Resolutions to Become a Sage:
An Annotated Translation of the Chagyǒngmun

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The learner needs to immediately get away from Buddhist teachings as if from licentious music and beautiful women.
Zhû Xî 朱熹, Jinsûlû 近思錄 13.5

Introduction: Yulgok’s Quest for Meaning

The Koryô 高麗 (918–1392) literati scholars An Hyang [Hoehôn] 安珦（晦軒）(1243–1306) and Paek Ijông [Ijae] 白顔正（尋齋）(1247–1323) were instrumental

Notes on Romanization and Style: Korean terms and names are romanized using the McCune-Reischauer system. The phonetic transcription of Chinese is given according to the Hányû Pǐnyīn 漢語拼音 system including tone marks. Japanese is romanized using the Hepburn system. The original notation—banjailânsì 漢字 or banjîl 漢字—is added to romanized terms and names where they are mentioned first or when deemed necessary. Korean and Chinese names are written according to the East Asian custom: family name precedes personal name. To romanize Korean given names, hyphens are included between syllables. Pen names or courtesy names are given in brackets.

1 “學者子釋氏之說。直須如涅槃美色以遣之。” JSL 13.5.
in introducing the teachings of Zhū Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) to the Korean peninsula, thereby sustainably implementing Neo-Confucian thought in a predominantly Buddhist environment. The coup d’état of Yi Sŏnggye 李成桂 (1335–1408, reg 1392–1398), backed by the newly emerged Neo-Confucian elite, expedited the peninsula’s transformation into a strictly Neo-Confucian country, then called Chosŏn 朝鲜 (1392–1910). Over time, the sŏngni-bak 僧尼八 tradition infiltrated all aspects of society, and centuries later became a veritable «cultural grammar», regulating «the customs and the consciousness of the Koreans». Despite the hegemony of Neo-Confucian ideology and the concomitant political suppression of divergent worldviews, the doctrinal rivals of Neo-Confucianism—in particular Buddhism—remained relatively vibrant during the Chosŏn dynasty.

In particular, Buddhist and Daoist teachings kept their appeal and charisma, even having an influence on the Neo-Confucian ruling class. As was the case with many eminent Chinese Confucians such as Zhū Xi or Wáng Shòu-rén 王守仁 (1472–1529), Korean scholars delved into Buddhism during their formative years. Similarly, one of the most significant exponents of Korean Neo-Confucianism, Yi I 李耳 (1536–1584), ventured to learn more about the way of the bodhisattva, indulging in these studies while

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2 To Hyŏn-ch’ŏl 도현철, Chosŏn’ui kŏng’guk’kwa yugumunhw’ui hwaktae 조선의 근국과 유교문화의 확대 [The Founding of Chosŏn and the Expansion of Confucian Culture], Tongbuk bakchi tongbu 東方學志 통보 124 (2004), 189–218.

3 Xingjixue 性理學 (Chinese, ‘school of nature and 理’ also chujabak 朱子學 (Chinese Zhúzìxué, ‘school of Master Zhū’ or chōngjīluk 子學 (Chinese zhénxué, ‘school of Chéng Zhēng Yi 程頤 and Zhū)). Refers to the Neo-Confucian tradition according to Zhū Xi who amalgamated the teachings of several doctrinal precursors such as Chéng Yí (1032–1107), Chéng Hào 程顥 (1032–1085), Zhăng Zūi 張載 (1020–1077), Zhòu Dúnyì 周敦頤 (1017–1073) and Shào Yŏng 遼雍 (1011–1077).


