Check for updates

Eco-ethica 8 (2019): 63–74
doi: 10.5840/ecoethica20206122

Publicness in the Confucian Sense and the Scholar-Gentry Spirit

Sang-Hwan Kim

Seoul National University

Abstract: The purpose of the present study is twofold. The first is to reveal the unique significance on publicness in the Confucian 儒家 tradition. In order to achieve this, Confucian philosophical documents that explain the state 國 (*guo*) and the family 家 (*jia*), and loyalty 忠 (*zhong*) and filial piety 孝 (*xiao*) as continuous relationships will be analyzed. The second is to elucidate that the most important principle for maintaining the Confucian distinction between the public and the private, or publicness in the Confucian sense, is the scholar-gentry 士 (*shi*) spirit. In order to achieve this, the significance of uprightness 直 (*zhi*) and conducting oneself with reverence 居敬 (*jujing*), which are central to the scholar-gentry spirit, will be translated into contemporary terms and, furthermore, the possibility of Confucian existentialism will be explored. The final point of the present study is that the condition for the inheritance of the Confucian concept of publicness in modern culture must be found in the possibility of Confucian existentialism.

Keywords: publicness, scholar-gentry spirit, Confucian paternalism, Confucian existentialism, Confucius

The waterfall falls down a straight cliff, without even a hint of fear

The indeterminable stream,
Without even the significance of falling toward something,
Regardless of the seasons and day and night,
Falls without rest, like a lofty spirit

When it is night, when neither marigolds nor human abode can be seen,
The waterfall falls, emitting straight sounds

Straight sounds are sounds.
Straight sounds summon
Straight sounds.

©Tomonobu Imamichi Institute for Eco-ethica

Waterdrops, which fall like lightning,
Do not even grant to the heart a moment to be intoxicated
And fall,
Without even height and width,
As if overturning indolence and stability
—Kim Su-Young 金洙暎, "Waterfall" 瀑布 (1957)–

Modernist Kim Su-Young's Scholar-Gentry Spirit

Though "Confucius' Hardships of Life" 孔子의 生活難 (1945) and "Song of the Shrine" 廟庭의 노래 (1945) were the first works by Kim Su-Young (1921–1968) to be published, he cited "Folding Screen" 屛風 (1956) and "Waterfall" (1957) as his de facto maiden works as well. It was because of his idea that the latter works revived the modernist spirit, which circles around "pain, unpleasantness, and death." At the bottom of modernism lies a destructive instinct that seeks to annihilate the existing language and to return to a state of tabula rasa: "'Folding Screen' is a poem about death, and 'Waterfall' is a poem that rejects indolence and stability."[1] "Folding Screen" depicts the paradox of a folding screen, which stands "Block[ing] a corpse with a corpse," "Waterfall" portrays the ecstasy of the waterfall, which summons straight sounds with straight sounds.

"The waterfall falls down a straight cliff, without even a hint of fear / . . . And fall, / Without even height and width, / As if overturning indolence and stability." When translated into Sigmund Freud's language, shattering indolence and stability is equal to transcending the pleasure principle. Straight sounds that reject compromises summon the death drive (thanatos) lying beyond the pleasure principle. Spread horizontally, the folding screen blocks the vertigo of the death drive. In contrast, the vertically falling waterfall is vertigo itself: "Straight sounds summon / Straight sounds." Because of the vertical violence of the waterfall, which summons clamors of death with clamors of death, the entire existing thought system heaves. And fragments of the real infiltrate the crevices that are generated there.

Confucius (551–479 BC) stated that a love of uprightness 好直 (*haozhi*) lacking a love of learning 好學 (*haoxue*) was tantamount to strangulation.[2] This means that the blind pursuit of integrity without discrimination leads one to become brutal, as if strangling someone. Integrity not mediated or determined by anything stands in the place of the black madness lying beyond the Symbolic: "Straight sounds summon / Straight sounds." Developing thus, "Waterfall" not only depicts the ideology of modernism, which may be termed a "yearning for the real," but also revives a certain "lofty spirit": "The indeterminable stream, / Without even the significance of falling

1. *The Complete Works of Kim Su-Young*, vol. 2 金洙暎 全集 2 (Seoul: Minumsa Publishing Group 民音社, 1981), 230.
2. *The Analects* 17-8: "好直不好學, 其蔽也絞."

toward something, / Regardless of the seasons and day and night, / Falls without rest, like a lofty spirit." That lofty spirit would be the scholar-gentry 士 (*shi*) spirit, compressed as uprightness 直 (*zhi*).

