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Scholar's Corner: Confucianism in and for the Modern World

Korean Philosophy Today: *Retrospect and Prospect*

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What is the status of Korean philosophy today from a global perspective? What was it like before and how is it evolving? Anglophone philosophers in general have of late begun to pay more attention to the general history and issues of philosophy in East Asia, and, Michael C. Kalton (1988; 2015), Martina Deuchler (1992), P. J. Ivanhoe (2015; 2016; 2020), Robert Buswell (1983; 1989; 2007; 2016), Charles Muller (2012; 2015), Hwa Yol Jung (2014; 2021), Jin Y. Park (2005; 2010; 2014; 2018; 2022), and other influential commentators both of Western as well as Korean extraction have made substantial contributions that develop major themes in Korean philosophy specifically. Indeed, Korean philosophy in general, having been an intellectual pariah for a long time, has made steady progress over the years and is now gradually evolving into a respectable form of thought. This is a welcome development. The recent surge of intense global interests in East Asian traditions in general and especially in the K-culture (K-pop, K-drama, K-movies, K-foods, *inter alia*) has given an additional impetus to the growing attention to Korean philosophy as well. At this point,

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** The great challenge facing those interested in Korean philosophy in academia is the Romanization of the Korean and Sino-Korean characters. Scholars traditionally prefer McCune-Reischauer Method (MR here after) but the Revised Romanization (RR hereafter) suggested by the Ministry of Education of the government of the Republic of Korea is gaining popularity. Since the available literature lacks consistency, I simply proceed with RR as a default method, even though I will stick to the traditional spelling in some cases, e.g., when famous names have been used consistently and predominantly in a different method. Whenever the context makes the reader bewildered, I will indicate the method adopted in individual works after each.

many institutions of higher education in the world, the course list in philosophy includes one or more surveys of Asian philosophy. The historical-geographical importance of this philosophy is universally recognized in the Pacific Rim Era, and more and more scholarly works on various figures or movements within it appear each year.

There is still no denying that Korean philosophy per se still maintains a relatively low profile, despite the scholarly efforts inter alia. There have been relatively few attempts made to introduce the philosophical tradition in Korea systematically and comprehensively. There is hardly any academic monograph or textbook that is singly dedicated to Korean philosophy in the English language.[1] Also, there is no anthology of original writings dedicated only to Korean philosophy today in English. The survey courses in Asian philosophy do not always include materials from Korean philosophy. There is a palpably felt need to help redress this unfortunate situation by way of e.g., more monographs that explore the leading themes and major development of Korean philosophy in its entirety. Those who attempt to learn or teach Korean philosophy thus face a huge disadvantage.

As is widely known, before the modern era there was no term for "philosophy" in Korea, even though the term "history" was established as part of government effort. There was naturally no phrase for philosophical ethics or for that matter metaphysics and of course "the history of Korean philosophy." The historiographic category of Korean philosophy was a modern invention coined in the context of the writing of the history of Korean Confucianism (Takahashi 1912). In fact, it was Joseon (Chosŏn), the dynasty before the colonial period, that the project referred to when it conceptualized "Korean Philosophy" as an academic sub-field for the first time. It was not philosophy in general but Confucianism that was examined here.

The term "philosophy" has its origin in the West, originally in ancient Greece. As explained, the term for it in East Asia is a result of an Asian response to the massive influx of western civilization in East Asia in the nineteenth century. The term for philosophy "*cheolhak*

[1] A possible exception is Cawley (2019), even though this work treats not only philosophy but also religion in Korea.

(*ch'ŏrak*)" in Korean was thus a response to this imposition—East Asians did not have any choice but to make responses to the tsunami of European cultural invasions whether they liked it or not.

But could there have been philosophy in this Western sense at least in its rudimentary element in the Asian tradition? Some doubt it and claim there was no philosophy in Asia. Many still believe so. But the situation is gradually changing. There is a new perception that philosophy in Asia does not have to be a twin sister of its western counterpart, and this is also true of Korean philosophy. In what sense, then, can we say there is philosophy in Asia? Compare Confucius' *Analects* and Plato's *Republic*. Both are classics in their respective traditions. *The Analects* offers a lot of insights about the human community by way of analogy and examples. More so than arguments, it provides practice-oriented ways of self-cultivation and the governance of society under what might be called *eu-praxia.*[2] *The Analects* is a congeries of practical directives for how to live a good life at the level of individual and society. This form of thinking is fundamentally grounded in an insight into human relationships. The *Republic* on the other hand offers insights or visions of the universe and humanity in it by way of more detailed theoretical arguments by a recourse to ideals that don't concretely exist in this world. This form of thinking is more focused on independent truth and its revelation. This comparison indicates that, even though there was no term for "philosophy" in Asia, Asian thinkers including Korean thinkers pursued what we call "philosophy" as part of an intellectual or spiritual discipline in a manner congenial to their culture and historical environment.