5 Robert E. Buswell, Jr., Buddhism under Confucian Domination: The Synthetic Vision of Sŏn Hyŏng, in Culture and the State in Late Chosŏn Korea, ed. by Ja Hyun Kim Haboush and Martina Deuchler (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 1999), 134–159.

spending a year at a Buddhist monastery. Along with his older contemporary, Yi Hwang [T’oebye] (1501–1570), Yulgok went down in history as the most brilliant and influential orthodox exegete of sŏngbak. However, like many before and after him, he passed through a time of intellectual experimentation, setting out on a quest for meaning as illustrated in the following poem, which he composed in 1555:

Learning the Way [to 逓] is without attachment,
I follow my affinity wherever it roams.
Leaving Ch’ŏnghaktong for a while,
I come and play at Paekkuju.
My body is in a cloud of thousand li, 7
The universe at the end of the sea.
Passing the night in a thatched hut,
Shining moon on the plume tree: this is elegance. 8

Yulgok accentuates his sincere desire for a knowledge that overcomes any prejudice or intellectual dependence. To grasp 逓 one implicitly needs to overcome the limiting boundaries of blind doctrinal obedience. Yulgok’s free-spirited and unattached mind sought a profound understanding of 逓, unhindered by any intellectual restraints. The youthful Yulgok wittingly delved into sŏnjiao 三教, rambling from Ch’ŏnghaktong (Buddhism and Daoism) to Paekkuju 白鷗洲 (Confucianism) and back. 10

Yulgok was born on December 26, 1536, 12 into a well-established yangban family in today’s Kangnŏng 江陵. He was raised in a staunchly Confucian milieu,

7 The li 里 (Chinese lǐ) is a traditional unit of distance. Its exact length has varied in the course of time, lying roughly between 300 and 600 meters.
8 Yŏsan’ın po’ng hasan, chip’ang’am yikwangmun (chwiwŏn) ka, sukch’odang 을산인풍산현, 칠청암의광문 (치외원)가, 수촉당 have Po’ng I came down the mountain, arrived at the home of P’ung’am Yi Kwang-mun (Chiwŏn) and passed the night in the thatched hut), YC 11.23a, 13.—For full bibliographical information, see List of Sources in the end of this article.
9 Chinese dào, i.e. the overarching principle of Being.
10 Korean sŏnjiao 三教, i.e. ‘three teachings’, comprising Buddhism, Confucianism and Daoism.
12 Detailed biographical information on Yulgok can be found in YC2 35.2a–35.51b, 342–366. For a brief outline, see Lukas Pokorny, Ontologische Parallelen im Neuplatonismus und Neokonfuzianismus:
receiving comprehensive education from childhood on, in particular through his mother Sin Saimdang 中師任堂 (1504–1551), who was later extolled as the epitome of Confucian womanhood. At an early stage, he constantly amazed the people around him owing to his outstanding perspicacity and wide reading. Despite keen interest in Buddhist and Daoist thought as an adolescent, Yulgok became a dedicated and rigorous proponent of sŏngnihak, entering officialdom in 1564. Until his untimely death on January 16, 1584, at age 47, he held a number of influential ministerial offices and produced a considerable amount of literature. His œuvre contains a plethora of seminal writings, a great many of which are not yet translated into Western languages. The paper at hand meets a desideratum, providing a first annotated translation of a well-known and frequently cited but—oddly enough—untranslated text. The so-called Chagyŏngmun 自警文 (Written to Alert Myself) is relatively brief, yet marks a watershed in Yulgok’s intellectual development. It represents his written resolution to henceforth wholeheartedly adhere to Confucian teachings while keeping any ‘false doctrines’ (wihak 僞學) at distance. The authoring of the Chagyŏngmun concludes his year-long sojourn in a Buddhist monastery at Kŭmgangsan 金剛山. Yulgok, severely struck by the death of his beloved mother in 1551, mourned at her gravesite for three years, experiencing an existential crisis. Longing for answers and to ease his bitterness, he decided to retreat to seclusion, setting off to Kŭmgangsan in the spring of 1554. Before entering the sŏn-Buddhist monastery, he prepared another piece of poetry, which again echoes his intellectual curiosity:

乾坤孰開闢？ Who has opened heaven and earth?
日月誰磨洗？ Who has polished and washed the sun and the moon?
山河既紡結？ Mountains and rivers are already entwined,

13 The yangban 阮班 denote the aristocracy in the Chosŏn dynasty.
14 For a Korean translation including scarce but auxiliary notes, see Kim Ik-su 金益洙, »Yulgok’ŭi chagyŏngmun’gwa ipchiron [Yulgok’s Chagyŏngmun and the Discussion on Acquiring Determination], Han’gug’ŭi ch’ŏngonyŏn munhwa 10/2007 韓國의青少年文化 vol 10 (2007), 19–27.
15 “十六歳。丁內憂。廬墓三年。一遵家禮。不談官經。躬執祭祀。雖洗脛之事。不使僕任之。” YC2 35.32a–b, 342.
16 For a succinct discussion why Yulgok sought isolation, see Kim Hak Ze, »Two Neo-Confucian Perspectives on the Way: Yi Yī’s and Li Zhi’s Commentaries on the Laozi« (PhD thesis National University of Singapore, 2008), 36. Kim underlines Yulgok’s earnest inclination towards Buddhism.
17 Chinese chán 禪, Japanese zen.
In the poem Yulgok articulates his overwhelming inquisitiveness and candid readiness to plunge into any doctrine, that might facilitate a deeper understanding of the cosmic principle *to* 道. Finally, he donned a monk’s habit, striving to dwell upon afflicting existential issues, and to allay his poignant grief at *Kümgangsan*. It is not recorded what exactly happened during his retreat, but it is assumed that while reflecting on his existential dilemmas and dealing with his grievance over his mother, Yulgok also engaged in intense reflection on the doctrines Buddhism itself. For example, the *Yulgok chŏmu* 栗谷全書 (Complete Works of Yulgok) relate a dialogue between Yulgok and an old monk, whom he met during one of his woodland strolls at a small hermitage. A part of the conversation reads:24

余曰。佛家妙處。不出吾儒。何必棄儒求釋乎。
僧曰。儒家亦有即心即佛之語乎。


19 *Bubwang* 八荒 (Korean *p'albwa*) denotes ‘every direction’ or ‘everywhere’.

20 *jižhwu* 九州 (Korean *kuju*) usually signifies China’s ancient nine provinces (*Ch’ina*), occasionally the ‘nine continents’ (‘world’), denoting ‘every place’ or ‘everywhere’.

21 *Ch’ultongmun* 出閼門 [Departing from the East Gate], YC1 1.9b, 11.

22 For an elaborate discussion on Yulgok’s quest for the ‘absolute’, also taking into account his engagement with Buddhism, see Yi Sang-ik 이상익, *Yulgog’e issŏd kunggkŏkch’a’wa kunggkŏkch’ok kwansim* 莊公的辯證論和辯證核心 (The Ultimate Being for Yulgok and His Ultimate Interest), *Yugyo munhwa yŏng’u* 儒教文化研究 vol 13 (2009), 29–46.

23 For a discussion on Yulgok’s stance toward Buddhism, see Yi Hee-jae, *Yulgok’s Perspective on Buddhism*, *International Journal of Buddhist Thought & Culture* vol 6 (2006), 265–289.

24 *P’ungak ch’ung soam nosōng* 森嶺樹小庵老僧 [Presented to an Old Monk of a Small Hermitage at P’ungak], YC1 1.20b–1.21b, 12—Autumnal *Kümgangsan* is called *P’ungsan* 森嶺山.
In this short passage, Yulgok poses a provocative question with the aim to initially contrast both teachings’ doctrinal foundations. He proceeds to indicate apologetically that the Confucian precept of sōngsōn 性善 (‘human nature is good’), in fact, conveys the core Buddhist ethical tenet of cbhiksīṃ cbhikpul 即心即佛 (‘mind is Buddha’). By comparing Buddhism and Confucianism, Yulgok expects to gain more refined insight into the nature of to 道. For Yulgok, the conversation evidently served a learning purpose in the existential search for meaning that first led him to Kṣīṃgaṃśaṃ. In the spring of 1555, Yulgok decided from then on to follow the Confucian way only, and he returned home. A post hoc account in the Tulgok chōnsŏ reads:

Now this learning [i.e. Buddhism] is not something particularly mysterious. It only strives to cut off the path of distracting the heart-and-mind and condensing the spirit in order to create a condition of supreme serenity, emptiness and brightness. Hence [Buddhist teachings] deceptively establish hwadu 話頭, causing [people] to...
greatly rely on it in their efforts. And fearing that, if people first become aware of this thought they will certainly not concentrate on making efforts and in the end getting nothing whatsoever, [the Buddhist teachings] thus establish these commandments, deceiving [the people]. Consequently, I suspected this learning’s wickedness and again took hold of the books of the sages and worthies, savoring them. I realized that the truth of their teachings did not defraud me. Then for the first time I greatly understood, packed up [my possessions] and returned home. 31

Shortly after, Yulgok put his resolution down in writing in the Chagyŏngmun, Yulgok’s personal manifesto, in which he admonishes himself to remain on the true path leading to sagehood. It signifies a turning point of his intellectual ripening. Yulgok later reported to King Sŏnjo (1552–1608, reg 1567–1608):

When young I was very much fond of sŏn-teachings thoroughly investigating every sutra. But perceiving that they lacked a stable place I returned to Confucian teachings to seek knowledge in our Confucian books. 32

Text and Annotated Translation

Written to Alert Myself

[1] At first I need to set my aspirations high and make the sage the standard. If I do not attain sagehood by even a hair, my task is not completed.

[2] One whose heart-and-mind is settled33 is [a person of] scanty words. Settling the heart-and-mind begins by reducing words. If one talks only at the right time the words cannot but be concise.

31 “蓋其學無他妙者。只欲裁斷此心走作之路。凝聚精神。以造靜極虛明之城。故假設話頭。便之依靠下功。而又恐人先知此意。則著功必不專精。卒無所得。故又設此禁而班之也。遂疑其學之邪。復取聖賢書而逼譯之。知其說之真不我欺也。始乃大悟。束裝而歸。” YC2 33.14a–b, 282.

32 “少時頗好釋學。泛觀諸經。顯得無着實處。反以求之百偈之書。” SJS 8/6/24.

33 The rectification of the heart-and-mind (chŏngsim 正心, Chinese zhèngxīn) rests upon making one’s intentions sincere (sŏngja 誠意, Chinese chéngyì) by extending knowledge (ch’iji 致知, Chinese: zhìzhī) through the investigation of things (kyŏngmul 格物, Chinese: gèwù). For a succinct discussion, see Huang Siu-chi, Essentials of Neo-Confucianism: Eight Major Philosophers of
How can it be easy to obtain the power to immediately gather the heart-and-mind that has been set loose for so long? The heart-and-mind is a living thing. If the power of stabilizing [virtue] is not completed, putting at rest the tremor [of the heart-and-mind] will be difficult. When thoughts and considerations are agitated and disturbed\[^{34}\] I consciously detest it, and if I intend to cut this I am all the more aware of agitation and disturbance. It suddenly arises, perishes abruptly and seems not to have been caused by myself. Even if I sever these thoughts and considerations only this 'severing thought' will be obstructing in my chest.\[^{35}\] This is also a delusive thought. When agitating and disturbing thoughts arise, I must harvest the spirit, effortlessly control it and not go along with any agitating and disturbing thoughts. If I make efforts for long, the heart-and-mind must have time to settle firmly.

Handling business while being focused: this is also the study of settling the heart-and-mind.

