基調演說 Ⅲ

新儒學 精神의 合理性

Neo-Confucianism and Rationality

Kah Kyung Cho
State University of New York at Buffalo

To fathom the Pattern (li)[1] in the universe and to regulate the human conduct in accordance with it, has been the singular, overriding concern of the Neo-Confucian philosophy. Whatever other pertinent senses there may be in calling Neo-Confucianism as essentially rational, - by alluding to the absence of irrational and superstitious beliefs already manifest in the older Confucian teachings or to the decidedly this-worldly turn and the pragmatic mentality that these teachings fostered, - all such general characterizations are less than rigorous ways to view the unique contribution Neo-Confucianism has made to the enrichment of rational thought. It is the purpose of the present essay to examine the type of rationality inherent in the Neo-Confucian philosophy, especially its cosmological speculation by means of a comparative analysis. For the concept of Pattern, by virtue of its resemblance as well as its contrast to the notion of Reason in the tradition of the Western thought, of itself invites a comparative scrutiny. As a device to facilitate such a comparison, we may select a model

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of rationality that comes closest to represent the prevailing views of Reason in the Western society and tentatively designate it as "technological rationality."

Though not necessarily referring to any fixed definition of technology in the modern sense, the chosen model of technology nevertheless underscores the "technical" in the specific sense as "the power to produce a preconceived result by means of consciously controlled and directed action"[2]. This pointedly methodconscious sense of what is rational obtains with regard to both the philosophical interpretation of Reason in some of Plato's dialogues and the "creative" and "calculative" Reason that can be seen as a force behind the social and scientific evolution of the modern West.

Four specific objections may be raised against the notion of Reason taken primarily in this technological sense. 1) Whereas the origin of the term Logos, of which Reason is roughly the English equivalent, indicates "word" or rational discourse through word, a lopsided emphasis is placed on manipulative action and execution, albeit according to a certain premeditated design which may be verbally formulated. 2) It restricts and justifies the role of Reason as an instrument, however efficient it may be, of some pre-given ends and purposes inaccessible to critical examination. 3) It exaggerates the creative aspect of human reason, oblivious of the "larger" truth that man can work only within, but never

2) R.G. Collingwood, The Principles of Art, Oxford 1937, p. 15.

against the laws of Nature. 4) Reason ought to have another and higher function bedises the technical control of things and events, namely, to contemplate the meaning or essence of being as such. Those four aspects of rationality not covered by the technological model may be termed a) discursive, b) critical or teleological, c) universal and d) meditative or contemplative, respectively. Each of these or all of them together constitute primafacie an argument against the narrowness of the technological rationality, though certainly not against its effectiveness. Now it is precisely the ascendancy of the technological rationality with all its avowedly onesided emphasis on "efficiency" that Reason itself has become increasingly exposed to critique. Thus it is an irony in the history of the concept that most of the criticisms enumerated above actually evokes the higher court of Reason to prosecute the partiality tolerated in this very concept. It will be shown that the Neo-Confucian type of rationality conspicuously subscribes to c), leans towards d), even while leaving its door open to a somewhat simplified adaptation of the technological model. For the moment, let us say it is the higher heuristic value of the technological model that sets it apart from other models, in that it enhances the chance of our becoming aware of the correctives and alternatives suggested by the analysis of the Neo-Confucian type of rationality.

There is an equivocation in the usage of the term rationality

as applied to Neo-Confucian philosophy inasmuch as, on the surface, at least, its substantive and functional meanings are scarcely differentiated. On the one hand, order of the universe is held to be a given reality, fixed once for all. One could therefore ask whether a concept of a rational order is a consistently rational one if such order is believed to be written in heaven and immutable in all times. Max Weber once called "purging the universe of magical elements through science" (Entzauberung der Welt durch die Wissenschaft) the measure of rationality. Despite the this-wordly turn, despite the practicality and sobriety of the Confucian mind, it has, in the final analysis, retained its portion of belief in the magical power of the universe, manifested, for example, in the fixed meaning of mystical numbers whose secrets were revealed only to ancient sages. Thus a remarkable degree of the faculty empirical observation did not lead to the concept of inductive generalization or formulation of hypotheses and correlatively to the awareness of what the mind can do in terms of organizing and legislating the physical universe. On the other hand, however, Neo-Confucianism did allow for a practical dimension of rationality in such a way that the given universal order is to be complemented through regulatory behaviors on the part of man. In the interpretation of human nature (hsing)[3], man is not elevated above physical nature,