And it is not the case that the Asian mode of thinking was not completely incommensurable with that of the Western thinking. If Asians can learn from the Western tradition, certainly, non-Asians can learn from the Asian traditions too. Perhaps we can even find some examples or analogues of Western-style philosophy in Asian traditions.

[2] For this concept of *eu-praxia* describing the systematic study of good action or practice in society as a way of life, see Kim (2020b).

For example, we may point out Buddhist logic or epistemology.[3] But there is a controversy about it. For example, it may be pointed out that Indian Buddhism has also an Indo-European connection. After all, it is influenced by Hinduism and its language, Sanskrit, is an Indo-European language. How about the Chinese tradition? Can Confucianism or Daoism show anything similar or analogous to classical Greek philosophy? Indeed, there are studies suggesting that logic and language (and other analytically manageable tools) were once highly regarded by some ancient Chinese philosophers as an important source of insights about human society and natural world.[4] But this case is an exception, not a norm. And once again, Asian philosophy, in order to be philosophy at all, does not have to be an exact replica of its Western counterpart in its method or style or tool.

Now, one does not have to talk about a zoo in order to do zoology. Likewise, one does not have to talk about Korea in order to do Korean philosophy. Even though there was no term for philosophy, there were definitely analogous intellectual, even spiritual, activities. *Dohak* (*Tohak* 道學, the learning of Dao), or *Seonghak* (Sŏnghak 聖學, the sage learning) are among them. Korean Buddhism always emphasized sitting meditations (as well as the study of the sutras). The past masters in Korean philosophy did not conceive their activities as part of "Korean philosophy" in this sense. The Buddhist masters Wonhyo (Wŏnhyo, 617–686) or Jinul (Chinul, 1158–1210) did not speak of their national identity when they produced their work. The eminent Neo-Confucian Toegye (T'oegye, 1502–1571) and Yulgok (1536–1584) did not think about their own Korean character when they produced their thoughts. They all rather thought of themselves as part of the universal order of Buddhism or Confucianism. Today philosophers engaged in Korean philosophy think of themselves (or wish to do so) as part of the universal order of global philosophy. Their philosophy may contain reference to Korea or particular names but they hope that their philosophy can be universally acceptable. Philosophy in Korea today is cosmological in this sense.

[3] See, for example, Dignāga (c. 480–540 CE) in his magnum opus, the *Pramāna-samuccaya.*
[4] See, e.g., Willman (2023).

It is part of the aim of the present paper to give a general survey on the current status of Korean philosophy as a way of paving the way for its in-depth introduction, detailed intellectual treatment/analysis, and discussions concerning its leading spirits, the main themes as well as the main debates in the entirety of Korean philosophy systematically and historically. But, when you contemplate writing a history of Korean philosophy, you immediately meet a couple of challenges. Is there any unitary, main theme or a spirit that never fails to run through the whole of Korean philosophy? What are the major operating philosophical categories that are uniquely found in Korean philosophy but nowhere else? What are the leading philosophical debates in its history not found elsewhere? In other words, is there such a thing as "Korean" philosophy at all?

In order to describe Korean philosophy at work today, one may ask what characterizes Korean philosophy within the general field of philosophy. To answer that question, we first distinguish the following two approaches carefully: the essentialist and the formalist approaches (Cf. Jospe 1997, 113–14; 2008, 19–33). According to the essentialist approach, there exists an essential core of Korean philosophy, which Korean philosophy would explain and rationalize. The strictest version holds that there is a single essential core that any philosophical ideas must conform to in order to count as Korean philosophy. Professor Han Ja Kyoung, for example, seems to hold a view belonging to this category (Han 2008). Han thinks that the distinctiveness of Korean philosophy is its orientation in the concept of mind (*sim* [*shim*] 心, *maeum* [*maŭm*]). On this view, Korean philosophy does not exclusively come from Korean sources, but it is specific in that it strives to orient philosophy within the framework of the mind and its activities. According to this essentialist model, Korean philosophy should not focus on particular doctrinal or religious or spiritual backgrounds alone. In order to count as a producer of Korean philosophy, one only needs to agree with this general philosophical orientation. If there is no candidate that satisfies this criterion, we should not count anything as Korean philosophy. Nobody counts as a Korean philosopher unless one reflects on mind in some form or other directly or indirectly. In this case, we would have to weed out a lot of good philosophies (especially contemporary ones) not

dealing with issues in the human mind as non-Korean.

