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Review

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BOOK REVIEWS

The Four-Seven Debate: An Annotated Translation of the Most Famous Controversy in Korean Neo-Confucian Thought. By Michael C. Kalton, with Oaksook C. Kim, Sung Bae Park, Young-chan Ro, Tu Wei-ming, and Samuel Yamashita. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994. Pp. xxxv + 217.

The Four-Seven Debate: An Annotated Translation of the Most Famous Controversy in Korean Neo-Confucian Thought is an important contribution to the scholarship and literature on Chinese and Korean Neo-Confucianism. The translation is precise and done with great attention to the conceptual implications of the key terminology. The discussion in the introduction gives the reader a strong sense of both the historical background and the philosophical content of the debate. Professor Kalton has also included helpful explanatory comments, footnotes, and a glossary of terms in both their Chinese and Korean transliterations. Aside from the fact that this important philosophical document has now been made available to a wider audience, and beyond the quality of the translation and its explanatory apparatus, this volume makes a most valuable contribution to understanding what is perhaps the single most important philosophical issue of the Neo-Confucian tradition: the conflict between "monistic" and "dualistic" conceptions of the good nature and the mind-heart.

In contrast to most writing on this topic, Kalton makes two crucial points: (1) that the issues of the debate are rooted in a fundamental "tension" within Chu Hsi's (1130–1200) so-called "synthesis," an idea that challenges what is usually seen as the smooth and unproblematic nature of this "synthesis," and (2) that the debate was between two different forms of dualism, not between dualists on the one hand and monists on the other. In short, this work offers a new way to conceptualize the contours of Ch'eng-Chu Neo-Confucian philosophical thinking.

Typically, monism and dualism are distinguished chiefly by the way in which the good impulses of the moral "nature" (*hsing*)—both monists and dualists posit the existence of a morally good nature—are expressed. The monist argues that the good nature is the agent of its own expression—that is, that it can actively respond to a particular situation or thing—because the human self has no other source of moral behavior; in contrast, the dualist is said to deactivate the good nature and argue that while the impulses of the nature are good they (along with nature itself) do not have the capacity for activation in response to a thing or event. Hence, the dualist must point to the "mind-heart" (*hsin*), which is

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ch'i in its being, in contrast to the good nature, which is *Li* in its being, as that which carries the impulses of the good nature to the point of their concrete expression.

While it is appropriate to suggest that the dualist posits an inactive moral nature, a close examination of Chu Hsi's writings, about which most scholarship on the issue of monism and dualism is devoted, shows that Chu not only articulated both kinds of theories late in his life but also occasionally articulated a form of dualism that posited an active and self-expressing moral nature. That does not mean that Chu was consistent in this regard, for there is an abundance of evidence that supports the traditional portrait of Chu's as an inactive nature or, as Ts'ao Tuan (1376–1434) put it, a "dead *Li*."

It is precisely this inconsistency in Chu's thinking that provided the parameters of the debate in sixteenth-century Korea. For the two correspondences that make up the Four-Seven Debate, the first between Yi T'oegye (Yi Hwang, 1501–1570) and Ki Taesŭng (Kobong, 1527–1572) and the second between Ugye (Sŏng Hon, 1535–1598) and Yi Yulgok (Yi I, 1536–1584), were between proponents of a form of dualism that recognized *Li* and *ch'i* as two "functional [I would prefer functioning] realities" and proponents of one which saw only *ch'i* as a functioning reality. A close look at Yi T'oegye's insistence that the four and seven "emerge in conjunction with each other" (Chin: *hu-fa*; Kor: *hobal*) reveals that this is a form of dualism, much like Chu Hsi's conception of the "Mind-Heart of the Way" (*tao-hsin*) and the "mind-heart of man" (*jen-hsin*) "proceeding in parallel" (*ping-hsing*), that sees both the good nature and *ch'i* as functioning realities. Chu used the term "proceeding in parallel" most consistently in his letters to Ch'en Liang (1143–1194) in the mid-1180s and incorporated this argument into his 1189 "Preface to the Sentences and Paragraphs of the Doctrine of the Mean" (*Chung-yung chang-chü hsü*).

In contrast, much like the theory Chu articulated in documents such as "The Explanation of the Observing Mind-Heart" (*Kuan-hsin shuo*), Kobong and Yulgok, while recognizing the ontological difference between the good nature/*Li* and the mind-heart/*ch'i*, insisted that the good nature is inactive and requires the mind to carry its good impulses to expression. Hence, while both sides would assert the ontological distinction between *Li* and *ch'i*, they would draw different conclusions from this premise, and the differences reveal the possibility of an active nature/*Li* in a dualistic philosophical setting and the possibility that there can be more than one form of dualistic Neo-Confucian thinking.

These points can be argued rigorously and to a wider audience now with the help of Professor Kalton and his collaborators in this excellent translation.