3) 性

but there is a certain sense of partnership and interdependence between man and nature, without which the order of universe may not be complete. The metaphysical underpinning for this theory of human nature is an ontological monism, but its principle displays a functionally "dualistic" feature. For man does not complete his life in a merely biological sense, but is expected to "perfect" his moral being. To that extent, namely, to the extent that man's nature is susceptible of change and betterment due to his purposive resolve, a different mode of interplay between li and ch'i (Energy, Ether)[4] will have to be presupposed. Without going to the length of declaring, therefore, the moral autonomy of man, Neo-Confucianism does leave a certain room for volitional actions, although such actions are again characteristically subsumed under the universal category of li, or Pattern.

But how does one recognize the rational order of the universe, Pattern, in conformity with which actions are to be implemented, in the first place? In having shifted the emphasis from cosmological speculation to practical investigation of the ways through which moral order can be realized, Yi dynasty's Neo-Confucians, Yi Toege and Yi Yulgok in particular, brought their blend of rationality a step closer to the vicinity of the technological model, as the issue now becomes one of human conduct in effecting a certain premeditated

4) 氣

rusult, - the harmony with the all-existing Pattern. We might expect also an epistemologically more satisfying answer to the question of how such Pattern becomes known, through what cognitive procedures. As it happens, the Neo-Confucian epistemology lags still far behind its cosmological speculation and offers an admixture of intuitionist and empiricist theory of cognition which is typically fettered by the dogmatic assumption of the infallibility of the canonical books, I-ching or Book of Change, in particular. Thus it appears as though the tenacious effort to observe Patterns in the universe was frequently sacrificed to the authority of classical texts when certain conflicts arose between empirical observations and the actions to be taken based on such observations.

It is well worth noting that when Neo-Confucians of Yi dynasty took the sense of "rational" quite literally as hap-li or "to be in harmony with Pattern", they did not mean anything like "logical consistency" or "absence of contradication" which applies merely to formal possibilities of thought. Yulgok defines hap-li in terms of the linkage to the real world through action, which would make thought practical, to be in the service of daily affairs. Advising his king not to confuse true learning with a merely bookish knowledge -with "reading books while sitting all day", Yulgok points out that one should be consistent with Pattern each and every time in his

"daily conduct of business" (Sonjyo Shilrok, Vol. 9)[5]. But a more striking part of his statement is what follows next. Yulgok recommends the virtue of reading books "when one cannot know by himself whether he is in fact (acting) in conformity with Pattern", ultimately justifying the higher authority of the Classics than the evidence of empirical studies. How often does one find himself in a situation where he is absolutely certain that he "reads" the signs of nature correctly" What specific qualities of things in nature are to be observed and studied, in order to arrive at the recognition of Pattern?

Much attention has been paid in recent years to the empirical spirit allegedly demonstrated by Neo-Confucian philosophy. But such empirical investigations were restricted to human affairs, and even when "things" in nature were explicitly mentioned as the proper objects of inquiry, they were not studied for their substantive qualities or for their purely physically causal relations. Things had to be studied because of their symbolic human and moralistic import. A purely physicalistic concept of an element, water for example, was of no relevance to the search for a "real" knowledge. Water would be a worthwhile object of investigation for its symbolic meaning and for its relative position within a vast system of correlations to which not only other elements, but also seasons

5) 「學問只是 日用間處事——合理之謂也，惟其合理與否 不能自知 故讀書以求其理」(宣祖實錄九卷)

and directions, parts of human body and its organs, senses, tastes as well as moral vitrues of individuals or social groups are coordinated. Which property of water, that is quenches fire, or that it is boiled by water, or again that it gives rise to the life of wood, becomes more significant, may be swayed by moralistic deliberations in light of certain social and political forces, whose agents in turn are symbolically related to the five elements and thus play out their roles according to Patterns inherent in the relationship of those elements.