Though Kim Su-Young became a byword for resistance poets following the April 19 Revolution 四一九 革命 (1960), he would not have awakened to the spirit of social participation for the first time only at that point. Indeed, it would be correct to say that the scholar-gentry spirit was well within his mind from the moment that he embarked on a career as a poet. The spirit of social participation that Kim Su-Young exhibited in the 1960s can be seen as a manifestation of his inherent scholar-gentry spirit.

A scholar-official 士大夫 (*shidafu*) of the Joseon Dynasty, Song Si-yeol 宋時烈 (1607–1689; pen name, Uam 尤庵) roaringly stated regarding straightness when he was presented with a bowl of poison 賜藥 as a means of execution at the site of his exile: "The principle by which heaven and earth generate all things and the principle by which sages respond to all things lie solely in uprightness."[3] Consequently, uprightness is not merely one of the sundry virtues that humans must be equipped with. It is a metaphysical principle explicating the operation of the universe and an ethical ideology guiding human praxis. The root of such an idea lies in the *Analects* 論語 (*Lunyu*): "What buttresses humans' lives is integrity. A life without integrity is merely avoiding calamities by chance."[4] Annotating this passage, Zhu Xi 朱子 (1130–1200), the founder of Neo-Confucianism 性理學, elevated uprightness to a principle of life, a cosmological principle. Subsequently, the Korean scholar-gentry inherited Zhu Xi's teachings and developed uprightness into the foremost ideology of praxis. The lines "Straight sounds summon / Straight sounds" must be read against the backdrop of such history of inheritance.

Uprightness and the Death Drive

In psychoanalysis, the madman refers to a subject who has not undergone the Oedipus complex. A "normal" subject is one who has been castrated while undergoing the Oedipus complex. Castration refers to relinquishing one's own primitive impulse, to being tamed within a linguistic-normative system structured by paternal rights. This is called the "socialization process" as well. The subject is born when social norms are internalized so that a second desire that can be coordinated in a mutually subjective manner takes root in the site where a wild impulse erupts. Georg Hegel and Jacques

3. *A Chronicle of the Life of Master Song* [i.e., Song Si-yeol] 宋子 年譜 (*Songja Yeonbo*): "天地之所以生萬物, 聖人之所以應萬物, 直而已." As for commentaries on this passage, see Yoo Myong Jong 劉明鍾, "Confucius' Thought on Uprightness" 孔子의 直思想, Korean Society of Confucian Studies 韓國 孔子學會, ed., *Confucius' Thought and the Contemporary Era* 孔子 思想과 現代 (Seoul: Sasayeon 思社硏, 1985), 197–209.
4. *The Analects* 6-19: "人之生也直, 罔之生也幸而免."

Lacan called such a socialization process "alienation." The subject is a subject who has been tamed within the communal spirit (big Other), an alienated subject. The alienated subject relinquished his or her primal desire in order to enter a symbolic level where communication with others is possible. The first stage of subjectification lies in voluntary subordination through such relinquishment.

Contemporary subject theory focuses on the possibility for the subject to be reborn as a bearer of desire that cannot be reduced to the desire of the big Other. Here, the issue is to go beyond the first condition for the subject to stand as a subject (the loss of wild desire) and to find the condition for recovering wildness. If asked in Confucius terms, it would be: How can the subject stand through learning 學 (*xue*) and rites 禮 (*li*) and, in turn, obtain the freedom of rational deviation through learning and rites? This question obtains its final answer from the theory of the mean 中庸 (*zhongyong*): In Confucian philosophy, the free and creative subject is a subject who walks down the path of the mean.