Secondly, the formalist approach holds that Korean philosophy can be identified by means of biographical and linguistic criteria. In this respect, someone who is not of Korean extraction cannot produce Korean philosophy. The formalist approach is a powerful alternative to the essentialist model because it rejects essentialism not only for being too narrow but also because of its unacceptable flaw: it is prescriptive rather than descriptive. It is really hard to find a philosophical component that is universally present in all or even most of Korean philosophies throughout history. Someone who believes that Korean philosophy must have an essence inevitably classifies texts into Korean and non-Korean elements. Without any generally acceptable, factual basis for an essentialist claim, such an operation is neither feasible nor useful. Moreover, this prescriptive approach ends up favoring prejudiced judgments about Korean philosophy as a whole.

Actually, formalism can be divided into two types. Extreme formalism calls Korean philosophy any philosophy produced by an ethnically Korean person, whatever the definition given for "Korean."[5] According to moderate formalism, the Korean identity of the author is a necessary condition but not a sufficient one. A Korean who plays football doesn't make it a Korean football. Extreme formalism is also untenable in the following situation: in the case that a philosopher realized at the end of his career that he was Korean, extreme formalism would retroactively turn his work into a contribution to Korean philosophy. These two absurd examples prove that the criterion used by extreme formalism to define Korean philosophy is indefensible. Moderate formalists include reading and referring to Korean sources or addressing Korean issues as the other necessary factors to define a philosophy as Korean. While essentialism focuses on the Korean content, moderate formalism rather takes into account the Korean national/ethnic identity. This moderate formalist definition is still too narrow and thus unacceptable because it leaves no possibility of non-

[5] One may be Korean even if one actively pursues academic life in foreign countries in this sense. Woncheuk (Wŏnchŭk), an eminent Consciousness-only Buddhist during the Tang dynasty is a case in point. Refer to Jospe (1997, 113).

Koreans specializing in, and doing, Korean philosophy.

For the third option in defining Korean philosophy, we may turn our attention to a very liberal one, the hybrid approach, according to which a philosophy counts as Korean philosophy if it either satisfies the essentialist model or the formalist model. This could serve as a "disjunctive" model of Korean philosophy. This definition has an advantage because it guarantees that Korean philosophy can be meaningfully classified with a relatively loose criterion, but it is outweighed by its disadvantage, for too many philosophies might count under this criterion. Even if a foreign philosopher happens to publish a work on a Korean concept of *jeong* (*chŏng*, emotional attachment), *han* (lingering sorrow), or *nunchi* (*nunch'i*, the subtle art of gauging others' mood), etc., that would not automatically turn them into a Korean philosopher.

The fourth approach is scepticism. This view holds that there is simply no such thing as Korean philosophy. As Hilary Putnam once said, there is no (analytic) philosophy. There is only good philosophy (1997, 203). So scepticism about Korean philosophy says that there is no Korean philosophy as such. There is simply a good philosophy and that is all. This is because of the universal, rational nature of philosophy, philosophy that anybody anywhere can understand, even intelligent extraterrestrials. But here the particularities and the context of any philosophy are ignored. Its historical background is swiftly brushed aside. This is why it is extreme and not acceptable.

Finally, there is what we might call a contextualist approach. Consider the following contextual definition: A Korean philosophy is an attempt to provide a well-reasoned and informed account of the fundamental questions concerning the spiritual and cultural beliefs and practices found in the Korean philosophical literature, both traditional and contemporary, without being confined to authors of Korean extraction. In this case we can uphold the universalistic character of philosophy and its communicability, but it also holds its cultural, social, historical background as important. In the former respect, there is no Korean philosophy, for any philosophy that only Koreans can accept is not truly a philosophy. Philosophy must be universally communicable. But we can also describe a philosophy actively pursued, investigated and promoted by Korean philosophers as Korean philosophy. In other

words, "Korean philosophy" is given a contextual definition. Jaegwon Kim (1934–2020), an analytic philosopher, once said that there is only one physics and only one chemistry, etc.; So why not one philosophy?[6] This is right when considered in its universalistic character, but wrong in another sense because it ignores the particularities in Korean philosophy that can be widely shared. Also, this excludes Jaegwon Kim from the scope of a history of Korean philosophy but includes Woncheuk (Wŏnchŭk, 613–696), a Consciousness-only Buddhist, because, even though both were born and raised in Korea and then spent the rest of their lives in foreign countries, the former never employed the language of Korean academia for major publications and was never active in the pursuit of any Korean themes, while the latter did, despite having spent all his career in Tang China, at the height of Pax Sinica.[7]

