

Articles

The Joseon Confucians' Response to Zhu Xi's "Treatise on Humanity"*

Chun-chieh Huang 黃俊傑**
Translated by Jan Vrhovski***

1. Introduction

In 1173, the great Neo-Confucian synthesizer Zhu Xi (朱熹, Hui-an, 1130-1200) composed an article entitled "Treatise on Humanity," in which he expounded on the most important core-value in the Confucian philosophical tradition, "humanity" (*ren* 仁).¹ Zhu Xi's monumental treatise caused an enormous response among Korean and Tokugawa Japanese Confucian scholars, thereby exercising tremendous impact upon the Confucian philosophy developed in Korea and Japan from the 13th century onward. Having completed our analysis of the Tokugawa Japanese Confucians' interpretation of Zhu Xi's "Treatise on Humanity,"² in this article we will proceed discussing how Korean Confucians read and re-interpreted Zhu Xi's theory of humanity during the Joseon period (朝鮮, 1392-1910). The texts in which Joseon Confucians expound on Zhu Xi's theory of humanity are extremely numerous. Therefore, in order to be able to effectively grasp the Joseon Confucians' problematiques, I first intend to point out the 5 relatively important key-propositions of Zhu Xi's "Treatise on Humanity." These are as follows:

* Translation from the Chinese original: Huang Chun-chieh, *Dongya Rujia Renxue Shilun* 東亞儒家仁學史論 (Taipei: National Taiwan University Press, 2017), chapter 7, pp. 331-348.

** Huang Chun-chieh [Huang Junjie 黃俊傑] is Distinguished Chair Professor of National Taiwan University and a member of Academia Europaea.

*** Jan Vrhovski is currently working as an independent researcher in intellectual history of modern China.

1 Zhu Xi, "Ren shou 仁說 [Treatise on Humanity]," in his Zhu Xi, *Zhuzi Quan Shu* 朱子全書 [Complete Work of Zhuzi] (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanzhe; Hefei: Anhui jiaoyu chubanshe, 2002), BK. 23, pp. 3279-3281.

2 Chun-chieh Huang, "Discourse on Humanity in East Asian Confucianisms: Zhu Xi's "Treatise on Humanity" and its Reverberations in Tokugawa Japan," in *Journal of Cultural Interaction in East Asia*, vol. 10 (March, 2019), pp. 13-41.

- 1.) The mind of heaven and earth gives birth to the myriad things. (天地以生物為心者也)
- 2.) Humanity or *ren* is called the principle of love. (以愛之理而名仁)
- 3.) “The unity of the myriad things and one’s self” is the substance of humanity. (以“萬物與我為一”為仁之體)
- 4.) The term *ren* is explained as “the consciousness of mind.” (以“心有知覺”釋仁之名)

In addition, because the theoretical framework of the “Treatise on Humanity” comes from Cheng Yi (程頤, Yichuan 伊川, 1033-1107), when the Korean Confucians responded to Zhu Xi’s treatise, they often also integrated Cheng Yi’s doctrine into the discussion. Consequently, we can also add the following key-expression used by Zhu Xi, which originated in the work of Cheng Yi:

- 5.) The common good (*gong* 公, ‘commonality’) is the principle of humanity. (公即仁之理)

The first among these five key-propositions, which says that “the mind of heaven and earth gives birth to things” and constitutes the first sentence of Zhu Xi’s “Treatise on Humanity,” is a citation from Cheng Hao (程顥, Mingdao 明道, 1032-1085).³ The subsequent key-expression is the core proposition of the “Treatise on Humanity,” which defines *ren* as the “principle of what makes love what it is,”⁴ thus turning the notion of *li* 理 into “the existence of love’s existence.”⁵ The third key-expression comes from Zhu Xi’s response to an assertion given by Cheng Mingdao in his “On Understanding *Ren*” (*Shi ren* 識仁), namely that “humanity is completely of the same substance as things.”⁶ The fourth key-expression appears in the part of the

3 See *Henan Chengshi yishu* 河南程氏遺書 [*Posthumous Writings of the Cheng Brothers from Henan*], Vol. 3, in Cheng Hao 程顥 and Cheng Yi 程頤, Wang Xiaoyu 王孝魚 ed. *Ercheng ji* 二程集 [*Collection of the Works of the Cheng Brothers*](Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981/2004), Vol. 1, p. 336. Following Ming dynasty scholar Shen Gui (沈桂), Wing-tsit Chan believed that this formulation was taken from Cheng Mingdao. See Wing-tsit Chan 陳榮捷, *Zhongguo zhexue wenxian xuanbian* 中國哲學文獻選編 [*A Sourcebook in Chinese Philosophy*](Taipei: Juliu tushu gongsi, 1993), Vol. 2, p. 766.

4 This is Mou Zongsan’s definition. See Mou Zongsan 牟宗三, *Xinti yu xingti* 心體與性體 [*The Substance of Mind and the Substance of Innate Nature*](Taipei: Zhengzhong shuju, 1969/1971), Book 3, p. 244.

5 Ibid.

6 See *Henan Chengshi yishu*, Vol. 2 (I), in *Ercheng ji*, Vol. 1, p. 16. Qian Mu interpreted this sentence in the following way: “Heaven and earth and the myriad things are all completely fused into this absolute body of humanity.” See Qian Mu 錢穆,

"Treatise on Humanity" where Zhu Xi refutes Xie Liangzuo's (謝良佐, courtesy name Xiandao 顯道, popularly called Master Shangcai 上蔡先生, 1050-1103) teaching that "the consciousness of mind is called humanity."⁷ The fifth key-proposition is taken from Yichuan's saying that: "Essentially, to describe the way of humanity one only needs a single word: 'common good' (*gong* 公, 'commonality'). The common good is only the principle of humanity, and one cannot simply refer to humanity as the common good. Rather, the common good is humanity, because it is embodied by the people."⁸

In different Korean Confucian treatises on humanity the five key-notions of Zhu Xi's treatise were presented to an unequal extent. We will discuss this fact in the remainder of this article, together with the theoretical relations between the above-listed five key-propositions. Instead of delving into unnecessarily detailed enumeration of all the particular views expressed by Joseon Confucians, the present discussion will focus only on a certain number of those treatises, which can be deemed most representative.

2. "Humanity is the Principle of Love": Kim Nakhaeng's Interpretation

Among the above-listed five key-propositions of Zhu Xi's discourse on *ren*, those most debated about and explicated upon by Korean Confucians were the following three: (1) "humanity is called the principle of love," (2) "the term *ren* is explained as 'the consciousness of mind'" and (3) "the common good (*gong* 公, 'commonality') is the principle of humanity." We will begin our investigation with the first of the above-listed key-expressions.