At the heart of Confucian philosophy, the mean is often explained as the wisdom of compromises and coordination and hence the wisdom of moderation that excludes wildness and extremes. However, this is a mean from which the spirit of uprightness or the will to uprightness has been omitted. Breathing behind the rationality of the mean that has been centralized by the will to straightness is the madness of the unbridled 狂者 (*kuangzhe*) or the timid 狷者 (*juanzhe*). There, the death drive oriented beyond the pleasure principle squirms.[5] When such a radical element (the Real in the Lacanian sense) is excluded, the mean turns into something like a cola drink that has lost its carbonation. In other words, it becomes "coffee without caffeine, beer without alcohol, . . . cigarettes without nicotine."[6] A yearning for radicality—this is the key element that renders modernism alive. This element can be translated, in turn, into a yearning for uprightness. A yearning for uprightness is resistance against castration, a challenge against false consciousness.

The Public and the Private in the Confucian Sense

The Confucian subject can easily be seen as the archetype of a castrated subject. This is true when the family ideology, which has had strong domination over the Confucian tradition, comes to the foreground. In Confucian philosophy, the state is an extension of the family. Hegel's satirical remark that there only exists the family spirit in China is not completely erroneous. Social solidarity is based on consanguineous solidarity. Though Westerners represented ideal society with a focus on friendship, filial piety 孝 (*xiao*) and fraternal deference 悌 (*ti*) constituted a model of social relations in the Confucian tradition. In a patriarchal order rendered ideologically absolute, the yearning for uprightness often had to be frustrated. The evils of this

5. Regarding this point, see Kim Sang-Hwan, "Confucian Golden Mean as Justice," *Ecoethica*, vol. 6 (2017): 11–24.
6. Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* (London: Verso, 2002), 10.

phenomenon lie in the blurring of the distinction between the public and the private. In Confucian philosophy, the public sphere is represented as an order of righteousness, and the private sphere is represented as an order of gain 利 (*li*), respectively. The objective condition of publicness is the pursuit of righteousness that stands in opposition to private desire. If so, then where does the subjective condition of publicness that interlocks with the pursuit of righteousness lie? It lies in uprightness or integrity 正直 (*zhengzhi*).

What must be explained through the pair of uprightness and righteousness, above all, is the scholar-gentry spirit. A figure representative of the Sarim faction 士林派 ("Forest of Literati") in the sixteenth century, Gim Seong-il 金誠一 (1538–1593; pen name, Hakbong 鶴峰) left over 1,500 poems, which often feature the images of the sword. Tantamount to scholar-gentry's embodiment, the sword was an object of pledges and promises, a representation of resentment and regret, or a mirror of self-praise and self-reflection, depending on the occasion.[7] According to an extant record, Gim Seong-il one day gathered his disciples, distributed swords to them, and urged them resolutely to sever the tie between righteousness and gain 利 (*li*) with those swords. In other words, he was enjoining them to cut off private gain resolutely and to adopt public righteousness. Even regardless of such anecdotes, in general, the scholar-gentry spirit has been directly linked to the image of the sword. The scholar-gentry spirit is not bending one's will to moral causes 大義 (*dayi*) even with a sword at one's throat. Seen thus, it is apparent that the warrior spirit was not the only thing to squirm with the death drive. Unafraid of death, the scholar-gentry spirit consists of uprightness as its subjective essence and the pursuit of public righteousness as its objective essence.

At one time, Korea under the Joseon Dynasty 朝鮮 (1392–1910) was replete with a keen scholar-gentry spirit. However, not only Korea but most nations with a Confucian tradition underwent a decline, weighed down by consanguineous paternalism and feudal closedness. Faced with the hypnotic effect of the family ideology, the sword of the scholar-gentry spirit failed clearly to sever the thread tying public justice and private gain. In fact, the failure firmly to shatter consanguineous paternalism could already be seen in Confucius and Mencius 孟子 (ca. 372–ca. 289 BC) themselves as well.

If the key to Confucian thought lies in benevolence 仁 (*ren*), then benevolence is ultimately a concept rooted in familial love. Confucius dreamed of a society overflowing with familial love. He yearned for a community where the father-son, monarch-subject, and mentor-disciple relationships formed a trinity, for a nation united by human feelings: "A village can be said to be beautiful only when its customs are benevolent. If one does not choose to live among benevolent people, how could

7. See Song Jae So 宋載邵, "The Image of the Sword in Hakbong Gim Seong-il's Spirit of Loyalty and Travel Poetry" 鶴峰 金誠一의 義理 精神과 紀行詩에 나타난 劍의 이미지, in *The Aesthetics of Sino-Korean Poetry and Historical Truth* 漢詩 美學과 歷史的 眞實 (Seoul: Changbi Publishers 創批, 2001), 152–83.

one be said to be wise?"[8] Such a question is the guiding ideology leading the entire *Analects*.