Now we can say that underlying the Neo-Confucian concept of Pattern is the presupposition of a psycho-physically undifferentiated totality of universe as a system of real and quasi-magical interactions whose primary function is regulative of human conduct, rather than constitutive of "Scientific" knowledge which would enable man to control the course of physical events. The realm of nature, far from being separated from the sphere of human and social concern, is in fact approached primarily with a view to conform to its "exemplary" manifestations which resemble only superficially physical laws. Patterns are also law-like in that they occur repeatedly with some measure of predictable regularity. But instead of the uniform necessity of physical laws which apply strictly to physical phenomena, the regularity of Pattern implies a mixture of physical necessity and moral imperative in such a way

that if the former takes place, the latter also follows or vice versa, due to the equivalent positions that they assume within a "cosmic" scheme of correspondence. This mutually "evocative" nexus of interaction will have to be explained by other categories than those of causality or substance and attribute relation.

One may wish to dispute the scientific rationality of this apparently arbitrary system of micro-macrocosmic correspondence. One may even go further and dispute the sense of rationality as such for an impressionistic mélange of classifications in which the criteria of distinctions and categories so important for a rational explanation of causal relationship among things seem to be obscured. Such basic categories as subject and object, from and matter, the mental and the physical seem to play here only a marginal role. Nevertheless, Neo-Confucianism contains in itself a uniquely rational core on the basis of its own "metaphysical" presuppositions, and this fact drew the attention of no lesser a philosophical genius of the West than Leibniz. It was he who saw in the Neo-Confucian cosmology prefigurations of those bold and ingenious ideas for which he became famous: binary arithmetic, monadology and pre-established harmony. The true proportion of his indebtedness to the Chinese philosophers of Sung dynasty, whether directly or through the interpretive offices of his friends and missionaries, is still open to debate and should not concern

us here[6]. The only important point to be raised is the immediately apparent presupposition of the Neo-Confucian cosmology which Leibniz correctly discerned as "organic" or "organicistic" view of the universe.

By intuiting the essence of being as a living organism rather than a machine or a creature of God, the philosophers of Sung China were able to steer clear of the dilemma in which Europeans were still caught in 17th century. It was the dilemma of the irreconcilability between teleological and mechanistic world views. The Neo-Confucians, as noted above, did not come anywhere near the idea of charting the whole universe in terms of purely physical and mechanistic causations. Nor did it ever occur to them to conceptualize a supreme being which would exist outside the series of creation as a transcendent creator, but which nevertheless directs and guides the whole succession of events, and that as a personal good.

As an organic system, neither the universe as a whole, nor any part of it would require an agent outside of itself for its own functioning. To be sure, there is a hierachy among living beings, but, lacking the notion of absolute transcendence, this hierarchy knows neither the opposition of the divine and the

6) Cf. J.Needham, Science and civilization China, Vol. II, p. 34044.

secular, nor the tension between pure spirituality and corporeality. Within the one and single self-contained universe, each individual part reflects the whole and each part is related to all other parts as are the cells of a living organism. According to the Explanation of the Grand Ultimate (T'ai chi t'u shuo) by Chou Tun-i[7], there is no beginning and end in the cyclic process of generation and decay, the two modalities of the operation of the Grand Ultimate or Pattern which demonstrates a remarkable degree of conceptual abstraction. The Neo-Confucian cosmology is as perfect an example of a system based on the principle of immanent coordination as possible without the help of the notion of substance or a subject. The concept of substance is literally at the base of the philosophical thinking of the West in such a way that even Leibniz, who admired the principle of organicism in Sung philosophy and whose monadology shows an unmistakable parallelism to it, could not help reintroducing this concept, certainly not as one among many substances, but in the sense of an ultimate substratum and bearer of the whole system, into his philosophy through the backdoor. For he saw it necessary to coordinate the "windowless" monads by the Creator anyway, since a universe existing without beginning in time was rationally just as unthinkable as it was theologically unacceptable to believe that

7) 周敦頤, 太極圖說

it was there from the beginning, uncreated. Thus his organicistic universe had to be "organized" through a divine intervention, even though it occurred only once at the moment of creation, in order to guarantee the harmony among milliards of living monads.