Zhu Xi's interpretation of humanity as "the principle of love" was an extremely original feature of his philosophy, which endowed an ethical theory of humanity with ontological fundamentals, and thus considerably elevated the degree of value of human life. This very dimension of Zhu Xi's philosophy enabled the Song dynasty Confucians to attain new heights in their effort, which Qian Mu (錢穆, Binsi 賓四, 1895-1990) called "the search to understand the greater self."⁹ Mou Zongsan (牟宗三, 1905-1995) said that in Zhu Xi's theory, the notion of humanity was transformed into "the principle of what

Zhongguo sixiang shi 中國思想史 [A History of Chinese Thought], in *Qian Binsi xiansheng quanji* 錢賓四先生全集 [The Complete Works of Mr. Qian Binsi](Taipei: Lianjing chuban gongsi, 1994-1998), Vol. 24, p. 180.

7 See Huang Zongxi 黃宗羲 et al., *Song Yuan xuean* 宋元學案 [Song-Yuan Case Studies], in Shen Shan hong 沈善洪 ed., *Huang Zongxi quanji* 黃宗羲全集 [Collected Writings of Huang Zongxi](Hangzhou: Zhejiang guji chubanshe, 1985), Vol. 4, p. 693.

8 Cheng Yi 程頤, "Yichuan xiansheng yu yi 伊川先生語一 [Sayings of Master Yichuan – Part 1]," in *Ercheng ji*, Vol. 1, p. 153.

9 Qian Mu, *Guoxue gailun* 國學概論 [An Introduction to Chinese Studies], in *Qian Binsi xiansheng quanji*, Vol. 1, p. 278.

makes love what it is”¹⁰ or the “existence of love’s existence.”¹¹ This proposition of Zhu Xi’s also received some further elucidation in a treatise written by 18th century Korean Confucian Kim Nakhaeng (金樂行, courtesy name Ganbu 艮夫, sobriquet Gusadang 九思堂, 1708-1766).

Kim Nakhaeng first expounds on the implications of Zhu Xi’s statement “humanity is called the principle of love” as follows:¹²

I humbly say that the principle of love (*ai zhi zhi li* 愛之之理) is this mind of heaven and earth that gives birth to things, and also what each human is endowed with to become human. Since its body is the same as that of heaven and earth, the position it occupies must certainly be very vast and extensive. But this vast and extensive space is entirely located inside the principle of love and does not rely on anything apart from it. In one of his letters written in reply [to Zhang Qinfu], Zhu Xi wrote: “If one says that humanity is a way embodied in everything and that it is not rooted in the mind of heaven and earth, which gives birth to things, then this is only knowing that humanity is embodied in everything and not knowing the reason why it is embodied in everything.” He also said: “The state when the one *yang* returns occurs when the mind of heaven and earth is completely self-sufficient, not depending on anything outside of it. That being the case, why must the myriad things of heaven and earth be the manifestation of this principle?” What is indicated here is not the selfish matter of oneself—that much is definitely true. As far as I can see, if what we call love is not meant to designate self-love, but rather the principle of loving other people and other living beings, how could it then possibly be a matter completely centered on oneself? If one assumes that this principle is commonly followed by humans and living beings, then one must also admit that this is true indeed. But this is so said after one was able to observe this principle. However, if in the present moment one discusses this principle, one is quickly lead to an exposition of what is commonly possessed by humans and other living beings. Do we in that way analyze everything [necessary]? Now, assuming that it is inherently present in every human, this principle is already completed on its own, so that one does not have to further

10 Mou Zongsan, *Xinti yu xingti*, Vol. 3, p. 244.

11 Ibid.

12 Kim Nakhaeng 金樂行, “Dab Yi Gyongmun 答李景文 [An Answer to Yi Gyeongmun],” see *Gusadang jib* 九思堂集 [An Anthology of the Works of Gusadang], Vol. 4, in Minjog munhwa chujinhoe 民族文化推進會 ed., *Yeongin pyojeom hangug munjib chonggan* 影印標點韓國文集叢刊 (Seoul: Gyeongin munhwasa, 1999/2001), Vol. 222, p. 347.

discuss any matter related to other people. I assume that this was also the reason why Zhu Xi maintained that Nan Xuan's (Zhang Shi's) doctrine on what is shared by all humans and other beings was not fully resolved. However, if after we consider this principle, we further develop it and observe, then people and other beings are all the same way, and it is not solely possessed by me.

Kim Nakhaeng stressed that "what we call love is not meant to designate self-love, but rather the principle of loving other people and other living beings," which is completely identical with the reasoning in Zhu Xi's teaching, where humanity is the principle of what makes love what it is. Kim further also explained the meaning of Zhu Xi's notion of the "principle of love," saying:¹³

Zhu Xi's letter says: "Humanity is the principle of love. Without heaven, earth and the myriad things, this principle would also be deficient." Someone who reads this might think that if heaven, earth and the myriad things did not exist, then how could this principle of love also be deficient? Now, it is from the learning of the Cheng [brothers] that there exists the doctrine that humanity [unifies] heaven, earth and the myriad things into one single body. Because all those who have spoken about humanity since then have maintained wrong views on it, they have regarded this as the definition of the term *ren*. In fact, Nan Xuan's doctrine also contains this meaning. Consequently, Zhu Xi refutes it with this exposition. Now, as I see it, humanity is the principle of love. If we look upon it in this way, then the substance (body) of humanity is exhaustible (comes to an end). What unifies heaven, earth and the myriad things into one single body is then speaking about the mind of humanity, which is fair, impartial and omnipresent. Humanity is not named in that way, though. In its discussion of this idea, the "Treatise on Humanity" is very clear. If we examine this letter from top to bottom, when it says that "humanity is the principle of love," it means that [to attain humanity] one does not have to rely on any other pursuits, but that humanity is only the principle of love. When it says that "the principle was originally very concise (*yue* 約), but today it is expounded on and mixed up together with heaven and earth, and the myriad things, which rather confuse the understanding of it," this means that the principle of

13 Kim Nakhaeng, "Juseo aejjili byeonsi inbyeon 朱書愛之之理便是仁辨 [A Discussion on Zhu Xi's Doctrine of Humanity as the Principle of Love]," *Gusadang jib*, Vol. 3, pp. 488a-489b.

love, that is humanity, is very concise. To maintain that humanity makes one single body out of heaven and earth and the myriad things, is rather a mixture creating a confusion [out of everything]. The letter also says that “when Confucius answered questions on extensively benefiting and assisting the masses, the idea he intended to express was also along these lines.” As I see it, this says that Zi Gong’s pursuit of humanity by means of widely benefiting and aiding the masses, is to search for the substance of humanity through the merit and function of humanity. That is why Confucius explained the substance of humanity by saying that “when [the humane person] wishes to be established himself, he establishes other people; when he wishes to attain something, he makes other people succeed. To be able to take as an analogy what is near can be called the method of humanity.” I suppose that the doctrine to widely benefit and aid the masses has exactly the same cause as the doctrine that heaven and earth and the myriad things form one single body. When it says that “if in *returning* (*fu* 復, ‘the cycle of life and death’) we recognize the mind of heaven and earth as the one *yang* moving through [the cycle of] stages, the mind of heaven and earth is completely self-sufficient, and does not depend on anything else outside of it,” this means that the one *yang* moving through its stages is the mind of heaven and earth that we call “humanity.” When there is no dependency on anything beyond it, after that we see the mind of heaven and earth. The four characters “愛之之理” (“the principle of love”) speak about humanity which is already self-sufficient and does not depend on heaven and earth and the myriad things. It is in this that [its meaning] becomes evident.