In Confucian philosophy, the scholar-gentry spirit is in the position to defend the ideology of living in a benevolent village 里仁 (*liren*) or living among benevolent people 處仁 (*churen*). Equipped with the arms of strict criticism, the scholar-gentry spirit even braves death for public moral causes. However, squirming in the will to straightness, the death drive is occasionally neutralized by excessive familial love. In other words, uncontrolled consanguineous feelings suddenly rise so that the ideology of living among benevolent people becomes corrupt. In fact, from the very beginning, the *Analects* elucidates filial piety as the root of all conduct and as the foundation of social order. Not only Confucius but also his disciples located the basis of benevolence in filial piety. As a result of the teaching that "Filial piety and reverence for one's superiors are the basis for practicing benevolence,"[9] love came to be confused with blind obedience to a hierarchical order. In particular, from the Han Dynasty 漢 (206 BC–AD 220) and onward, the ideology of loyalty 忠 (*zhong*) and filial piety was consolidated as the key to Confucian ethics.

Confucian Paternalism

The influence of Confucianism was greater on Korea than on any other country around the globe. Consequently, filial piety has been considered a measure of humanness among Koreans. If saints who devoted themselves to God were the models of spiritual life in medieval Christian society, in East Asia, filial children who sacrificed themselves for their parents were the objects of reverence as much as were saints. Without exception, all countries that continued such a tradition came to be embroiled in inevitable philosophical debates as soon as they stepped over the threshold of modernization. At the heart of such debates was the question of whether or not Confucian ethics was a hotbed of social corruption.[10]

For example, in the *Analects* is a story about a son who reports his father's theft of sheep to the government authorities. When the minister of a neighboring country praises this young man as a person of integrity, Confucius thus answers: "People of integrity in my village differ from him. Fathers hide sons and sons hide fathers, but integrity lies precisely amidst them."[11] A similar tale is included in the *Mencius* 孟子

8. *The Analects* 4-1: "里仁爲美, 擇不處仁, 焉得知?"
9. *The Analects* 1-2: "君子務本, 本立以道生. 孝悌也者, 其爲仁之本與."
10. As for a recent case where this issue was raised and led to a fierce debate, see Liu Qingping, "Confucianism and Corruption: An Analysis of Shun's Two Actions Described by Mencius," *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy* 6:1 (2007): 1–19.
11. "Zilu" 子路, *The Analects* 13-18. Such a response is opposite the attitude of Shuxiang 叔向 (Yangshe Xi 羊舌肸; ?–ca. 528 BC) recorded in the *Commentary of Zuo* 春秋 左氏傳 (*Chunqiu Zhushizhuan*) by Confucius himself as an embodiment of uprightness. Shuxiang neither concealed his elder brother, who was legally liable, nor exon-

as well. "What would Emperor Shun 舜 [ca. 2294–ca. 2184 BC], the great monarch, have done if his own father had killed a person?" When a disciple musters his imagination and poses this question, Mencius replies as follows. Of course, the ruler would have let his father be arrested at a judge's orders according to procedures. At night, however, he would have cast off his position as a monarch like worn-out shoes and rushed to the prison. Shun then would have "stolen away with his father on his back and lived by the seashore, being very happy for the rest of his life and forgetting everything that he had done previously as the Son of Heaven 天子 [*Tianzi*; i.e., Emperor of China]."[12]

Children's feelings for their parents are infinitely idealized through such stories. Before filial feelings, even the position of the Son of Heaven, which wields the greatest power on earth, becomes as meaningless as worn-out shoes. What, then, would become of such things as law, justice, and common good, much less? They, of course, would become as light as dust and as worthless as rheum. It is none other than such points at which critics raise their voices. In other words, Confucian ethics stresses consanguinity including the father-son relationship to such an extent that it fosters a climate where public justice as represented by law is held in contempt. This point becomes even more pronounced when compared with the ethics of the Kantian-Christian tradition, which saw moral laws as categorical imperatives (i.e., orders that must be followed unconditionally without exception).