Two comments are in order for this definition. The first one is about the connection between philosophy and the origin of its method: I will concentrate on the manner by which Korean philosophers have used non-Korean philosophies in order to solve philosophical problems they faced from the start. In other words, we do not pay attention so much to the content or the actual answers to the philosophical questions but rather the way they dealt with the issues by resorting to the Indian, Chinese, and more recently German, French, and American, or other philosophical methods. The question is then to what extent any philosophical method of foreign extraction was useful to the Koreans for the purpose of doing philosophy, even though the Koreans themselves also may well have contributed to the elaboration of such philosophy—and sometimes even did so without any reference to Korean historical texts or any sources identifiable as palpably Korean. We may count phenomenology or analytic philosophy done in Korea as part of Korean philosophy in this respect.[8]

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[6] See Jaegwon Kim (2000).

[7] For this argument, see Kim (2019b).

[8] For the former, see the works by Kah Kyung Cho, who spent most of his career at SUNY Buffalo or Hwa Yol Jung at Moravian College in the US. Both of them died in the US. For the latter, see the recent debate on *uri* 우리 ("we") among analytic philosophers in Korea. For the most general bibliography, see my forthcoming "Oxford Bibliography in Korean Philosophy."

The contextual definition of Korean philosophy I have just given isn't meant to state what Korean philosophy essentially at its core is or should be but rather offers a new way of measuring its evolution, depending on its context of discussion. Most historians of Korean philosophy divide it into the pre-Buddhist, the Buddhist, and the (Neo-)Confucian periods as well as the contemporary period. The periodization I propose is guided by the contextualist model. Korean philosophy of the contemporary period is not exclusively Confucian nor Buddhist. There is a palpable influence from the West including the contribution of analytic philosophy as well as phenomenology and existentialism. Marxism has been influential, too. But despite having nothing to do with any uniquely Korean themes, they are all influential in Korean philosophical activities. Philosophies, when genuine, are never mere copycats in their internalization of such philosophies and their associated methods, and I think this is true of Korean philosophy as is practiced today. It is this approach then that we adopt in our description and characterization of Korean philosophy today as well as its prospect in the future.

The eminent contemporary popular philosopher Ham Sok Hon (Ham Seokheon, Ham Sŏkhŏng) once wondered: Can anything good come out of Korea? He characterized Korean history as that of suffering but at the end attempted to elevate the spirit of Korean people by way of a progressive, teleological, indeed eschatological scheme of things with the conception of *ssi-al* ("ordinary people") as the main drive of history (Ham 1985).[9] Our specific question, however, is: was there a good philosophy which came out of Korea?

In the spirit of the contextualist conception of Korean philosophy given above, we can, perhaps, take a further step and suggest that Korean philosophy is a conscious effort to answer fundamental questions about human life both as individuals and members of society and also about their physical, mental, cultural universe as viewed by someone with a keen interest in the processes and things taking place in the Korean Peninsula. It also involves theoretical foundations of

[9] For an account of his view, see Kim (2016b).

the Korean worldview and the cultivation of characters. As part of the effort to answer this question, we may first ask: what are the most important *de facto* philosophical components in the Korean way of philosophizing? Certainly in view of its humble beginning in Siberia/Manchuria, the seeds of Korean philosophical thinking were sown in a form of shamanism, no matter how rudimentary it may have been.[10] But it really hardly evolved into abstract thinking required for genuine philosophical thinking. There was no canonical text in it, even though the latter is not essential to philosophy. After all, Socrates himself did not think highly of a written tradition. In Korea there is no question that the first genuine form of philosophical thinking was offered by Buddhism. When Buddhism first arrived in Korea, it came with multiple (sometimes confusing) systems of thoughts with diverse, sometimes conflicting views. For example, the view about universal causation (twelve dependent origination), the view about the no-self, and the view about the impermanence of all things. Most of all, some held that things do not really exist but are empty of self-nature. Others held that things exist as the development of our consciousness. It took Wonhyo's (Wŏnhyo) genius to sort things out and come up with a consistent and coherent view of the world and humanity.[11] Later, Jinul developed the method of sudden enlightenment and gradual study for the purpose of attaining Buddhahood (or rather rediscovering and rehabilitating the inherent Buddha-nature in us.[12] The latter is typical of Seon (Sŏn) (=Zen) school, which is the dominant trend of Buddhism in Korea today.