When in the above excerpt Kim says that “the four characters ‘愛之之理’ (‘the principle of love’) speak about humanity which is already self-sufficient and does not depend on heaven and earth and the myriad things,” it is as if he were saying that the aseity of “the principle of love” can exist only if it does not depend on all existing things. In other words, Kim Nakhaeng advocated that the “principle of love”—in Zhu Xi’s words, “humanity is the principle of love”—belongs to the noumenal domain, and does not constitute a part of the phenomenal world. This kind of interpretation corresponds entirely to Zhu Xi’s discourse on humanity. In his conversation with Yi Gyeongmun (“Ui yeo Yi Gyeongmun (byeongsul)” 擬與李景文) (1766) Kim said: “What is here called the principle is the principle of love. The principle of love is a principle which exists fundamentally in itself (*ziran benyou* 自然本有, “existing fundamentally in nature”). It does not exist only after the existence of the consubstantiality (*tongti* 同體) of heaven and earth and the myriad things. This is Zhu Xi’s doctrine. That this principle then does not depend on the

consubstantiality with other beings, and is thus by itself fundamentally given, is evident. The fact that it exists fundamentally in itself does not result in any deficits if it is the case that it does not depend on heaven and earth and the myriad things, thus being completely self-sufficient. That much can be clearly seen."¹⁴ This paragraph can confirm that Kim Nakhaeng truly understood the fact that in Zhu Xi's teaching on humanity "the principle" (*li* 理) possesses the characteristic of aseity.

The words "The principle of love is a principle which exists fundamentally in itself," which Kim Nakhaeng quoted in the above text, were taken from Zhu Xi's "Reply to Zhang Qinfu: On the Treatise on Humanity Again 15" ("Da Zhang Qinfu you lun renshuo shiwu" 答張欽夫又論仁說十五), which reads:¹⁵

In your letter you say: "The cause of why it forms one single body with heaven and earth and the myriad things, is possessed by this mind of heaven and earth. This [mind] is then the repository of generation and regeneration, common to people and all things. It is what is called the principle of love." Now, if I closely inspect these few sentences, it appears that they are rather unresolved. Now, suppose we assume that humanity is solely the principle of love, which exists in all humans. Then, if a person happens not to be impartial (*gong* 公, 'work for the common good'), this resides in the fact that contrary to harboring love as he should, there is something he does not love. It is then only in the common good (公) that one witnesses heaven and earth and the myriad things all together comprising one single body, where nothing is without love. Therefore, if the principle of love is a principle which exists fundamentally in itself, then it does not necessarily [start] existing only after the consubstantiality of heaven and earth and the myriad things. (...)

Considering Zhu Xi's ideas, the "principle of love" which is the "principle which exists fundamentally in itself" precedes heaven, earth and the myriad things and is as such in possession of its aseity. In his "Reply to Hu Guangzhong 5" ("Da Hu Guangzhong wu" 答胡廣仲五) Zhu Xi also

14 Kim Nakhaeng, "Ui yeo Yi Gyeongmun (byeongsul) 擬與李景文丙戌," in *Gusadang jib*, Vol. 4, p. 350.

15 Zhu Xi, "Wang Zhang Lü Liu wenda er - Da Zhang Qinfu you lun renshuo shiwu 汪張呂劉問答二-答張欽夫又論仁說十五 [Conversations with Wang, Zhang, Lü and Liu 2 - Reply to Zhang Qinfu: On the Treatise on Humanity Again 15]," in Chen Junmin 陳俊民 ed., *Zhuzi wenji* 朱子文集 [Collected Writings of Zhu Xi](Taipei: Caituan faren defu wenjiao jijinhui, 2000), Vol. 32, p. 1267.

remarked:¹⁶

One definitely cannot refer to humanity with the name love, yet the principle of love designates the so-called substance (body) of humanity. Forming one body with heaven, earth and the myriad things, must undoubtedly be the reason why I would love everything, yet still the principle of love would exist regardless of that. It needs to be known that the four terms “humanity, righteousness, ritual propriety and wisdom” all generally refer to virtues of one’s inherent nature (*xing* 性). Thus, the principle which exists fundamentally in what is natural (*tianran* 天然) is like that without having been made thus. *Ren*, however, is the principle of love, it is the way of generation (*sheng* 生, ‘becoming’), and consequently, even if it is like that, it can still embrace the above four virtues. This is the reason why humanity is such an essential component in learning.

In the two texts quoted above, Zhu Xi asserts that “the principle of love” is “a principle which fundamentally exists in itself”, “a principle which exists fundamentally in what is natural (*tianran* 天然) is like that without having been made thus.” This is also exactly what the Korean Confucian Kim Nakhaeng had in mind when he spoke about Zhu Xi’s doctrine on humanity.

It is quite probable that Kim Nakhaeng’s exposition on humanity conceals two further questions, which can be set in relation to the above-discussed content, namely: (1) If the “principle of love” is “a principle which exists fundamentally in itself,” then how is it possible that “what is so in itself” (*ziran* 自然, ‘natural’) is transformed into “what is necessary” (*biran* 必然, ‘inevitable’). This is also to say: how can the “principle of love” which is “the existence of love’s existence” (in the words of Mou Zongsan) be transformed into a mere fact of “love”? (2) If the statement that “the principle of love” equals “a principle which exists fundamentally in itself,” which represents the ontological basis of humanity, and is “like that without having been made thus”; then does Zhu Xi’s discourse on *ren* not to some extent contradict his philosophical standpoint in the “Supplement to the Investigating Things Section of the *Great Learning*” (“Daxue gewu buchuan” 大學格物補傳), which speaks about “investigating the principles of all things we come into contact with” (*jiwu qiongli* 即物窮理)? Kim, however, did not ponder these two questions at all.

16 Zhu Xi, “Zhi jiu menren wenda – da Hu Guangzhong wu 知舊門人問答·答胡廣仲五 [Conversations with Old Friend and Disciples – An Answer to Hu Guangzhong 5],” in *Zhuzi wenji*, Vol.42, p.1813.