If thoughts that always caution and fear, and restrain themselves when alone\[^{36}\] are preserved in my chest, and if I am mindful and not negligent, naturally wicked thoughts will not arise. The ten-thousand vices emerge from all

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\[^{34}\] See ZZYL 6.1, 114.

\[^{35}\] See ZZYL 15.1, 308.

\[^{36}\] See ZY 33, 430–434 and Zhū Xi’ s commentary in ZYZJ X 33: “詩曰。衣錦尚絹。惡其文之著也。故君子之道，闕然而日章。小人之道。約然而日亡。君子之道。淡然而無聲。闕而文。溫而理。知遠之近。知風之自。知微之顯。可與入德矣。衣。去聲。謂。口語反。惡。去聲。闕。於反。前章言聖人之德。極其盛矣。此復自下學立心之始言之。而下文又推之以至其極也。詩謂風衛猶人。鄭之手。皆作“衣錦尚絹。裝。同。褐衣也。尚。加之。古之學者為己。故其立心如此。尚絹故闕然。衣錦故有日章之美。淡。探。溫。闕之異於外也。不顯而文且理焉。錦之美在中也。小人反是。則暴於外而無寶以繼之。是以已然而且亡也。遠之近。見於彼者由於此也。風之自。著乎外者本乎內也。微之顯。有著內者形諸外也。有為己之心。而又如此三者。則知所譏而可入德矣。故下文引詩言謙德之事。詩云。響雞伏矣。亦孔之昭。故君子內省不疚。無惡於志。君子之所不可及者。其唯人之所不見乎。惡。去聲。詩小雅正月之篇。承上文言。莫見乎微。顯著乎微。也。疚。病也。無惡於志。猶言無愧於心。此君子謙德之事也。”
who do not restrain themselves when alone. [Only] after restraining myself when alone, I am able to know the meaning of bathing in the Ki [river] and returning home singing.\(^{[37]}\)

Rising at daybreak I reflect on business that has to be done in the morning. After breakfast I reflect on business that has to be done during daytime. When I retire to rest I reflect on business that has to be done the next day. If I have no business, I put it down,\(^{[38]}\) if I have business, I need to reflect. I must obtain the way to appropriately manage affairs and thereupon I will read books. By reading books, I must seek to distinguish right and wrong and to carry it into practice. If I do not examine business and solely read books, this is useless learning.

財利榮利。雖得掃除其念。若處事時。有一毫撻便宜之念。則此亦利心也。尤可省察。

\(^{37}\) Reference to "點。爾何如。跂弔希。遲爾。舍弔而作。對曰。異乎三子者之撰。子曰。何傷乎。亦各言其志也。曰。莫春者。春服既成。冠者五六人。童子六七人。浴乎沂。風乎舞雩。詠而歸。夫子喟然歎曰。吾與點也。" LY 11.25 [11.26], 248. In a conversation with four of his disciples Kóngzǐ asks what they were to do when in power. His senior disciple Zēng Dìan [Zēng Xi] 曾點 [曾皙] went last, saying after a while: «At the end of spring, with the spring dress being completed, along with five or six capped men, and six or seven boys, [I would like to] bathe in the Yi, enjoy the breeze by the rain altar, and return home singing.» “莫春者。春服既成。冠者五六人。童子六七人。浴乎沂。風乎舞雩。詠而歸。” LY 11.25 [11.26], 248. Kóngzǐ thereupon spoke after a heavy sigh that he sided with Zēng Dìan. Zēng Dìan’s response signifies his superior contentedness and humility, being in utmost harmony with to 達. For a detailed discussion of Zēng Dìan’s sagely character and different interpretations, see Sophia Katz, «The Tradition of Ruist Unrestrainedness: Zeng Dian, Shao Yong and Chen Xianzhang (6th c. BCE–11th c. CE),» in At Home in Many Worlds: Reading, Writing and Translating from Chinese and Jewish Cultures: Essays in Honour of Irene Eber, ed. by Raoul David Findeisen & al. (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz Verlag, 2009), 69–79.