In the fourteenth century, Buddhism gave way to Neo-Confucianism, not because of philosophical weakness but political reasons. Buddhism was driven out by force, not by philosophical persuasion,[13]

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[10] Note that, in ascribing a form of life or spirits to all entities, Spinoza's pantheism or Leibniz's monadology is similar to Korean shamanism. Of course, the former two systems are vastly more complex in their philosophy than the latter but they are all animistic nonetheless (or even panpsychistic in some extended sense).

[11] See, e.g., Buswell (1989; 2007) for an exposition of the view.

[12] For an elementary account of Jinul's Seon Buddhist philosophy, see Buswell (1983; 2016); Keel (1984).

[13] For an attempt at such a persuasion, see Jeong Dojeon's (Chŏng Tojŏn, 1342–1398) *An Array of Critiques of Buddhism* in Muller (2015). For Gihwa's (Kihwa, 1376–1433) defense of Buddhism against the Neo-Confucian criticisms, see Muller (2015) as well.

when the new dynasty Joseon (1392–1897) toppled Goryeo (Koryŏ, 918–1392). Buddhism as an institution never recovered to its former glory even when the Neo-Confucian state of Joseon fell apart and could not fill the spiritual lacuna, to the chagrin of many modern reform-minded Buddhists at the beginning of the twentieth century, when the people most needed it. Later, this allowed Christianity to sneak in at the end of the nineteenth century with its systematic approach to the needs of the people.[14] Koreans had already accepted Confucianism together with Buddhism early in their history but they began actively integrating Neo-Confucianism into their thinking at the end of the fourteenth century from the Mongol dynasty of Yuan. If you think that Neo-Confucianism took root right away then, you are in the wrong. It took a couple of hundred years to infiltrate the very depth of the Korean mind. If you also think that the same form of Confucianism was maintained throughout the five hundred-year Joseon dynasty, you are also in the wrong. Neo-Confucianism went through many different forms. But it is hardly disputable that the development of Neo-Confucianism culminates in the fifteenth century in the form of the Four-Seven Debate[15] with ramifications on moral psychology, cultivation of the relational self, and metaphysical outlook in the unison of heaven and human. Most importantly, it was Toegye's genius that brought about the most pertinent solutions to the philosophical

[14] The process of appropriating Christianity was gradual like any other intellectual/spiritual movements of foreign origin in Korea. For a domesticated form of Christian thinking in Korea, see, e.g., Yu Yeongmo's (Yu Yŏngmo) (pen name: Daseok [Tasŏk]) diary (*Daseok ilji* [*Tasŏk ilchi*]). See Kim (2019c) for a basic account of this "Korean" interpretation of the Christian worldview.

[15] The debate was *prima facie* over the origin of Four Sprouts (the heart/mind of sympathy, the heart/mind of shame, the heart/mind of deference, and the heart/mind of right/wrong; see Mengzi 2A.6) and Seven Emotions (such as joy, anger, love, fear, sorrow, hatred, desire). At its foundation, the debate is essentially about the true source and nature of morality. In this respect, it not only touches on the issue of the feasibility of a metaphysics of Principle (*i*) and Vital Force (*gi* [*ki*] 氣) in terms of their causal efficacy and normativity but also the questions about moral and psychological philosophy of mind, human nature, and feelings, and, most importantly, the questions about how best to achieve ideal moral characters and life under the epithet "sage" despite our emotions in our examined life with bodies. For this see, e.g., Kalton et al. (1992), Chung (1995), and Ro (1989).

problems that the Four-Seven Debate is about, the problem of evil by way of the power of our rational mental enterprise in the form of principle (*i* 理).

Korea was then challenged in an unprecedented way by the introduction of Western Learning (西學) beginning in the seventeenth century. Following the Renaissance, Reformation and the Age of Discovery (and Destruction), Westerners began sending their army and traders to Asia as elsewhere. Religion, too. The very conception of "religion" had to be invented. Indeed, there was no term for "religion" in Asia before the American commodore Perry forced an unequal treaty on the Japanese when he and his "black ship" invaded the land. When Jesuits sent their best representatives to China, like Matteo Ricci (1552–1610), Neo-Confucianism in Korea was shaken. The eighteenth century began witnessing the new school of thought under Practical Learning, and its star philosopher Dasan (Tasan, 1762–1836) showed a keen interest in the new ways of thoughts and, instead of rejecting them, went out of his way to incorporate them (Jeong 2001; 2010; 2012; 2016). The result is his unique form of philosophical system. For example, his answer to the traditional problem of evil proceeded by means of the concept of free will[16] suggests that the problem is in fact multifaceted and complex. This was the first time East Asians came up with the notion of freedom explicitly in the philosophical context. Rejecting the role of *i* ("principle") in cosmology and ethics, Dasan reintroduced the concept of God (called "*sangje* 上帝" or "supreme deity") that is personal and rewarding, recovering it from the classical Confucian texts. It was sort of a panopticon now serving as an external source of moral motivation for human agents. I hope by now it is clear that the manners in which the three quintessentially Korean thinkers philosophized amply show that there is much to be learned from the Korean way of doing philosophy in the past. And this is our answer to Ham's question.