If the ultimate effect of this organizing principle without recourse to the concept of substance resembles what contemporary Structuralism consciously strives to attain, namely, the descriptive ideal of objectivity through elimination of the category of subject, then Neo-Confucian philosophy can undoubtedly lay claim to the title of being rational in the specific sense of such objectivistic consistency. Contemporary French structuralists speak of writing, for example, as an impersonal process, because the identity of the author as the first person and the author as he is read, i.e. as the thrid person, does not exist. The Neo-Confucian scholars of 15th century Yi dynasty who participated in a revolutionary undertaking to invent an entirely novel system of phonetic alphabet, considered themselves subliminally an instrument of the force in nature, and their product a mere application of pre-existing Pattern in nature. Leibniz, who was born exactly two hundred years after the promulgation of hangul or the Korean alphabet in 1446, and who was himself the inventor of an universal script which was to become the forerunner of modern symbolic logic, serves here again as a parallel illustration because in both cases

the underlying idea was the same "magical" art of numerical combination. With a given finite set of rules, an infinity of combinations was to be generated. The only difference was that Leibniz attempted to exhaust all possible logical propositions using a finite set of mathematical symbols, whereas the Neo-Confucians of Korean tried to produce all possible phonetic pronunciations utilizing only 17 consonants and 11 vowels. These vowels and consonants are literally "carved" out of nature, inasmuch as their graphic shapes depict either the vocal tracts and their related physiological features or reflect the interplay of Yin and Yang force, which in turn are correlated to the physiological manifestation of ch'i, in this case most appropriately understood as air or even air flow and aspiration. The schematic throughness and consistency in applying the cosmological principles of Neo-Confucian philosophy to the production of speech sound and corresponding script leaves no doubt about the pervasive sense of "technological" rationality of which we spoke at the beginning. The true significance of rational spirit behind the formulation of a phonetically effective alphabet that is capable of reproducing "all possible human voice and every possible sound of nature" lies in the fact that it was so consciously designed and executed in every step of its generation. And to the extent that the Neo-Confucian philosophy has provided king Sejong and his scholars

with the basic concept of Pattern that can be applied to human behavior and conduct, in this case to the speech production with a view to creating the most comprehensive and yet generatively simplest phonetic system yet known, the rationalist potential of this philosophy, also in regrad of its "technological" efficiency, should command a positive recognition.

But from today's excessively technologically oriented point of view, what is not so obvious a merit of this historical lesson is that the Neo-Confucians knew how to efface their own achievement in having "tapped" sucessfully the hidden "phonetic" resource of nature.

In the Preface of Chong Inji to Hunmin chong'um, we read: "The making of Correct Sound is not something that has been transmitted by our ancestros; they have been perfected out of Nature itself. Now since there is no place where the all-embracing Pattern is not found, this (Correct Sound) is certainly not a man made or private thing"[8]. One may recall the story that king Sejong himself suffered from a chronic eye disease as a result of long and intense reading. A group of Neo-Confucian scholars endured all sort of hard work in their life-long search for a phonetic system that is as comprehensive and perfect in its capacity to render all possible

8) 「正音之作, 無所祖述, 而成於自然, 豈以其至理之無所不在, 而非人爲之私也」

sounds as it is simple and easy to be mastered even by illiterate peasants. Such a "technological breakthrough", however, was never attributed to any inventive genius of the authors themselves. Hunmin chong'um haerye (Explanations and Examples of Correct Sounds for the Instruction of People) states: "Now the making of the Correct Sounds was from the beginning not the matter of planning wisely and searching laboriously, but simply one of relying on their (own) sounds (both spoken and heard) and carrying out their Pattern to its consistent end"[9]. In paraphrasing this statement, it should not be fifficult to see the meaning of Pattern specifically defined as "graphic" patterns or configurations of speech organ. The throat, for instance, is taken as a "well", corresponding to the element of water and depicted as a pipe-form(circle), and the adjacent molar teeth are considered to represent the "element" of wood which spring out from water, with its Sound-physiological feature seen in the blockage of the throat opening by the root of tongue, as when the upper and lower molar teeth touch in order to produce the equivalent of "k" sound. Thus the letter shape of "K" sound is graphically modelled after the shape of tongue root blocking the throat opening.

