

A Theoretical Basis of Human Nature in Korean Neo-Confucianism  
- Focusing on the Human-Nonhuman Nature Debate

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The mind 心, nature 性, and feelings 情 are the core psychological concepts in the Neo-Confucian tradition of philosophical anthropology. Following the two previous debates in the sixteenth century, the Four-Seven Debate and the Human-Moral Mind Debate, on feelings and the mind, respectively, there arose another debate on nature in Korea in the eighteenth century, i.e. the Human-Nonhuman Nature Debate. This debate was deeply concerned with three interrelated questions, i.e. whether human nature is the same as nonhuman nature, whether all human mind is the same (or whether the sage's mind is the same as the ordinary man's mind), and whether the state of the mind (or mind-substance) before the arousal of feelings or thoughts is morally good.

The debate on nature was primarily performed by two scholars, Yi Kan (Oeam, 1677-1727) and Han Wŏn-jin (Namdang, 1682-1751) who were originally the students of Kwŏn Sangha (Suam, 1641-1721), who was a faithful follower of Yi I (Yulgok, 1536-1584). However, interestingly, although both of them focused on Yi I's theory of *litonggiguk* 理通氣局說 that *li* is pervasive and *ki* delimits, by putting an emphasis on different parts of the proposition they reached contrary conclusions to the three questions. Yi Kan offered positive answers to all the questions on the basis of his interpretation of *litong* 理通, whereas Han Wŏn-jin offered positive answers to all the questions on the basis of his interpretation of *kiguk* 氣局.

In what follows, I shall begin with clarifying the Neo-Confucian concept of nature in comparison with the Aristotelian concept in order to reveal its characteristics, and then discuss the implication and significance of Yi I's theory of *litonggiguk* which became the theoretical basis of Han Wŏn-jin and Yi Kan. Given these preliminary discussions, I shall turn to show how and why the two Neo-Confucians differ in understanding Yi I's theory and how their different understanding affects their views on the three questions stated above. In this way, we shall see that a small difference in their starting points can result in a huge difference in their consequential theories.

Keywords: The Human-Nonhuman Nature Debate (Ho-Rak Debate) 人物性同異論辨, the Sage-Ordinary Mind Debate 聖凡心同異論辨, the Debate on the Unaroused State of the Mind-Substance 未發心體論辨, the theory of *Litonggiguk* 理通氣局說, Yi I (Yulgok), Yi Kan (Oeam), Han Wŏn-jin (Namdang)