But can Korean philosophy be globalized? This is a new form of Nathaniel's question: Can anything philosophically good come from

[16] His actual term was the power of autonomy (自主之權), not "free will." For an exposition of Dasan's thought see, e.g., Baker (2002; 2010).

Korea today? Of course it all depends on the possibility of universal philosophy acceptable to any interested readers and practitioners. No philosophy was ever accepted by every human being everywhere out there. But there are philosophies interculturally acceptable. Hegel, Husserl, and Heidegger all thought that Asians lack universal reason but this point of view itself reflects a particularized point of view. The so-called universal reason is one defined from a Euro-centric perspective. What we need is not universal acceptance but the possibility of empathy in its broadest sense. This starts from understanding certain outlooks and nature in a direct way. Furthermore, this empathy does not have to be fixed once and for all. Things change naturally, and empathy, its content and form, can change as well.

Today Korean philosophy covers large areas, indeed all walks of philosophical life, and confronts issues that are germane to all aspects of human life and universe. Some are prominent, for example, environmental issues, the problem of the human self and consciousness, and the possibility of achievement of peace on the Korean Peninsula and globally as the country is divided into two: one south, one north. But there is no denying that explorations of important relevant concepts often find themselves derived from Confucian motives, e.g., emotions, carings, and lovings that make life in Korea what it is. So we may cautiously say that the main influence upon Korean philosophy is that of Neo-Confucianism. Various explorations of the nature of the human mind and of the self as well as emotions are guided by the basic assumptions in Confucianism. No matter how you try to characterize Korean philosophy, it is mostly heavily influenced by Confucianism, especially Neo-Confucianism. Buddhism predates Neo-Confucianism by almost 900 years in Korea, but the Joseon Neo-Confucianism has so heavily influenced Korea that it is still palpably perceived today. In this cultural and intellectual environment, no thinking could freely escape the long arms of Neo-Confucianism in Korea. Even the Christian-inspired thinking which has last arrived in Korea cannot escape from the influence of Confucianism. We may then say that the influence of Confucianism upon philosophical thinking in Korea has been greater than that of anything else, except perhaps for that of Buddhism.

It appears that these days people are excited about the possibility that recent developments in Korean philosophy might shed some light on some main problems in philosophy. To my knowledge, not much light has been shed; at least it has not been known worldwide. Nevertheless one can still hope. We also find some philosophers still under the influence of the prejudice that philosophy is properly concerned exclusively with clarity and perspicuity and that conceptual analysis is all that matters, and that for this analysis no knowledge of the particular traditions, e.g., Korean tradition, is necessary. As much as we need the developing scientific data and discoveries as well as truths, we also stand in firm need of the particularities of history and culture in properly doing Korean philosophy—indeed, any philosophy.

The German philosopher Jaspers once spoke of an exemplary age when ingenious philosophies emerged all over the world. We do not seem to live in such axial ages now. The philosophical scene today seems rather bleak. This is like the period between the Greek classical philosophy and the medieval Scholastic philosophy. Or between the pre-Han Classical period on the one hand and the rise of Chinse Buddhism during the Sui-Tang period. The great figures of the past—such as Confucius, Buddha, Mencius, Nagarjuna, Shankara, Zhu Xi, Wang Yangming, Kant, Hegel, Heidegger, Wittgenstein, Sartre, etc.,—do not seem to exert the same vital energy as before; their work has been more or less thought lightly and now is sometimes even brushed aside. But if you carefully think about the philosophical significance, their thought cannot be ignored nor replaced. A great deal of highly competent, and sometimes even interesting, work is being done both in Korea and elsewhere. But there are no dominant ideas or visions being introduced and developed at least at this point in history. We are still waiting for a Zarathustra—a new creative impulse that can revitalize philosophy.