Likewise, in the *Analects*, filial piety is formulated as the simple imperative of "Do not transgress (無違)":[13] Never transgress one's parents' intention. This is the Confucian categorical imperative. The problem, however, is that one must unconditionally follow not a certain universal law but the intention of particular individuals called one's own "parents." Furthermore, the Confucian categorical imperative is characterized by its order that one's parents must be followed unconditionally even when they have committed wrongs.[14] As has been mentioned earlier, in the Confucian tradition is a doctrine that the public and the private, or righteousness and gain, must be distinguished strictly. The heart of the scholar-gentry spirit lies in the firmness with which one defends public moral causes, even staking one's life. Nevertheless, before Confucius's categorical imperative that one's parents' intention must be followed unconditionally, not only the scholar-gentry spirit but also the authority of social justice and common good can easily be incapacitated.

---

erated the latter from three instances of crime (fourteenth year in the reign of Duke Zhao [of Lu] [魯]昭公, *The Commentary of Zuo*). Regarding this, see Yoo Myong Jong, "Confucius' Thought on Uprightness," 199: "Although Confucius sought to retain both uprightness and familial feelings instead of seeking to break through ethnic closedness with uprightness, as did Shuxiang, when they collided, feelings came to be placed first."

12. *The Mencius* 13-35.
13. *The Analects* 2-5.
14. See the *Analects* 1-11, 4-20, and 19-18.

Indeed, when the *Mencius* is examined, there is a passage extolling Emperor Shun's virtue in conferring a provincial vassal state on a half-younger brother who previously sought to harm him.[15] From the perspective of the people, this cannot at all be seen as a fair personnel management measure because they must now be ruled by an incompetent and immoral person. Rather, it can be viewed as a case of the distortion of the appointment of capable and talented figures or the fair enforcement of law due to nepotism. Though Shun has fully performed his role as a son or an elder brother, he has unwittingly made a decision that will torment his people. To put it harshly, Confucius's categorical imperative and the familial paternalism interlocked with it can become principles for justifying and even praising the corruption of government officials. They can also serve as the driving force inciting nepotism. In other words, filial children can ruin nations.

Reverence and Inner Verticalization

However, let us ask once more: What indeed is filial piety? To disciples who asked about filial piety, Confucius always stressed one's mental attitude: "Filial piety nowadays refers to the ability to support one's parents materially. However, for even dogs and horses are all sustained, how could one be distinguished from the beasts but for reverence?"[16] As is apparent from such sentences, Confucius located the heart of filial piety in reverence 敬 (*jing*): "Revere and revere so that, in the end, there is no transgression" (又敬不違).[17] This is the entirety of the Confucian categorical imperative.

The Chinese character *jing* 敬 originates from *pu* 攵 ("fear of caning") and *gou* 苟 ("words of self-blame and regret sought after at the brink of death"). It signifies righting and correcting one's heart. The significance of this word in Confucian philosophy is best expressed in the *Classic of Changes* 易經 (*Yijing*): "A virtuous person 君子 [*junzi*] straightens his interior 直內 [*zhinei*] with reverence, squares his exterior 方外 [*fangwai*] with righteousness. For when reverence and righteousness are established, those who follow his virtuousness will arise, he will never be solitary."[18] In these sentences, which show that straightness and righteousness are concepts forming a pair, reverence apparently is something that restores and preserves uprightness. If righteousness is the principle of squaring one's exterior, then reverence is the principle of straightening one's interior. The principle of straightening one's interior, reverence may very well be called the form of the Confucian interiority.

15. *The Mencius* 9-3.
16. *The Analects* 2-7: "今之孝子, 是謂能養. 至於犬馬, 皆能有養, 不敬, 何以別乎?"
17. *The Analects* 4-18.
18. Trigram *Kun* 坤卦, "Commentary on the Words" 文言傳 [*Wenyanzhuan*], *The Classic of Changes*: "君子 敬以直內 義以方外 敬義立而德不孤." This sentence is worth examining together with "In general, to have attained mastery is to have an upright nature and to love moral causes" 夫達也者, 質直而好義 from the *Analects* (12-20).