3. "The Term *Ren* is Explained as 'The Consciousness of Mind': Yang Eungsu's and Yi Sangjeong's Interpretation

In the final paragraph of the "Treatise on Humanity," Zhu Xi responds to the theory proposed by the great disciple of the Cheng school of thought, Xie Liangzuo, namely that "the term *ren* is explained as 'the consciousness of mind' (*xin you zhijue* 心有知覺)." Zhu Xi says: "From what the other calls 'the consciousness of the mind,' we can see that humanity embraces wisdom, yet it is not the reality after which *ren* has obtained its name."¹⁷ Korean Confucians have also devoted quite a good deal of their discussions to the theory that humanity should be interpreted as "the consciousness of mind." Among those Korean Confucian scholars who have most discussed the above-mentioned interpretation, the 18th century scholars Yang Eungsu (楊應秀, courtesy name Gyedal 季達, sobriquet Baegsu 白水, 1700-1767) and Yi Sangjeong (李象靖, courtesy name Gyeongmun 景文, sobriquet Daesan 大山, posthumous name Mungyeong 文敬, 1711-1781) can be taken as representative. In his essays entitled "Treatise on Two Generative Forces" ("Igiseol" 二氣說) and "A Dispute on Consciousness" ("Jigag seolbyeon" 知覺說辨), Yang Eungsu proposed that in the human "mind" (*xin* 心) "the principle" coexists with "consciousness." Yi Sangjeong, on the other hand, was a Namin (南人) scholar, who used to travel together with Kim Nakhaeng and other scholars. His opus encompassed books such as "Yagjung pyeonje" (約中編制) and "Sachil seol" (四七說). Yi Sangjeong deduced how in the "Treatise on Humanity" Zhu Xi obtained the conclusion that "humanity embraces wisdom" setting out from "the consciousness of mind," noting that:¹⁸

Nonetheless, in the past someone asked Zhu Xi [the following question]: "Consciousness (知覺) is the supreme efficaciousness (*ling* 靈, 'intelligence') of the mind; this definitely is so. Or, is it the case that it is manifested by the generative (material) forces (*qi* 氣)?" [Zhu Xi] said: "It is not entirely caused by the generative forces, for before them there [already] exists the principle of consciousness. Yet, the principle is not yet consciousness; it takes shape [only when] the creative forces have aggregated. Consciousness is possible only when the principle and the generative forces are joined together. For instance: this lamp, it [burns] with a much brighter flame only because it received this oil." He further

17 Zhu Xi, "Ren shuo 仁說 [Treatise on Humanity]," in *Zhuzi wenji*, Vol. 55, p. 3392.

18 Yi Sangjeong 李象靖, "Dab Jo Seongso 答趙聖紹 [An Answer to Jo Seongso]," see *Daesan Seonsaeng Munjib* 大山先生文集 [Collected Works of Master Daesan], Book 4, Vol. 28., in Hanguk munjip pyeonchan wiwonhoe ed., *Hanguk yoktae munjip chongso* 韓國歷代文集叢書 (Seoul: Gyeongin munhwasa, 1999), Book 175, pp. 351-352.

said: “All that is perceived (所覺) is the principle of mind. The capability to perceive (能覺), though, is the supreme efficaciousness of the generative forces. Thus, it appears to be the case that the wonder of the existence of consciousness, which [occurs] after the principle and the generative forces have combined and the mind has been created, is like the lamp which took in oil and has now got a glowing flame. Therefore, when regarding only the mind, then one speaks about the consciousness of the mind; and when regarding the principle, then one speaks about the function (*yong* 用) of wisdom. Now, if we say that consciousness is a creation of the generative forces, and that it is not created by the principle, this is only to perceive that the bright flame [of the lamp] is fire, without knowing that it is accomplished through a combination with oil.” In his response to Pan Qian’s (潘謙) letter, Zhu Xi noted: “The innate nature (*xing* 性) is only this principle (*li* 理), emotions (*qing* 情) are the stage when it comes flowing out and is put to use, and the mind’s consciousness is what possesses this principle but also carries out these emotions.” If we speak about it in terms of wisdom, then wisdom is the principle of knowing (*zhi* 知) right and wrong. Emotions are to do right and wrong by knowing what is right and wrong. What implements this principle to perceive its rightness and wrongness is the mind. To ground oneself in this law to do right and wrong by knowing what is right and wrong is then the realization of what is perceived. To perceive what is done right and what wrong is the realization of the capability to perceive. Besides speaking about mind in terms of its capability to perceive and speaking about the function of wisdom in terms of what is perceived, is there any other level at which one can ponder over it?

Zhu Xi’s words, “wonder of the existence of consciousness, which [occur] after the principle and the generative force have combined and the mind has been created,” cited by Yi Sangjeong in the above text, were taken from the exposition in the former’s work *Jinsi lu* 近思錄 (*Reflections on Things at Hand*). Zhu Xi, however, believed that “one cannot speak about humanity in terms of consciousness (*jue* 覺 ‘feeling, sensation; awareness’); even though it suffices for knowing humanity, it still constitutes wisdom. In love, though, the traces of humanity are clear and distinguished.”¹⁹ He also remarked that: “In humanity there indeed exists consciousness. Yet one still must not call humanity consciousness.”²⁰ In that manner, Zhu Xi opposed Xie Liangzuo’s

19 Li Jingde 黎靖德 ed., Wang Xingxian 王星賢 comm., *Zhuzi yulei* 朱子語類 [*Classified Conversations of Master Zhu*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), Vol. 6, p. 118.

20 Ibid.

explanation of *ren* through sensation (*jue* 覺). Yi Sangjeong was really able to grasp Zhu Xi's explanation of *ren* via the tripartite structure of mind (*xin* 心), innate nature (*xing* 性) and emotions (*qing* 情), and at the same time regarded the "mind" (*xin* 心) to be a "cognitive mind" (*renzhi xin* 認知心). This is evident from the way he cites from Zhu Xi's "Letter in Response to Pan Qian" ("Da Pan Qian zhi shu" 答潘謙之書)²¹.

Because Joseon Confucians were profoundly immersed in the mentality of Zhu Xi learning, they faithfully followed Zhu Xi's way of reasoning, and in turn also refuted Xie Shangcai's doctrine which "glosses humanity as sensation" (*yi jue xun ren* 以覺訓仁). Nevertheless, the Joseon Confucians mostly had not taken into consideration that the "sensation" (*jue* 覺) in Chen Mingdao's and Xie Shangcai's interpretation of humanity as sensation really is not "perception" in the cognitive sense, but in a moral sense. Now, let us take a look at the 18th century Korean Confucian Yang Eungsu's further interpretation. Yang said:²²

Someone might ask Yu Xiu: Contemporary scholars might maintain that consciousness (*zhijue* 知覺) is consciousness of mind and not a function (*yong* 用) of wisdom. What do you think of this theory? Answer: No, this is not the case. Whence does one know that this is not the case? Answer: This is evident according to Zhu Xi's doctrine. In his "Treatise on Humanity," Zhu Xi writes: "Consciousness is a matter of wisdom." The *Classified Conversations* (*Yulei* 語類) read: "Wisdom is the principle of knowing." It further reads: "Nominally speaking, humanity *per se* is the substance of love and perception (覺) itself is the function of wisdom." Or someone might question Zhang Wugou's claim that: "Humanity is perception." Zhu Xi said: "Since consciousness is wisdom, to consider humanity to be consciousness then equals saying that humanity is wisdom." In his "Reply to Hu Guangzhong's Letter," Zhu Xi discussed how Mencius and Shangcai spoke about consciousness in different ways, and remarked that: "Its greater body (大體) is all a matter of wisdom." If we consider these five assertions, then is there anything which makes us doubt that consciousness is a function of wisdom? Like Zhu Xi once said: "Humanity, righteousness, ritual propriety and wisdom

21 Zhu Xi, "Zhijiu menren wenda – da Pan Qianzhi yi 知舊門人問答·答潘謙之一 [Conversations with Old Friends and Disciples – An Answer to Pan Qianzhi 1]," in *Zhuzi wenji*, Vol. 55, p. 2607.

