BOOK 3. The investigation of things[論格致]

[3.1] One day, during his stay at the Hanseoam(寒栖菴)1), the master was talking about the Bazhentu(八陣圖) by Zhuge Liang(諸葛亮).2) Then he took out the book with diagrams and related texts, and showed it to the people by saying, “Reading this book is another way of investigating the Li. It is worthwhile to explore the book in leisure time.”

- Mun Wi-se(文緯世)3)

在溪舍時, 一日, 先生語及諸葛孔明八陣圖, 仍出示其圖說, 使傳寫別本, 曰“此亦格致工夫一端, 讀書之暇, 可以留意究觀也.”[文緯世]

[3.2] On the day of the winter solstice, Gim Chwi-ryeo4) asked, “Today is the day where Yang first moves and Heaven and Earth produce and give life to creatures. I wonder whether the roots of all the vegetation move to sprout from this day onwards.”

The master answered, “Being broken and afflicted by the wind and the frost, branches are thin and show no vitality. Still, the Li to sprout has already moved today.”

-Gim Seong-il(金誠一)5)

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1) [TN: Translator’s note] Toegye Yi Hwang built this house at the age of 50 and He devoted himself to reading and research there. The house was also called Gyesa(溪舍).
2) [TN] Zhuge Liang(諸葛亮, 181-234). His courtesy name(字) is Kongming(孔明). He was the prime minister of the Shu Han Dynasty during the Three Kingdoms period.
3) [TN] Mun Wise(李堣, 1534~1600). His courtesy name(字) is Sukjang(叔章) and Pungam(楓庵) is his pen name(號).
4) [TN] Gim Chwi-ryeo(金就礪, 1172-1234). His courtesy name(字) is Jjeong(而精), and his pen name(號) is Jamjae(潛齋)
Gim Chwi-ryeo asked again, “Even the trifle grasses get vitality to sprout caused by the return of Yang. Then why there seems no vitality in humans who are the lord of all creation?”

The master answered. “Being affected by Qi, humans do not seem to be commensurate with changes in nature. But Li of stimulus-response and increase-decrease does move with Heaven and Earth. Therefore, the ancient wise kings made a law to close all the gates and take care of themselves on the day of the summer or winter solstice. By doing this, they tried to cut Yin force in advance and thus prevent any bad circumstances, so it is not right that there is no vitality in humans alone. Furthermore, every moment where the ‘four beginnings’ sprout inside of you can be considered as the day of return of Yang. However, people simply failed to achieve the goal of growing good sprouts because of their own greed. There sprouts one tiny seed inside you and then greed from everywhere suddenly appears and attacks the seed, which leads you to fail to be in harmony with heaven and earth. So lamentable!”

The master evaluated virtues of his disciples by letting them play the ‘arrow throwing(投壺).’ He also let Yi Deok-hong build an ‘armillary sphere(渾天儀)’ and observed the shape of the universe with it.

-Yi Deok-hong(李德弘)
先生使諸生投壺，以觀其德。令德弘，造瑜璽玉衡，以察天象。[李德弘]

[3.5] When Gim Ryung asked the meaning of “The Five Agents are the one Yin and Yang; Yin and Yang are Taiji” from Chou Tun-i’s Explanation of the Diagram of Taiji, the master answered, “The meaning of that sentence is that Yin and Yang produces the five agents and Taiji produces Yin and Yang. It does not mean that Yin and Yang are Taiji itself.”

- Gim Ryung(金隆)

問“太極圖說，五行一陰陽，陰陽一太極。”先生曰“言五行卽陰陽之所為，陰陽乃太極之所為也，非謂陰陽卽一太極也。”[金隆]

[3.6] Gim Ryung asked, “Why did Zhu Xi put the circles of Taiji, Yin and Yang, the Five Elements on those of Heaven and Earth, the sun and the moon in the Taijitujie(太極圖解)?” The master answered, “Once the ultimate standard for man is established, it goes well with Heaven and Earth, the sun and moon, the four seasons and the spirits.”

- Gim Ryung(金隆)

問“圖解天地日月之上，又加太極楊動陰靜五行之圈者，何耶?”曰“人極立，則太極陰陽五行及天地日月四時鬼神不能違也。”[金隆]

[3.7] When Gim Ryung asked the meaning of chongqi(冲气) from the Taijitujie(太極圖解), the master answered, “Chong(冲) is in the same sense as 中(zhong). Qi of Earth does not tilt to Yin or Yang, and stands on a fair and neutral position.”