If reverence is the principle of straightening one's interior, then the end of this straightening of one's interior is oriented toward the height of the Mandate of Heaven 天命 (*Tianming*). The Confucian subject always stands on the path of self-cultivation, and that path of cultivation is completed in one's sensitivity to the Mandate of Heaven. For Confucians, the entire path to learning starts from piety, which is the principle of inner verticalization, and returns to piety. However, at the starting point of all such journey lies the praxis of filial piety. This is closely related to the method of the ability to draw analogies from what is near at hand 能近 取譬 (*nengjin qupi*) stressed by Confucius. The methodology of the ability to draw analogies from what is near at hand is that what is distant must be realized from what is close and what is high must be accomplished from what is low.[19] Confucians of the past stressed filial piety to one's parents not simply because they supported a patriarchal order but also because they viewed this virtue as the source of all kinds of lofty enlightenment. In other words, even the path to correctly establishing one's heart-mind and finally attaining mutual rapport with the Mandate of Heaven, too, had to start from love for one's parents, who were the closest objects of daily praxis.

If the Confucian subject stands through rites (立於禮), it is because the subjective essence of rites lies precisely in reverence, the principle of inner verticalization.[20] The primary condition for learning and practicing rites lies in the ability correctly to establish one's interiority through piety. Filial piety is the most concrete and effective way to accumulate such an ability to straightening one's interior in everyday life. Finding the method for fostering oceanic matter-energy 浩然之氣 (*haoranzhiqi*) in the preservation of straightness,[21] Mencius taught that the spirit vast enough to cover heaven and earth likewise must be accumulated from filial piety, which was the praxis of inner verticalization in daily life. Learned through filial piety in Confucian philosophy, reverence is the subjective essence of rites and is a method of cultivation toward the height of the Mandate of Heaven.[22] In other words, the path to becoming a sage like Emperors Yao 帝堯 (ca. 2356–ca. 2255 BC) and Shun, too, lies in the praxis of filial piety.[23]

Confucian Existentialism

When viewed from such a perspective, it is no coincidence that Bak Jong-hong 朴鐘鴻 (1903–1976; penname, Yeoram 洌巖), who inherited the scholar-gentry spirit, should have interpreted the entire existentialism as a "philosophy of sincerity" 誠實.

19. *The Analects* 6-30: "夫仁者, 己欲立而立人, 己欲達而達人. 能近取譬, 可謂仁之方也已." *The Doctrine of the Mean* 中庸 [*Zhongyong*] 15-1: "君子之道, 辟如行遠必自邇, 辟如登高必自卑."
20. *The Mencius* 8-28: "仁者愛人, 有禮者敬人."
21. *The Mencius* 3-2: "其爲氣也, 至大至剛, 以直養而無害, 則塞天地之間."
22. *The Analects* 14-45: "修己以敬."
23. *The Mencius* 12-2: "堯舜之道, 孝悌而已矣."

Here, "sincerity" is a translation of the German *Redlichkeit*, which originally signifies "uprightness" or "straightness." To be faithful to the original language, existentialism would be a philosophy of straightness or a philosophy of integrity. It could be called a philosophy of verticality as well. The translation, which should have been "straightness" but was rendered as "sincerity," was natural for the Neo-Confucian tradition, which has viewed sincerity 誠 (*cheng*) and reverence as identical. Cheng Hao 程顥 (1032–1085) stated, "Because sincerity is the Way 道 [*Dao*] of heaven and piety is the foundation of human affairs, piety is none other than sincerity."[24] If piety and sincerity are identical (敬則誠), then because piety is a principle of straightening one's interior, inner straightness can, in turn, become something like sincerity. Bak Jong-hong discovered the word *Redlichkeit* for the first time while surveying Friedrich Nietzsche's concept of truth and embraced the significance of this word as agreement with oneself under Karl Jaspers's influence:

> When all truths with certain forms thus seem to have been lost, what remains as the final ground is sincerity. Sincerity is always sincerity toward one's own self. It is the premise of existence, and the generation of our own existence finally becomes possible because of it.[25]

In Nietzschean philosophy, the divine, absolute, and eternal all collapse. Theoretical knowledge that objectifies objects and seeks to view them within a fixed framework endlessly capsizes amidst the waves of generation. However, there is a way to sail even on that sea of catastrophes without sinking, which is none other than sincerity, which creates straightness. Here, "straightness" refers to agreement with oneself, unmediated and direct agreement. The self-regressive agreement that arises in sincerity creates a new balance and a different pivot each time. Consequently, straightness can become the driving force bringing about the "premise of existence" and the "generation of our own existence." Such an explication by Bak Jong-hong can be cited as a case of translating Confucian philosophy, which saw uprightness as a principle of acquiring and preserving interiority, into contemporary language.