22 Yang Eungsu 楊應秀, "Se – Jigagse 說·知覺說 [Doctrines – The Doctrine of Consciousness]," See *Baeksu Seonsaeng munjib* 白水先生文集 [Collected Works of Master Baeksu], Book. 2, Vol. 6, in *Hanguk yoktae munjip chongso*, Book. 1652, pp. 216-219.

are innate nature (*xing* 性). Compassion, sense of shame, courtesy and modesty, distinguishing between right and wrong are emotions (*qing* 情). To love with humanity, to feel shame with righteousness, to be courteous with ritual propriety, and to know with wisdom is the mind (*xin* 心).” Now, if consciousness were only the consciousness of the mind and not the function of wisdom, then why is it that Zhu Xi speaks about “knowing with wisdom” and not about “the mind knowing by itself”? One might also set the following question: “Wisdom as one of the four virtues (humanity, righteousness, ritual propriety and wisdom) is not the same as being intelligent (聰明) and possessing wisdom of farsightedness (*ruizhi* 睿智). One is the nature [given] in itself (*ziran* 自然), to be able to distinguish between right and wrong. And the other is the virtue of a sage, being able to do everything. Zhu Xi said: “it is only this one thing.” The wisdom of ritual propriety refers to intercommunication between what is above and what is below. The wisdom of farsightedness is to expand, reaching a comparative greatness. Like fire in the stove is this wisdom of ritual propriety. Like the wisdom of farsightedness is to illuminate [everything, from] the sky [down to the] deepest bottoms of the earth. What the contemporary scholars call consciousness, does it belong to the wisdom of farsightedness? Or is it not a part of the wisdom of farsightedness? If we say that it does belong to it, then, since Zhu Xi taught that it is only one single thing, one cannot say that it is not the function of wisdom. If, on the other hand, we say that it does not belong to it, then in this one mind, there are both, the wisdom which speaks about the intercommunication between what is above and what is below, as well as the wisdom which expands, reaching a comparative greatness; and besides that there is also consciousness. Is there really any such principle in the world? One might also say: Another theory, which proposes that consciousness is not the function of wisdom, speaks in the following way: wisdom is the principle of [distinguishing between] right and wrong, and dwells as one of the five natures (*wu xing* 五性, ‘temperaments’); knowing is the subtle mystery of numinous awareness (*lingjue* 靈覺) and the function of the concentrated mind (*zhuan yi xin* 專一心). Can the function of the concentrated mind indeed act as the function of one of the five natures? But, does not his doctrine also contain the principle (*li*)? It says: “This also does not get as far as to speaking about the innate nature and the principle.” Humanity also occupies the place of one of the five natures, it is the complete virtue of mind. How come? It is because humanity is capable of embracing all four virtues. Zhu Xi said: “Wisdom can also embrace the four [virtues].” He further said: “Humanity is the first (beginning) of the four virtues, and wisdom

is capable of becoming [their] beginning or [their] end." When the *Classified Conversations* question the four sprouts (beginnings) of Mencius, they also ask how come that wisdom is regarded as secondary (later)? It reads: "Mengzi only cyclically states that wisdom fundamentally conceals in itself humanity, righteousness and ritual propriety. Wisdom is only understood in this way. It is only when it is in this way that humanity, righteousness and ritual propriety are all concealed inside of wisdom. This is akin to origination (*yuan* 元), endurance (*heng* 亨), advantage (*li* 利) and stability (*zhen* 貞), where stability (*zhen*) represents wisdom. Stability, nevertheless, harbors the ideas of origination, endurance and advantage inside of it. It is like the four seasons, where wisdom is winter, while at the same time the ideas of birth in spring, growth in the summer and ripening in the autumn are all concealed within Winter." He further said: "Humanity and wisdom being *yuan* 元 (origination), *heng* 亨 (endurance) is a matter of ending and beginning. But, these two extremities are ever reoccurring." If one grasps these few dialogues and studies them carefully, then [one can conclude] that wisdom occupies one of the five natures and is thus able to act as the substance of consciousness, in the same way as humanity occupies one of the five natures and is capable of being the complete virtue of the mind. If the function of the concentrated mind is great, to be in the position of one of the five natures is petty. Thus, if we say that the great consciousness cannot serve as the function of the petty wisdom, then humanity also must not act as the complete virtue of the mind. Can this really be so?

In the above text, Yang Eungso displayed his extreme mastery of the content of Zhu Xi's *Collected Writings* and his *Classified Conversations*, adeptly providing passages from the above-mentioned works and turning them over into grounds for his arguments as needed. Nevertheless, Korean Confucians were still unable to really grasp the fact that Zhu Xi had actually misunderstood the doctrine which interpreted humanity as sensation (以覺訓仁) that existed in his days. Mou Zongsan hit the nail on the head when he pointed out this issue within Zhu Xi's doctrine, saying that:²³

About the doctrine of glossing humanity as sensation (以覺訓仁); what is here denoted by *jue* 覺 is clearly rooted in Mingdao's notion of being insensitive and unaware as timber (*mamu bujue* 麻木不覺), which comes from the presumption that "inhumanity is insensitivity and numbness"

23 Mou Zongsan, *Xinti yu xingti*, Vol. 3, p. 251.

(*weibi wei buren* 痿痺為不仁). *Jue* is the sensation as in “sensation arising from sympathy” (*ceran you suo jue* 惻然有所覺), it is the sensation of not being pacified and not being able to bear (tolerate) something, it is the sensation of moral truth, it is the sensation when the emotions are one with the silence (*jigan yiru* 寂感一如), it is a matter of the sympathy in human minds (hearts), and not a matter of wisdom. Thus, its meaning is equivalent to the word *feeling* and not *perception*. Now, when Zhu Xi explains *ren* through the matter of wisdom, stating that “[from] the consciousness of the mind, we can see that humanity embraces wisdom, yet it is not the reality after which *ren* has obtained its name,” this indeed is a great error.