These and similar detailed rationalistations may have their proper place in the science of speech production and speech physiology

9) 「今正音之作, 初非智營而力索, 但因其聲音而極其理而已」

What is more immediately important from the point of view of comparative philosophy is again the "displacement" of the epistemological subject implied in Chong Inji's statement. The human knower, i.e. in this case the authors of the Correct Sounds, recedes in the background. Chong says that "the making of Correct Sounds" is "not an artificial and private matter", as quoted above. The grammatical subject of this sentence, if we may pursue this problem further, is the "Making" (of the Correct Sounds), and thus the "impersonal" activity itself comes to the foreground, replacing the normal human agent.

On a lower, formal logical level of cognition, of course, Neo-Confucian philosophy realized the distinction between subject and object. Chu Hsih made this point unmistakeably clear. "Knowledge means knowledge my mind. Pattern means Pattern in things and affairs. Through the former, the latter is known. Thus subject and object are of themselves distinguished".[10] But it is also evident that he did not mean by "my mind" a merely private, individual subject, even through it may function outwardly, through the individuating principle of ch'i[11] as the apparent bearer of a cognitive act. the deeper metaphysical ground which truly makes

10) 「知者, 吾心之知, 理者, 事物之理, 以此知彼, 自有主賓之辨」
答江德功書(朱子大全, 44,37)

11) 氣

such cognition possible, however, is invariably li itself Pattern is the true cause of knowledge. Chu Hsih once again clarified this point: "One is able to know through the Ether of soul, but one is enabled to know through the Pattern of mind".[12] Needless to say, Pattern of mind is neither the formally subjective, nor empirically psychological condition for the possibility of knowledge Subjectively active mind, if Ether of soul can be provisionally taken as such, may "occasion" the knowledge by directing its attention to this or that particular object, but the possibility of any true knowledge rests ultimately on what constitutes the "ontological" ground or the "pre-patterned" nature of things, including the cognitive predisposition of mind itself. The latter, again, is not an isolated substance, but should be understood, as Leibniz did, in the sense of a living organism, within which all other living organisms and thus nothing less than the whole world are reflected. J. Needham pointed out that the hierarchy of monads in Leibniz' philosophy "resembled the innumerable individual manifestations of the Neo-Confucian li in every pattern and organism".[13] Because each monad mirrors the whole universe, the Pattern operating in the mind of each individual is capable of grasping the Pattern in another monad (object) or in the larger

12) 「能覺者, 氣之靈, 所覺者, 心之理」(朱子大全, 5,3)

13) J. Needham, Science and Civilization in China, Vol. II, p. 499.

whole of universe, more or less in a "pre-established harmony". Even while an individual monad may subjectively conceive of itself as an active agent of cognition, it is in fact passively subordinated to the "mirroring" life of the larger organism that is the world. The finer nuance of Leibniz' own logicizing metaphysics, for example, the hierarchy of monads according to greater or lesser degrees of clarity and purity of their perceptual capacity, may have been missed by Neo-Confucian philosophy. But its theory of interaction between li and ch'i, or Pattern and Ether, which in a crude approximation may be rendered as ontological ground and energy for its self-actualization, Neo-Confucian philosophy remains a quarry from which epistemological subtleties may yet have to be extricated.

From what has been said, it is not difficult to conclude that the Neo-Confucian type of rationality only partially overlaps the model of scientific and technological rationality, as shown with the example of Korea's 15th century phonetic alphabet, the design and execution of which made an ingenious use of what we now refer to as "generative" principles. These principles were indeed implicit presuppositions of the Neo-Confucian cosmology. Its implicit dimension, however, included the magical order of the universe in Weber's sense, although it was the purpose of this essay to point out that such magical world order may well be the correlate of a contemplative humility of man who vows to what

Rudolf Otto[14] once called the "numinous" quality of the world. This reverential attitude in the face of some higher force and order than what human intelligence can effectively chart, seems to be an antiquated philosophical position in today's avowedly technologically rational society, but the contrast is a haunting one, because it does show the critical limit of the latter. it does show the critical limit of the latter.

14) Rudolf Otto, The Idea of the Holy, Oxford 1923.