\(^{38}\) The passage recalls an account about Kóngzǐ: «When the master was sitting at leisure, he was distended, he was cheerful.» “子之燕居。申申如也。夭夭如也。” LY 7.4, 196. If unoccupied with business, Yulgok enjoys his rest, putting aside any compulsion.
[6] [Aiming at] property and fame: even if I sweep this thought away, if I just slightly think of picking out the convenient while conducting business this also displays a greedy heart-and-mind. I must still more carefully examine myself.

[7] Generally speaking, when meeting the business, if it is business that can be done I will exhaust my sincerity when conducting the task and my heart-and-mind will not be weary no matter what. If it is business that cannot be done I will cut it off completely and right and wrong cannot be caused to strive against each other in my chest.[69]

常以行不義。殺一不辜。得天下不為底意思。存諸胸中。

[8] The thought of not committing one act of unrighteousness and putting to death one innocent person in order to obtain the throne[40] is always preserved in my chest.

39 Yul gok addresses a key issue of sŏnghak, namely the constant struggle between insim 人心 or the human heart-and-mind (Chinese: rènxīn), and tosim 道心 or the heart-and-mind of the Way (Chinese: dàoxīn). The locus classicus of this concept can be found in the shàngshū 上書: 2.2.15, 61–62. Zhū Xi's famous interpretation of this passage sets the tone for the orthodox Neo-Confucian understanding of the relationship of insim and tosim: ”人心惟危。道心惟微。惟精惟一。允執厥中。” SS 2.2.15, 61–62.

40 Reference to 中書 2.1.2, 194–195. In a conversation between Mèngzǐ and his disciple Gōngsūn Chǒu 公孫丑, the latter asks whether Kōngzǐ and the two admirable men Bó
41 Reference to 述人於此。其待我以横逆。则君子必自反也。我必不仁也。必無禮也。此物也宜哉。其自反而仁矣。自反而有禮矣。其橫逆是也。君子必自反也。我必不忠。自反而忠矣。其橫逆是也。“MZ 4.2.28, 333–334. In this passage Mēngzǐ refers to the demeanor of a jūnzi 君子 (Korean kunja) when facing someone, who treats him in a perverse and unreasonable manner. In such a situation the jūnzi would immediately examine himself, striving to be even more virtuous to be a positive influence on the person in front of him.

42 This part is a reference to 曰。士不可以不弘毅。任重而道遠。仁以為己任。不亦重乎。死而後已。不亦遠乎。”LY 8.7, 210. Here Zēngzǐ 蹇子 (tr. 505–436 BCE), a prominent disciple of Kǒngzǐ, explains that the cardinal virtue of rén 仁 (Korean in) is difficult to preserve, for at death one's efforts will cease.
Concluding Remarks:
The Chagyŏngmun as the Turning Point and Seed for Yulgok’s Later Works

As seen in the introduction, the Chagyŏngmun marks the turning point at which Yulgok left behind his keen interest in Buddhism and affirmed his commitment to Confucian learning only. His lifelong attention to the flaws and errors of Buddhism begins here, with a critical reevaluation of his own youthful indulgence in the Buddhist way.

Moreover, the Chagyŏngmun lays the foundation for Yulgok’s later treatises regarding self-cultivation including the Manŏn pongsa, the Sŏnghak chibyo, and the Kyŏngmong yogyŏl. Every topic in this terse but concise work is repeated and elaborated in his later writings, which were to become an indispensable part of the self-cultivation literature of not only Yulgok and his followers but also of Korean Neo-Confucianism in general.