Confucian philosophy is a product of an agrarian culture that pursued a harmonious community. In contrast, existentialism is an urban philosophy that resists the alienation of humans caused by industrialization. Nevertheless, when viewed from a distance, Confucian philosophy and existentialism have much in common. Above all, both approach humans from the perspective of practical behavior (concrete, subjective perspective) beyond the perspective of theoretical knowledge (abstract, objective perspective). In focusing more on the issue of life (e.g., "How is one to live?") than on the issue of knowledge (e.g., "What is to be known?") and placing weight on individuals' inner experiences that cannot be reduced to a third-person perspective,

24. *The Complete Works of the Two Chengs* 二程 全書 (*Ercheng Quanshu*), fasc. 2: "誠者天之道, 敬者人事之本, 敬則誠."

25. Bak Jong-hong, *Introductory Lectures on Philosophy* 哲學 槪論 講義, vol. 2 (Seoul: Minumsa Publishing Group, 1998), 99.

the two did not differ from each other. However, according to Jung Hwa Yol,[26] who has explicated such aspects lucidly, the point at which Confucian philosophy and existentialism truly approximate each other is at passages viewing inner verticalization as interlocking with outer horizontalization, or at passages stressing the fact that a regressive self-relationship is parallel to mutually subjective relationships with others.

In fact, reverence is the principle of inner verticalization, yet it belongs to the subjective essence of rites and, in that respect, is conditioned by the transversal line that demarcates mutually subjective relationships. The movement of straightening one's interior through piety mentioned by the *Classic of Changes* occurs simultaneously with the movement of squaring one's exterior through righteousness.[27] Mencius, too, stated that oceanic matter-energy was fostered by integrity yet "always form[ed] a pair with righteousness and the Way[, respectively]."[28] Uprightness always interlocks with righteousness and, at the same time, forms a pair with the Way. To form a pair with the Way is identical to forming a relationship with the Mandate of Heaven, which continues from the past to the future along a certain abstract line.

The Contemporary Condition for the Revival of the Confucian Concept of Publicness

The Way in the Confucian sense is not a maze trodden by a solitary individual but is a wide road that one must walk down with people in the world. Because vertical interiority further approximates the Great Way 大道 (*Dadao*) the more it deepens in Confucian philosophy, it never degenerates into closed interiority separate from others. Rather, it acquires a capacity for remote resonance that is open to others and directed toward the outside world. The statement in the *Analects* that "A virtuous person is not solitary and has neighbors without fail"[29] likewise must be understood from such a perspective. This stems from the fact that a virtuous person comes to have neighbors not because of his or her outward behavior but because of his or her inner integrity and participation in the opening Great Way. Consequently, Confucian philosophy and Kierkegaardian existentialism can never meet each other. The existential subject who forms an exclusive relationship with a deity at a vertical height amidst infinite separation from others is situated directly opposite the Confucian subject.

However, the existential subject described by Martin Heidegger, Jaspers, and Martin Buber is different. In these figures' philosophy, the existential subject awakens to his or her interdependence with others as he or she deepens in thought. The more he or she returns to himself or herself, the more this subject acquires the possibility of communication with others. In the end, he or she discovers that individual

26. Jung Hwa Yol, "Confucianism and Existentialism: Intersubjectivity as the Way of Man," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 30:2 (1969):186–201.
27. See note 18 in the present article.
28. *The Mencius* 3-2: "其爲氣也 . . . 以直養而無害 . . . 配義與道."
29. *The Analects* 4-25: "德不孤, 必有隣."

existence is rooted in social coexistence (*Mit-Sein*) and that social coexistence is rooted in individual existence. If such a thing as Confucian existentialism is possible, it can be anticipated only when the Confucian subject is reinterpreted with such a form of the existential subject in mind. In addition, it will be possible for publicness in the Confucian sense to be inherited and transmitted into modern culture only when it interlocks with such Confucian existentialism.