- Gim Ryung(金隆)

問“圖解沖氣之說。”曰“沖，中義同。土之氣，不偏於陰，不偏於陽。其氣中也，故居中。”[金隆]

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6) [TN] Yi Deok-hong(李德弘, 1541-1596). His courtesy name is Goengjung(宏仲) and his pen name is Ganjae(艮齋).
7) [TN] For translation, see Michael C. Kalton, To become a sage: the Ten diagrams on sage learning, New York: Columbia University Press, c1988, 68.
8) [TN] Gim Ryung(金隆, 1525-1594). His courtesy name(字) is Doseong(道盛), and his pen name(號) is Muram(勿巖).
Gim Ryung asked, “How can we recognize the difference between essence and fringe, fine and coarse?” The master answered, “In principle, essence and fine belong to Taiji whereas fringe and coarse belong to Yin and Yang. However, we must understand every creature in consideration of various conditions. Since Taiji produces essence and fringe, fine and coarse, we need not tell which one is better or not.”

- Gim Ryung (金隆)

Gim Ryung asked, “Yin and Yang and the Five Elements are the raw material for making all things. I wonder whether good season or bad season affects them when they unite and consolidate.” The master answered, “You cannot tell by good season or bad season. When Taiji produces all creatures, some Qi are clear and others are murky; some pure, others mixed. Think about flowers. Some flowers bloom early and others late; some of them are large, but others small. Some flowers are beautiful, but others are not that pretty. We can say the same thing about Qi. If you fully understand the fact that humans receive Qi in their highest excellence, then you will be able to accept their differences. Have you not read Funiaofu (鵩鳥賦) which reads, ‘Heaven and earth are the furnace, the workman, the Creator; His coal is the yin and the yang, His copper, all things of creation?’ I value these words very highly.”

- Gim Ryung (金隆)

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9) [TN] They are all good from the viewpoint of Taiji.
[3.10] Gim Ryung asked, “In the Taijitujie(太極圖解), there is an explanatory note by Huang Gan11) which explains Taiji by saying that it is the collection of all principles and origin of all phenomena. But I have a doubt that whether Taiji from ‘Every creature has its own Taiji’ is the same thing as the above-mentioned one. I think that human nature can be the collection of all principles. But each creature owns only the principles that fit it among all principles. How can we say that creatures other than humans have all principles?”

The master answered, “On the surface, it seems not reasonable that nature of each creature owns all principles. However, if they are endowed with principles of Taiji, then why we cannot say that each creature owns all principles? It seems impossible that Taiji takes off certain principles from the collection of all principles and assigns different principles depending on the characteristics of various creatures. The moonlight shines on both large seas and small vessels. You cannot say that the moon in a bowl of water is not a perfect moon because the amount of water in the bowl is small.”

- Gim Ryung(金隆)

[3.11] Yi Guk-pil said, “One day, I was reading the Daxue and reached Chapter 5 which reads, ‘The learner, in regard to all things in the world, has to proceed from what knowledge he has of their principles, and pursue his investigation of them, till he reaches the extreme point.’12) And I thought that I learned something. ‘Pursuing my investigation’ is the path that I have to seek my

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11) Huang Gan(黃幹, 1152-1221) was an official and neo-Confucian scholar of the Song Dynasty. He was a son-in-law of Zhu Xi(朱熹) and one of the most important disciples of Zhu Xi. He compiled the Obituary for Zhu Xi.

whole life.”

The master answered, “Pursuing your investigation of truths based on what you have already learned is a good thing. However, you also have to pursue to practice truths based on what you already have achieved. If you try to be good at both, the difficulty of your study will gradually dissipate.”

- Yi Guk-pil(李國弼)

問“讀大學，至格物章，因其已知而益窮之，以求至乎其極，似有得焉。益窮二字是小子平生門路也。”先生曰“以因其已知而益窮之為平生門路，甚善。然不獨以知為然，其於行也，亦當因其已行而益勉之。二者並進，其門路漸可通達，而無礙矣。” [李國弼]

13) Yi Guk-pil(李國弼, 1540-?). His courtesy name(字) is Bieon(棐彦).