The first statement in the Chagyŏngmun, regarding setting one’s aspiration for becoming a sage, is restated and developed in the first part of the self-cultivation chapter in the Sŏnghak chibyo, the chapter on setting one’s aspiration in the Kyŏngmong yogyŏl, and a section of the Manŏn pongsa. The notion of sŏng (sincerity) or ‘sincere intention’, which marks one of the salient features of Yulgok’s thought appears at the first time in the Chagyŏngmun, being expanded into an independent section entitled sŏngsil in the Sŏnghak chibyo, and appearing as crucial part of the ontological background of the Kyŏngmong yogyŏl and the Manŏn pongsa.

Yulgok’s self-cultivation begins with setting Confucian sages as immanent models to emulate. In his later writings, drawing upon the notion of tot’ong, he highlights exemplary figures, including cultural heroes, legendary rulers, and eminent scholars such as Fúxī, Shénnóng, Huángdì, and Yáo...
and Shùn, Yǔ, Tāng 湯, Wén 文, Wǔ 武, Zhōu Gōngdàn 周公旦, Kǒngzǐ, Mèng 孟, Zhū Xī and the Chéng brothers. For Yulgok, the concrete deeds and the historical events concerning these sagely figures should become objects of emulation that guide one’s self development. The term »immanent models« is appropriate to describe these sagely exemplars, because there is no dichotomy between sages and the common people, and even an ordinary person is disposed to become a sage. One of the distinctive topics in Yulgok’s thought, and in Neo-Confucian literature in general, concerns how to articulate guidelines for attaining sagehood. Yulgok says: »Now, the original nature of sages and common people is alike. Realizing what is genuine and putting it into practice, and breaking through conventionalities, one is capable of returning to the initial nature. How can [the saying that] "common people may become Yo 耒 and Sun 黉« betray me? According to the Chagyŏngmun, although one should aspire to become a sage, one’s very intentions to subdue an agitated and disturbed heart-and-mind can be self-defeating. As the myriad things including the heart-and-mind consist of ki 氣, sagehood is attained not by imposing one’s intentions on the natural order, but by attuning oneself to one’s surroundings and nourishing one’s latent propensity. Yulgok writes that humans who are in tune with invigorating ki are able to exploit it to the utmost unless their own desires obstruct its growth.

In Yulgok’s Confucian project of »human becoming«, self-willed actions often do not produce desired consequences; rather, a single human being is an integrated part of the surrounding environment, and his or her efforts should arise spontaneously and naturally as reflections of potentialities in the larger

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52 See YC2 24.57a–26.38b, 55–80. Tradition holds that Fúxì and Shénóng are divine sovereigns and cultural heroes from the first centuries of the third millennium BCE. Huángdì 黃帝 is a legendary ruler who—according to tradition—has reigned in the 27th c. BCE. Tāng is the first ruler of Shāng dynasty, Wén is the founder of Zhōu dynasty (11c–256 BCE), Wǔ is the son of Wén and first ruler of Zhōu dynasty, and Zhōu Gōngdàn is the brother of King Wǔ of Zhōu.

53 "蓋衆人與聖人，其本性則一也。 [...] 而苟能習知實踐，去其僞染，而復其性初。 [...] 人皆可以為聖人，乃欺我哉。” YC2 27.3b–27.4a, 82. The saying he references reads: “曹交問曰。人皆可以為聖人，有諸。” MZ 6.2.2, 424.

54 Ki 氣 (Chinese qì) is the actualizing or concretizing manifestation of the metaphysical blueprint given by the ontological pattern or principle bǐ 理 (Chinese lǐ). In this context ki can be seen as the foundational matter or immanence of the heart-and-mind.

55 “天地氤氲，生生不窮，無一息之停。人之氣，與天地相繼。故良心真氣，亦與之俱長。惟其戕害多端，所長不能董其所消，展轉殞亡。故心焉禽獸，氣至天札，可不懼哉。害良心者，耳目口鼻四肢之欲，而害真氣者，亦不出是欲耳。” YC1 21.19a–21.19b, 471.
whole. This is expressed in the Sŏnghak chibyo: »The more one intends to detest futile thoughts, the more the heart-and-mind is agitated and disturbed. The intention to detest itself is a futile thought. Realizing the nature of futile thoughts, one can allow them to withdraw in a natural manner.« Elsewhere, when asked by the young scholar Yi Kyŏngjin [Sŏngbo] how to deal with carnal desire, Yulgok exhibits a similar attitude. He suggests that one should let carnal desire withdraw on its own accord by virtue of self-cultivation rather than repress it.