Mou Zongsan’s assessment is most precise and appropriate, so much that it allows us to accept it as the final argument.

However, when Yang Eungsu refuted the statement that “consciousness is consciousness of mind and not a function of wisdom,” he was completely unable to recognize that by claiming that “consciousness is a matter of wisdom” Zhu Xi also failed to grasp the meaning of Cheng Mingdao’s teaching that: “insensibility and numbness of hands and feet is inhumanity, (...) humanity unifies heaven, earth and the myriad things into one single body (一體),”²⁴ which specifically indicates that the “substance of humanity” possesses the quality of being syngenetic and sympathetic with heaven and earth and the myriad things. As a matter of fact, because Zhu Xi maintained that in pursuit of *ren* one needs to attach particular importance to moral effort, he was in extreme discord with Yichuan’s teaching of humanity being “completely of the same substance as things.” Thus, in his “Ke zhai ji” (克齋記, “Records from the Studio of Self-Mastery”) Zhu Xi remarked: “The essence of pursuing humanity is also called ‘getting rid of all that harms humanity’ and that is all.”²⁵ In relation to that, Qian Mu further noted that: “Zhu Xi was not fond of the Cheng brothers’ manner of speaking about *ren* in terms of consubstantiality (*tongti* 同體) with all things, nor of their doctrine of humanity forming one single body with heaven and earth and the myriad things.”²⁶ He was quite right to claim so. Zhu Xi’s viewpoint, that the pursuit for humanity can only start after one has first understood and grasped the principles of effort to remove one’s own “selfishness of human desires”

24 Zhu Xi, *Sishu zhangju jizhu* 四書章句集注 [Collected Commentaries on the Chapters and Sentences of the Four Books](Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), Vol. 3, p. 92.

25 Zhu Xi, “Ke zhai ji 克齋記 [Records from the Studio of Self-Mastery],” in *Zhuzi wenji*, Vol. 77, p. 3869.

26 Qian Mu, *Zhuzi xin xuean* 朱子新學案 [New Studies on Master Zhu](Taipei: Sanmin shuju, 1989), Vol. 2, p. 60.

(*renyu zhi si* 人欲之私), considerably differs from the standpoint advocated by Wang Yangming,²⁷ and it is also the reason behind his misunderstanding of consciousness (*jue* 覺) as wisdom (*zhi* 智). Nevertheless, when the Joseon Korean Confucians discussed the doctrine which taught about humanity through the notion of consciousness (*jue* 覺, 'sensation'), they had not the slightest idea about the existence of such an important misconception in Zhu Xi's thought.

4. "The Common Good is the Principle of Humanity": Yun Sungeo's interpretation

The third key-proposition from Zhu Xi's doctrine of humanity most discussed by Korean Confucians asserted that "the common good (*gong* 公, 'commonality') is the principle of humanity." This statement does not appear in the "Treatise on Humanity" nor in the "Records from the Studio of Self-Mastery" but in the work *Classified Conversations of Master Zhu*, where, in the context of the antagonism between the "common (good)" (*gong* 公) and the "private (selfish)" (*si* 私), Zhu Xi often stated that "*gong* 公 is the moral principle (*daoli* 道理) of humanity," as in the following cases quoted from the specified chapters:²⁸

- (1) The common good (*gong* 公) is in the front, consideration (*shu* 恕, 'altruism') follows behind, and humanity is in-between. One can only be humane when the common good has been completed. Where there is selfishness, there cannot be humanity.
- (2) Humanity is the moral principle of love and the common good is the moral principle of humanity. In consequence, when there is common good, there is humanity, and when there is humanity, there is love.
- (3) The common good is the method of humanity, the human person (*renshen* 人身) is the tissue of humanity.
- (4) The common good is the place from which humanity issues forth. Without the common good, humanity cannot be carried out.
- (5) Humanity is embodied by the character *gong* 公. So that, even if the character *gong* were to be omitted, it would live in humanity.
- (6) In the case that one might inquire about the difference between humanity and common good (*gong* 公), the answer would be: "Humanity is on the inside, common good is on the outside." One could also say: "Only if

27 Cf. Chen Lisheng 陳立勝, *Wang Yangming "wan wu yi ti" lun – Cong "shen – ti" de lichang kan* 王陽明“萬物一體”論：從“身-體”的立場看 [On Wang Yangming's Doctrine of Things as One Body: From the Perspective of the Body-Substance] (Taipei: NTU press, 2005), pp.42-43.

28 Li Jingde ed., Wang Xingxian comm., *Zhuzi yulei*, Vol.6, pp.116-117.

there is humanity can there afterwards be common good.” And also: “Humanity is a fundamentally existing principle. Common good is the highest stage of attainment in the moral effort of overcoming one’s self. Therefore, only if one is humane can one later also act for the common good (*gong* 公); the principle is very clear. Consequently, master Cheng said: ‘act for the common good and embody it through humanity.’ Then, after one has overcome and exhausted the selfishness of one’s self--only then, when one observes one’s own character, will one be able to see humanity.”

- (7) Even though one cannot designate humanity with common good (*gong*), still humanity is to act for the common good (*gong*) and to be selfless. Respectful diligence (*jing* 敬) cannot be called the mean (*zhong* 中), yet still to be respectfully diligent and not miss the mark is to be in the mean (*zhong*).
- (8) If dwelling within unselfishness, then one is acting for the common good (*gong*). If one is acting for the common good, one is humane. As for instance, if a stream of water encounters a slight obstruction, it will form two separate streams, but what you need to do is to put together an unpassable block, then it will inundate and overflow the earth.

The proposition stating that “*gong* 公 is the moral principle (*daoli* 道理) of humanity” (*gong shi ren de daoli* 公是仁底道理), which Zhu Xi refers to in the above examples, was taken from Cheng Yichuan. The latter namely taught that:²⁹

Essentially, to describe the way of humanity one only needs one word: ‘the common good’ (*gong* 公, ‘commonality’). The common good is only the principle of humanity, and one cannot simply refer to humanity as the common good. Rather, the common good is humanity, because it is embodied by the people. If it is only the common good, then it shines down on every living being and me at the same time. Therefore, humanity is the reason why there can be consideration (*shu*), why there can be love. Thus, consideration is bestowment of humanity and love is its use.

Zhu Xi’s high regard for these words of Yichuan’s was not only recorded in the work *Reflections on Things at Hand (Jinsi lu)*³⁰, but appeared also in

29 Cheng Yi , “Yichuan xiansheng yu yi 伊川先生語一 [Sayings of Master Yichuan – Part 1],” see *Henan Chengshi yishu*, Vol.15, in *Ercheng ji*, Vol.1, p.153.

30 Zhu Xi, Lü Zuqian 呂祖謙, *Jinsi lu* 近思錄 [*Reflections on Things at Hand*], in Zhang

his *Collected Works*³¹ and then again in his *Classified Conversations*, where Zhu Xi discussed the very same proposition with his students.³² The constant reoccurrence of this proposition conveys how highly Zhu Xi approved of it.