It is also important to note concerning Korean philosophy that Koreans have always been enthusiastic about religion. Even the North Korean Marxist and thus atheist, anti-religious regime takes advantage of this Korean religious fervor.[17] The North Korean state is now more

[17] For this point, see Hannah H. Kim's "Juche in the Broader Context of Korean Philosophy" (forthcoming, *The Philosophical Forum*), which approaches North Korean *juche*

like a religious cult centering on its leaders than a political state. Nevertheless, because of this strong sentiment, we cautiously hope that the next large creative impulse in Korean philosophy might come from the direction of religion. Baek Seonguk (Paek Sŏng-uk, 1897–1981), Iryeop (Iryŏp, 1896–1971), Daseok (Tasŏk, 1890–1981), Ham Sok Hon (1900–1989), and many important Korean contemporary philosophers are just a few examples of philosophers with deep religious orientations. Not a few philosophers in Korea are now taking religion seriously in their personal lives. Of course, the vast majority of them may not be institutionally involved—they are not "religious but spiritual" to quote an often-overused phrase—but they acknowledge religious feeling or commitment. We may associate it with the concept of empathy as I pointed out above. Some of these thinkers, in time, are likely to systematize their religious sentiments and commitment and to bring a preoccupation with religious issues into academic philosophy. This is the case with metaphysics, but ethics is no exception. What fell within the province of religious thought could very well have important repercussions in ethics as well. We live in the Fourth Industrial Age and AI and all, but the meaning and value of ethical life will never tarnish. Human nature being what it is, Confucius' *Analects*, *Bhagavat Gita*, and Plato's *Republic* will never lose their importance in human civilization. For life is about the nature of virtue, the meaning of life, the ultimate purposes and ideals of life and universe, and so on.

Research in traditional Korean philosophy generally consists of reading and interpreting literature related to Korean philosophy. The investigation of Korean philosophy typically begins with learning how to read Korean alphabets, but it also includes literacy in classical Chinese—only then are you able to empathize with the thoughts of the traditional Korean philosophers. Students of philosophy in Korea have been focused mostly on how to best interpret the existing literature. So textual analysis has been an integral part of Korean philosophy. They have been attempting to extract and promote ideas in the works of Korean philosophy and it was important to decipher

philosophy academically, contextualizing it in light of broader views on the traits in Korean philosophy.

these interpretations and to come up with new understanding. Neither of these are facile, but such tasks become even more significant and engrossing if you develop your own ideas including your own way of reading the traditional works. Also traditional works are mostly treated in isolation from the general context of contemporary East Asian philosophy. However, Wonhyo did not think of himself as doing a uniquely Korean ("Silla [Shilla]") philosophy, or for that matter, Toegye, Yulgok, and Dasan did not view themselves as promoting a quintessentially Korean ("Joseon") form of thought. Their view was that truth is truth, and it can be captured when it is revealed, and communicated through systematic and conscientious effort. What provided this outlook was the general East Asian tradition. In this respect, Chinese philosophy traditionally has been a main inspiration. More recently Western philosophy has been a main influence. But we may want to be exposed to Japanese thinking, Vietnamese thinking and beyond, such as Africana philosophy, Native American philosophy, and Latin American philosophy as they are being explored and expanded more. We truly live in the earth village and live our life globally. Intercultural investigation is not an option but a necessity.

Korea today is where major different schools of thought of the world come to and interact. In this sense, it is a philosophical melting pot. As for Western philosophy, the influence of Kant, Hegel, and Marx among others has been prominent. More recently, Anglo-American analytic philosophy and French philosophy seem to exert influence on the students of philosophy. Political institutions have also been developed under the influence of their views both in South and North Korea. This suggests that Korea offers a fertile ground in which people can philosophize in many ways concerning human beings and the world around them. But it is not an abstract "cosmopolitanism" that can be only thought about, which is needed here, but one that can relate to the heart of the people and have an influence on the way people act, feel and think in a community in which they find themselves free and equal. Thus, Korean philosophy when properly developed can contribute to the age of globalization. It is said that all history is contemporary history. Any study of the past is necessarily informed by the consciousness and situation of the writer's own time;

the more conscious historians are of their contemporary motives, the more searching and accurate their investigations of the past (D'Amico 1999, 272). I think the same is true of philosophy. All philosophy is contemporary philosophy. Our study of Wonhyo, Jinul, Toegye, Yulgok, and Dasan, etc. is a form of contemporary philosophy, too. It is their philosophy seen through our eyes today. It follows that the Korean study of Kant, French philosophy, and Confucius, Mencius, and Zhu Xi are also Korean philosophy. Korean philosophy then is any philosophy seen, analyzed and interpreted by the Koreans, or by the scholars in Korean philosophy, indeed, by anybody remotely interested in Korean affairs.

