (to gain fame thanks to one's *yu* skills, or *yu* qualities) and *yuhaeng* 儒行 (acting as a true *yu*). Lastly, *yup'ung* 儒風, related to *yusŭp* 儒習, refers to the educative mission of the Confucians and their ability to improve civilization.

The last group of terms designating the scholars-officials is based on the term *hak*

學, which refers clearly to Neo-Confucianism and especially the Cheng/Zhu Neo-Confucianism as interpreted during the Yuan dynasty. Indeed, *hakcha* 學者, *wuihakja* 為學者, and *odongbang hakja* 吾東方學者 designate the followers of the *sirhak* 實學, or *sōngnihak* 性理學, or *yihak* 理學, or *sōnghyōn chi hak* 聖賢之學. The latter term, *sōnghyōn chi hak* 聖賢之學 (the “Learning of the Sages and Worthies”), and the first one, *sirhak* 實學 (“practice-oriented Learning”) are particularly meaningful, because they indicate the political horizon of the Neo-Confucianism adopted in Korea, which was intended primarily for the governing elites. When compared to other teachings, Confucianism or *hak* is opposed to *yidan* 異端 and *yiryu* 異類, and it is named *odo* 吾道 or *sado* 斯道 (two terms that stress the unity of the Confucian *hak* 學 or the only one *To* 道). There are also some expressions that clearly link the *hakja* 學者 or the Confucians with the figure of Confucius: *kongja chi to* 孔子之徒, *pōp kongja chi to* 法孔子之徒. But we can notice here too that acting superficially as a follower of Confucius does not necessarily mean being in the right way, as shown in the expressions *pok kongja chi pok* 服孔子之服 (wearing the clothes of Confucius) and *song kongja chi ōn* 誦孔子之言 (reciting the speeches of Confucius). These examples are of high interest because, when using these terms, Yulgok exposes the superficial ritual attitude and the superficial knowledge of Confucian Classics of the supposed or “false” Confucians who are just using Confucian practices and references as a means to gain social recognition.

One last terminology used by Yulgok should be studied before concluding this general survey: the typology of the retired scholars of his time, the *sa chi pulsa* 士之不仕 (literally the scholars who do not want to serve). After the beginning of the factional strives at court, Yulgok exposed in two letters to the king his own terminology to designate this particular category. The *yuhyōn* 遺賢 are the ideal Confucians who must serve for the sake of the government and the whole country. The *ūdun chi sa* 隱遁之

士 are a sort of hermits who are not unconcerned about state affairs, and it is up to the king to persuade these capable men to serve in his government. The *yōmt'ui chi sa* 恬退之士 (the category where Yulgok classifies himself) are described as having some outstanding abilities. But because they are also aware of their shortcomings, the king must leave them retire for self-cultivation and summon them when they will be ready to serve with efficiency. The last category, that of the *tomyōng (chi sa)* 盜名(之士), refers to the unscrupulous scholars who wrongfully assume the title of *sa* 士.

Many conclusions might be drawn from this short analysis of the terminology used by Yulgok in various types of texts, but just two of them should be underlined for our general purpose. Firstly, there is no particular term to designate the scholars-officials as a social class. Indeed, there is a vagueness in the use of the terms *sa* 士, *yu* 儒, *sin* 臣, and *hakja* 學者, even if there are also many evident signs that Yulgok has a clear “class awareness”. Secondly, the terms *yu* 儒, *sa* 士, *kongja chi to* 孔子之徒, *hakja* 學者 do not refer necessarily to any moral qualities that would be inherent to the status they are designating. So the supposed moral superiority and the scholarly expertise of the scholar-officials are the crucial problems for defining the identity and the self-awareness of this class, which is in search for recognition. Generally speaking, whatever the nature of the texts, Yulgok shows a great concern for the definition and the categorization of the different types of scholar-officials. His typology of the contemporary “retired scholars” is especially interesting, for it mainly reflects his attempt to make clear distinctions among the indistinct group of scholars-officials. The vagueness of the vocabulary and the contradictions in the terminology in his texts display on the one hand the lack of a clear representation of his class and of its specificities, duties and legitimacy; and on the other hand a great concern for a self-definition as a scholar, an official and an aristocrat. This leads us to give a second thought to the problem of Confucianization.