In the Confucian view of self-realization, a person’s day-to-day affairs take on crucial importance, given that he or she is affected by many elements in the surrounding environment, including other people, various tasks, and other life events. Virtuous action such as reflection (sa), restraint when alone (kŭndok), and appropriate management of affairs (chŏch'ibŏi) are not faculties possessed by a substantive self, but are strategies for optimizing the mutual responsiveness between selves and worlds in process. This relational aspect of virtuous action is evident in Yulgok’s thought when he stresses the continuity between the internal and the external. While reverence (kyŏng) is connected to inner cultivation, and righteousness (ŭi) refers to the proper execution of affairs, Yulgok deemed reverence and righteousness to be inseparable.

The pragmatic orientation of Yulgok’s thought is already evident in the Chagyŏngmun. When reading a book, you should carry the acquired knowledge and judgments from it into practical everyday business—otherwise reading is completely in vain. Here Yulgok introduces the idea of sincerity as the transformative power to bring events to fruition. In the Chagyŏngmun we already see one of the major characteristics of Yulgok’s mature thought in which pragmatism, sincerity and efficacy are cherished. Yulgok repeatedly laments that even though there may be many ambitious discussions regarding how to govern

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56 "有意厭惡。則尤見擾亂，且此厭惡之心。亦是浮念。覺得是浮念後。只可輕輕放退。" YC1 21.37–21.37b, 480.

57 "李景實問。色慮之類發難制。何以抑絶此念乎。粟谷曰。此也無別功夫。只是心有存主。讀書則專心窮理。應事則專心踐履。無事則靜中涵養。常使此心無忘時。則色念自不得發。雖發亦必省覺。省覺則自退矣。不然。放心忘識。而欲與色念磨斃。雖極費力。如上壓草。愈壓愈生矣。" YC1 32.2b, 260.

58 "朱子日。居下得無事好。敬主手中。義防於外。二者相交持。[...].臣按。敬體義用。雖分内外。其實敬誠義。直之敬。敬以存心也。外之義。敬以應事也。" YC1 21.32b–21.33a, 478.
the country properly, nothing is put into practice. Yulgok pragmatically recommends institutional and political reform to keep up with changing situations. The flexibility for timely change is important—for people’s minds and hearts as well as for institutional structures—for once-relevant policies and principles too easily encourage a rigid adherence to convention, if they are not continually reassessed.

For Yulgok self-serving behavior, such as seeking pecuniary gain or promotion in rank, is directly contrasted with sincerity and efficacy and should therefore be critically examined and eventually eliminated. The late Yulgok elaborates this point in the light of his ontology, indicating that *toism* should guide *insim* lest the human desire for self-benefit grow too powerful.

As is evident, the *Chagyŏngmun* is a seed, containing the kernel of Yulgok’s mature thought on self-cultivation, without the elaborate metaphysical scheme he later develops. This short treatise not only indicates his early departure from Buddhism and wholehearted dedication to Confucianism but provides a condensed introduction to the main themes of his later works.

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59 See, for instance, YC1 15.15a, 320: “主人曰。終朝設食。不得一飽。空言無實。豈能濟事。今夫君庶之士。章奏之間。非無嘉謨謬論。足以治國。而未見一弊之革。一策之施者。只是不務實效故也。”
List of Sources and Their Abbreviations


LY Lún/yù 论语
MZ Mèngzǐ 孟子
SS Shāngbù 尚書
ZY Zhōngyōng 中庸


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