I took up my professional teaching job in Korea several years ago after decades of teaching in the US, and I can assure the reader that philosophy in Korea is improving as fast as anywhere else in the world. I constantly hear good discussions of all kinds of philosophy both in classrooms and conferences, and read good papers in the local language. The only defect, or rather a desideratum, is the formidable barrier posed by English. Hardly any philosophy is discussed in Korea in the international language (i.e., English). Hardly any good work in Korean philosophy has been translated into English. Accordingly, not much is known about the status of Korean philosophy outside Korea. For this purpose, my colleagues and I helped establish the North American Korean Philosophical Association (NAKPA). We speak philosophy in the universal language (English) here, so everybody can come understand and exchange ideas freely and equally. Why North America? Because that is where many philosophers come willingly. NAKPA is affiliated with the American Philosophical Association as a sub-group. Korean philosophy is not American philosophy, and Korean philosophers are not American philosophers. But this maneuver has several merits. We hold our NAKPA panels during the American divisional meetings. People hardly ever come to Korea to discuss Korean philosophy on their own but they come to the US to its annual meetings from all over the world. We want to take advantage of Pax Americana Philosophia so to speak, even though we might have witnessed the beginning of its decline with the attack on the US Capitol in 2022. NAKPA was founded in 2014 in Baltimore, Maryland,

at the American Philosophical Association, Eastern Division Meetings. Professors based in the US have kindly agreed to the idea and since then we have been holding its annual meetings all over the world except of course during the pandemic. We pursue exchanges of new ideas and theories and engage in friendly discussion in all areas of philosophy. But if you examine the past programs of the meetings both at the annual meetings as well as the APA divisional meetings, Neo-Confucianism has been the dominant topic. It was followed only by Buddhism. We held our very first annual meetings in Omaha, Nebraska, at the University of Nebraska at Omaha in 2015 under the auspices of the Academy of Korean Studies. Hwa Yol Jung and Owen Flanagan were its keynote speakers. The second meeting took place in Toronto, Canada, where Graham Priest gave a keynote. The third meeting took place in Seoul, at Sungkyunkwan University. The fourth meeting was at University of San Francisco with its keynote speaker as P. J. Ivanhoe. The fifth meeting took place in Palo Alto at Stanford University with the keynote speaker from Korea, Jung In Kang. The sixth meeting took place in Cork, Ireland. The seventh meeting was originally planned for Sogang University, but it was postponed due to the pandemic. Then its seventh meeting took place in Omaha again both at University of Nebraska and Creighton University, Omaha. Its keynote speakers were Kim Heisook (on a Korean feminism theme) and Robert Buswell (on Jinul). The eighth meeting will take place in Daegu, at Kyungpook National University in November 2023, with Edward Chung as its keynote.

As the meetings took place, we began to see anthologies emerge on Korean philosophy. P. J. Ivanhoe and Hwa Yeong Wang recently edited and published *Korean Women Philosophers and the Ideals of a Female Sage* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2023). Their anthology on Korean Confucianism is forthcoming. Jin Y. Park and Sumi Lee are in preparation for an anthology on Korean Buddhism. What we need is a single-volume anthology on Korean philosophy. Also junior members of NAKPA began taking tenure track positions around the world including University of Colorado-Denver, University of Arizona, Leiden University, Duke Kunshan University, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaigne as well as universities in Korea *inter alia*.

In the context of generating discussions on Korean philosophy across different countries, Romanization will play an important role. There is no expectation that all students of Korean philosophy will master the difficult language of Korean. We often see Korean authors Romanize their terms arbitrarily, which is likely to cause confusion among readers who cannot expect to know Korean nor even its alphabet. As for Romanization, more and more authors are beginning to rely on the Revised Romanization (RR) as opposed to McCune Reischauer (MR), which has been popular among professional scholars but not exclusively.[18]

Finally, there is a strong need to unify various efforts to publish different presentations and articles on Korean philosophical themes in an international language. Korean philosophers see their efforts rewarded when their articles are published in Korean philosophical journals and anthologies, but an English-language journal devoted only to Korean philosophy is well worth the effort. There is a growing body of scholars who are able to submit articles in English and engage in peer reviews.[19]

[18] For Korean Romanization, see the Wikipedia entry "Romanization of Korean." For an automatic conversion, one should visit: http://roman.cs.pusan.ac.kr/input_eng.aspx

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