Yun Sungeo (尹舜舉, courtesy name Nojig 魯直, sobriquet Dongto 童土, 1596-1668) was a Korean Confucian scholar from the 17th century and a descendant of the renowned scholar Sung Hon (成渾, courtesy name Howon 浩原, sobriquet Woogye 牛溪, Moogam 默庵, posthumous name Mungan 文簡, 1535-1598) whose works include *Noelungji* (魯陵志, *Local Gazetteer of Noelung*). Yun opposed the interpretation of humanity as human (*ren* 人) *per se*, as well as the reading of humanity as sensation (*jue* 覺) or love (*ai* 愛), and instead proposed an interpretation which equated the concept of humanity with the common good (*gong* 公). He said:³³

Humanity is for the human as the origin (*yuan* 元) is for heaven. Humanity turns heaven and earth and the myriad things into one single body. It embraces the five constant virtues, it strings together the myriad forms of good, it really is the complete virtue of the mind. But, being the right principle (*zheng li* 正理) under heaven, it completely overcomes one's selfishness, clearing and purifying [one's mind], and all parts of the body and mind become well-balanced, regarding all things under heaven as oneself. By which way (*dao* 道) is [this achieved]? It is also by following the common good (*gong* 公), and that is all. After there is [the common good], the atmosphere of life-generating activity (*sheng yi* 生意) will arise by itself and day by day become more fulfilled; what one will reside in and what one will issue forth, everything will be the heavenly principle, and their humanity will be inexhaustible. But if on the contrary, one is overindulgent and excessively tolerant, then one will enter impropriety and diverge from uprightness. In that case, how could the person be called humane? [Therefore], by knowing the [principle] of

Boxing 張伯行 ed., *Zhengyitang quanshu* 正誼堂全書 [A Collection from the Zhengyi Hall], Vol. 2, p. 28.

- 31 Zhu Xi, "Zhijiu menren wenda – da Dong Shuzhong wu 知舊門人問答·答董叔重五 [Conversations with Old Friend and Disciples – An Answer to Dong Shuzhong 5]," in *Zhuzi wenji* 朱子文集 [Collected Writings of Zhu Xi], Vol. 51, pp. 2331-2332; "Zhi jiu menren wenda – Da Chen Anqing san 知舊門人問答·答陳安卿三 [Conversations with Old Friend and Disciples – An Answer to Chen Anqing 3]," in *Zhuzi wenji* 朱子文集 [Collected Writings of Zhu Xi], Vol. 57, pp. 2777-2778.
- 32 Li Jingde ed., Wang Xingxian comm., *Zhuzi yulei*, Vol. 95, pp. 2452-2455.
- 33 Yun Sungeo 尹舜舉, "Jabjeo – Gong choegeun in se 雜著·公最近仁說 [Miscellaneous Writings – The Doctrine of Gong as the Closest to Humanity]," See *Dongto seon-saeng munjib* 童土先生文集 [Collected Works of Master Dongto], Book 1, Vol. 5, in *Hanguk yoktae munjip chongso*, Vol. 2353, pp. 199-201.

common good (*gong*) one completely fathoms the method of humanity. Indeed! Because the heavenly way is selfless, the cycle of four seasons goes on. When the living things are prosperous (*heng* 亨) and the way of humanity attains the common good (*gong*), the four sprouts are fulfilled, and the hundred endeavors will succeed. That being the case, the role of origination (*yuan* 元) among the four virtues is equal to the role of humanity among the five constant virtues. And selflessness equals the common good (*gong*), and nothing else. Then, in the form of the common good one can observe the whole substance of humanity.

One could say: In that case, could we now not directly say that common good is humanity? To which, one could respond: No. The common good [we are speaking about] is only assisting humanity, so that it is definitely the case that one cannot simply refer to humanity by calling it the common good. And it is as a result of this that the principle of humanity resides in common good. How can we say that? Now, if we assume that a mirror stands as a metaphor for a human being, then humanity is the light shining upon it, and common good is the cleanliness (*wu chen* 無塵 “without dust”) of its surface. If on the mirror there is no speck of dust, it can reflect the light shining upon it. Similarly, if a person is without a single particle of selfish desire, he can perfect his humanity. But if the mirror is dusty, so that its illumination is obscured, then it is not something I would choose to call “a mirror.” Thus, if a person has desires, they extinguish and harm his acting for the common good, and such a person cannot be called humane. What I deem to be the meaning of humanity is to subdue one’s selfishness. By being selfless one acts for the common good. When one acts for the common good, humanity is already at hand. Thus, humanity is not far away from acting for the common good. Supposing that the common good is embodied by a person, then that person will be able to sense (*jue* 覺), to love, to feel empathy (*shu* 恕), to like and dislike people, to straighten the others. In that way, one will attain the highest point of the way, which has one principle and many manifestations (*li yi fen shu* 理一分殊), becoming appropriately settled in all places. In my opinion, this is how close humanity is to common good. Because of this proximity, humanity illuminates all things together with myself, it embraces and penetrates everything, and is able to turn all under heaven into one family and the Middle kingdom into one person. Every living being, which takes a form between heaven and earth, be it an animal or a plant, having or not having emotions, they all obey their nature (*xing* 性) when bringing their life (*sheng* 生) to realization. The greatness of humanity’s meritorious use goes so far as to assist one in one’s establishment (position) and inner

nourishment, so that one attains a sage's ability to perform tasks. The words "to widely extend benefit and aid the masses" does not adequately describe it. Confucius said: "The nobleman embodies humanity (*ti ren* 體仁) to the extent that he can lead people." Therefore, it is said that when he wishes to be established himself, he establishes other people, when he wishes to attain something, he makes other people succeed. And if for one single day he overcomes his self and returns to ritual propriety, all under heaven will follow and revert to humanity. In the humanity of a sage, the common good should be esteemed and valued in this manner, and no other way. I have never seen that a person was able to become humane by not working for the common good in this manner.

In the above excerpt, Yun Sungeo at first follows along Cheng Yichuan's and Zhu Xi's train of thought, expressing the idea that "humanity forms one single body with heaven and earth and the myriad things," yet in turn proposes the definition of humanity as "to subdue one's selfishness," and asserts that "by being selfless one acts for the common good" and that "humanity is not far away from acting for the common good." In that way, he provides a detailed exposition of Cheng Yichuan's and Zhu Xi's proposition that "the common good is the moral principle of humanity" within the spectrum of antagonism between *gong* 公 ("common good; commonality") and *si* 私 ("selfishness; privateness"). Compared to Cheng Yichuan's and Zhu Xi's simplistic manner of expression and their concise use of words, Yun's way of reasoning was fairly meticulous and prolix.