We could maybe interpret this vagueness and this concern for a definition as signs of the feelings of insecurity and disarray. The theoretical discourse and the philosophical exegesis of the scholar-officials, from the foundation of Chosŏn, have mainly stressed the necessity of a collegial power, a sharing of the power between the king and the scholars-officials taken as a group. These scholars-officials have been used to picturing themselves as a unitary body, in contrast to the figure of the king. And whatever the name given to them (*kongsin* 功臣, *sarim* 士林, *hungup'a* 勳舊派, etc), there is no doubt that they have all experienced *sahwa* 士禍 and various hardships for many centuries. However, if they share a common history, they have been deeply divided since the very foundation of the new dynasty. Yulgok's example suggests that, at the end of the 16th century, they seem to put words on this division. Besides, we could also wonder if they are not beginning to proclaim the difference between the figure of the official (or bureaucrat) and that of the scholar, *sŏnbi* 선비. More precisely, they could have been in search of a new identity that could relieve them from the duty of serving, a duty which has legitimated their existence as an aristocratic social class. So the Confucianization of the whole society led by the scholars in local areas from the end of the 16th century might mirror the progressive construction of new mental representations, of a new self-awareness for Chosŏn Confucians.

Conclusion

This brief and modest survey of the vocabulary used by Yulgok Yi I to define the Confucians and their project to confucianize the society still lacks consistency. However its aim has only been to test the relevance of using new methods to make the history of Confucianism. The relationship between the king and his servants – the

scholars-officials – is one of the common and recurrent theme in the Confucian texts. And this topic can be studied in a philosophical perspective to explain the theoretical viewpoint of the Confucian scholars on the necessary balance of political power that has been discussed in the Classics since the Chinese Antiquity. It is then possible to think that the Korean scholars of the 16th century are motivated by this eternal theoretical ideal, and that they were eager to put it into practice at their time. But such a viewpoint might not offer the only one explanation of what is at stake in the Confucianization. The preceding insight into the possible mental representations of the actors of the process has tried to show that the historical context and the mentality of the 16th century may have played a role that cannot be neglected.

In the current context of a globalized world where the need for mutual knowledge between cultures is often expressed in public and academic levels, the perspectives of Confucian studies are rich and promising. However, precisely because of this hope in the development of the field, specialists have to increase their sense of responsibility. Some methodological changes are welcome, since past attitudes and practices are showing some limits. The aim is less to go in an infinite auto-critical process, than to try and try to improve our research and expertise. Because this project is still embryonic, the program remains wide and relatively undefined. Intellectual history deals with questions, rather than answers; with problems, rather than certainties. Because of the exploratory nature of the project, a greater cooperation between scholars who have different skills will be needed, and results will take time to come out. But the task remains challenging in spite of diverse difficulties, for the future of Confucian studies is fully open to development, innovation and healthy emulation. The major goal is to keep a certain distance with past, in order to know exactly what common past and what Confucianism we are discussing today for present and future. Geographical, methodological, and mental boundaries should be crossed now, in order to enrich and

develop Confucian studies throughout the world.

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超越儒教研究的境界

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中文提要：本论文的目的是在这个学界和大众日益关心儒教的世界化社会中，对以后儒教的发展方向进行讨论。本主题的焦点集中在研究的各种可能性上，而不仅仅是作出一个学术上的结论。儒学研究的特性、限界、方法论等方面都有过研究，这都是为了讨论创造知性历史的优点而进行的。首先在东北亚 21 世纪的现实中对儒教研究进行探讨之后，对学者们所使用的哲学性和概念性的权威进行讨论。为了寻求今后儒教研究的提高和发展的方向，介绍了法国史书，特别是 Annales 学派的例子。在朝鲜 16 世纪的儒教研究之中具体讨论了方法论的困难之后，将李栗谷所使用的词语作为研究事例进行了介绍。为了说明研究的主要目的，使用了受法国历史学者影响的方法论。研究之前儒教学者是在哲学和历史学的层面上理解过去儒教的现象，并通过他们更好地说明现在和未来社会将会是一个更好的方式。

关键词：Annales 学派，知性历史，形象，李栗谷，儒教化