As I have already pointed out in one of my previous studies, in the pre-Qin philosophy of Confucius and Mencius it was still advocated that the domain of the "common good" (*gong* 公) is an expansion and extension of the domain of the "private self" (*si* 私, or "selfishness"). It was only with Xunzi (荀子, around 298-238 BCE), a successor to the Confucian school from the late Warring States period (475-221 BCE), that the distinction between *gong* 公 and *si* 私 started being made. Ultimately, from the 10th century on, the Northern Song Neo-Confucians all started advocating the precedence of *gong* over *si*, and subsequently, in the Southern Song period, Zhu Xi further stressed the antagonism between "the common good of the heavenly principle" and "the selfishness of human desires."³⁴ Then, following Zhu Xi's

34 Cf. Chun-chieh Huang 黃俊傑, "Dongya jinshi rujia dui "gong" "si" lingyu fenji de sikao: Cong Mengzi yu Tao Ying de duihua chufa 東亞近世儒者對 "公" "私" 領域分際的思考: 從孟子與桃應的對話出發 [East Asian Modern Confucians' Reflections on the Boundaries Between the Domains of the Common Good and the Private: Proceeding from the Dialogue Between Mencius and Tao Ying]," in Chun-chieh Huang, *Dongya Ruxue: jingdian yu quanshi de bianzheng* 東亞儒學: 經典與詮釋的辯

philosophy, in his work *Benmei* 辨名 (*Distinguishing the Meanings of Terms*), the 17th century Japanese Confucian Ogyū Sorai (荻生徂徠, Butsu Mokei 物茂卿, 1666-1728) intensified the antagonism by strongly distinguishing between the notions of “common good” and “privateness.”³⁵ Maruyama Masao (丸山真男, 1914-1996) maintained that this kind of intensive differentiation between *kō* 公 and *shi* 私, as present in Ogyū Sorai’s philosophy, represented one of the most important turning points in Japanese intellectual history.³⁶ Thus, it was within the context of the East Asian intellectual history of the concepts *gong* 公 and *si* 私 that the 17th century Korean Confucian Yun Sungeo proposed his interpretation of humanity as common good. Nevertheless, when Yun Sungeo put forward the above-mentioned interpretation, he only provided a detailed exposition of the standpoint previously taken by Cheng Yichuan and Zhu Xi, namely that the concept *gong* 公 represents the method of putting humanity into practice, and did not at the same time explicitly state that *gong* 公 cannot be treated as entirely equal to humanity. As a matter of fact, this problem was not properly clarified before the 18th century, when Kim Nakhaeng pointed out that: “As far as I can see, the common good (*gong*) is something that embodies humanity, but is not the body of humanity. If we now apply the theory, which says that it is something by which humanity is embodied, into the doctrine, which says that it is the body of humanity, this is exactly what was rebuked by Master Cheng, and what Zhu Xi called confused talk.”³⁷ Kim’s statement conveys his profound understanding of the problem, even to the extent that we could call it an exact explanation of the sentence “the common good (*gong*) is the principle of humanity.”

5. Conclusion

In this article we have analyzed and discussed the opinions expressed in the Korean Confucians’ debates on Zhu Xi’s discourse on *ren* 仁. In order to provide a more focused discussion, we have selected three propositions most

證 [*East Asian Confucianisms: The Dialectics between Classics and Hermeneutics*] (Taipei: NTU press, 2007), pp. 395-418; Chun-chieh *East Asian Confucianisms: Texts in Contexts* (Göttingen and Taipei: V & R unipress and NTU press, 2015), Chapter 3, pp. 57-80.

- 35 Ogyū Sorai 荻生徂徠, *Benmei* 辨名 [*Distinguishing the Meanings of Terms*], in Inoue Tetsujirō 井上哲次郎, Kanie Yoshimaru 蟹江義丸 eds., *Nihon rinri ihen* 日本倫理彙編 [*Japanese Writings on Ethics*](Tokyo: Ikuseikai, 1901-1903), Book 6, Vol. 1, p. 69.
- 36 Cf. Maruyama Masao 丸山真男, *Nihon seiji shisōshi kenkyū* 日本政治思想史研究 [*Studies in History of Japanese Political Thought*](Tokyo: Tokyo University Press, 1952), p. 80.
- 37 Kim Nakhaeng, “Dab Yi Gyongmun 答李景文 [An Answer to Yi Gyeongmun],” See *Gusadang jib*, Vol. 4, p. 345.

commonly placed at the center of the Korean Confucians' discussions, namely: "humanity is called the principle of love," "the term *ren* is explained as 'the consciousness of mind'" and "the common good (*gong* 公, 'commonality') is the principle of humanity." At the same time, we considered Kim Nakhaeng, Yang Eungso, Yi Sangjeong and Yun Sungeo as the representative thinkers who contributed to the above-mentioned discussions, and in turn also examined the essential points of their discourse on Zhu Xi's learning on humanity, as well as the problems hidden underneath their surface. Having closely examined the above-mentioned material, it is quite apparent that, in comparison with the Japanese Confucians, the Korean Confucian scholars were able to delve deeper into the intellectual world of Zhu Xi. Consequently, they were also able to penetrate deeper into the "hermeneutical circle" of Zhu Xi's philosophy. They also demonstrated a refined use of language and a skill to compose cogent and lucid texts that were unlike any others.

However, if we compare them with the Tokugawa Japanese Confucians, who before having reached middle-age were still deeply immersed in Zhu Xi's philosophy, and yet after having reached this age mostly abandoned or criticized Zhu Xi, the Korean Confucians, in contrast, can be said to have remained completely immersed in Zhu Xi's philosophy. It appears that they made Zhu Xi's philosophy their spiritual homeland and were not contented until they had become perfectly familiar with every single detail of their realm, so that, in consequence, their interpretations of Zhu Xi's learning on humanity contained an abundance of conservative thought and lacked innovativeness. To give an example: in his interpretation of the teaching that "humanity is named the principle of love," Kim Nakhaeng had fully grasped the fact that Zhu Xi's "principle of love" belonged to the domain of ontology, yet was still entirely unaware of the problems that a theory such as Zhu Xi's might involve. Yi Sangjeong followed Zhu Xi's reasoning and refuted the theory which equated humanity with consciousness (*jue* 覺, also 'sensation, feeling'), but had not the slightest idea of the fact that Zhu Xi himself misinterpreted the meaning of the character *jue* 覺 in the first place. Similarly, even though Yun Sungeo was able to elaborate on and elucidate the content of the sentence "the common good (*gong* 公) is the principle of humanity," he was not able to really grasp the idea that the common good (*gong*) is the method by which humanity is embodied (*ti ren* 體仁) and not the body (substance) of humanity (*ren zhi ti* 仁之體). In the same manner, all these examples strongly illustrate that Korean Confucians were shrouded under the authority of the interpretation given by Zhu Xi's study of humanity, to the point that their reformulation of the old exceeded their capability to invent the new.

