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Confucian moral duty and public service

Abstract

In a bureaucratic state, such as the Kingdom of Chosŏn, Confucian scholars had an important role at all levels of the social, political and administrative life. The public appointment depended largely on one's performance in the state examinations, an extremely difficult trial, which had tremendous importance and weighed heavily in the lives of Confucian scholars since holding a public post based on the results of the state examinations had not only great social impact, but carried economic value as well. As such, holding a public position meant a big change in one's social status; it brought privileges, but also responsibilities. Most of all, it meant loyalty and dedication to the king, the government and the state. Theoretically, this was in line with the Confucian moral values. In practice, the Confucian scholar-official often experienced conflicting feelings between their moral duty to serve others (state, king, people) in the macro-frame of the cosmic order, and their moral duty of self-transformation, an individual process that was at times at odds with the socio-political developments. Therefore, many Confucian scholars had doubts about their public involvement and either resigned from their positions or did not accept ranks or offices. The origins of this phenomenon and the debates about one's duty towards the state can be traced back to the time of Confucius. They can also be identified in the Japanese Confucian tradition, even if in Japan there are no civil examinations and no equivalent to the *yangban* society, since both traditions have as a starting point their view on one's moral duty under the Confucian classics, especially the *Great Learning* (*Daxue* 大學) and Neo-Confucian master Zhu Xi's comments on the classics, which highlight the role of the individual as a servant of the society. In this paper, I will investigate how this cultural pattern is perpetuated in the first half of Chosŏn thinkers such as Yi Hwang T'oegyŏ and Nammyŏng Chosik and in Japan by Fujiwara Seika

and Hayashi Razan.

Introduction

Among the important elements that created the Confucian tradition, the state examinations and the government appointment that depended on their result had a tremendous importance and weighed heavily in the lives of Confucian scholars. Even more so in Chosŏn Korea, a *yangban* bureaucratic state, which functioned following the principles of the civil rule (*munch'ichuŭi*). Confucian scholars from Chosŏn and from imperial China made extreme efforts in studying and preparing themselves to pass the civil examinations. And their efforts were well rewarded; consequently, a successful candidate brought honour to all of his family and the area he belonged to. Holding a public post based on results of the state examinations had equal importance and at the same time it carried economic value.

In Chosŏn Korea, the Confucian scholars, the *sŏnbi*, were called 'the primary force of the state'¹, a role they assumed and played for centuries, with all the complexity it acquired with the competition of various schools and political groups. However, these highly educated men, the 'primary force of the state', often expressed their doubts about their role as literati in the service of the state, about the meaning of their scholarly life and ultimately about their moral duty. Confucian scholars of Chosŏn seem to be affected by the tension between their drive towards individual study and practice of Confucian morality (self-cultivation) and the public duty for the state and government, which should also be part of Confucian morality. Theoretically, they should be inter-related, that is, one should result from the other, but in reality, judging by the number of justifications, letters of resignation and memorials they wrote to the kings, it seems that the two were regarded as being apart, if not in opposition. Talking about Yulgok, Young-chan Ro said that he was 'caught in the old age dilemma of the brilliant Confucian scholar-official: that is the conflict between official government duty and the private pursuit of his scholarly and philosophical interests. It was a conflict that he was never able to resolve adequately'.² And this is true of many other literati from Chosŏn. Many of the most prominent Confucian scholars from the beginning to the middle of Chosŏn who held a public post at one point

¹ In *Korean Philosophy – Sources and Interpretations*, ed. by Youn Sa-soon, Ch. 4, p. 380. and p. 384.

² *The Korean Neo-Confucianism of Yi Yulgok*, Introduction, p. 4.

in their life experienced some form of retirement from public duty. The reasons for rejecting public positions or withdrawing from them were various and complex; some of them were recurrent while others were singular. Sometimes the reasons were stated in official letters of resignation, or in individual letters they sent to friends or disciples, other times we guessed the reasons from the life of the scholar and the historical context he lived in. Some scholars, like Kim Sisŭp (1435-1493) retired to become Buddhist monks, others, like Sŏ Kyŏng-dŏk (1489-1546), did not accept official positions at all and remained in the countryside to dedicate themselves to the study. Many retired from public service a few times because of illness; Yi Hwang T'oegye (1501-1570) and Yi I Yulgok (1536-1584) are probably the most notorious cases.³ Other scholars had open political reasons: Yun Hyu (1617-1680) lived in the countryside and refused public posts because he opposed the terms of the peace agreement with the Manchus, Pak Sedang (1629-1703) held a series of minor posts but asked repeatedly to be relieved from office in spite of having outstanding credentials after having passed the special *munkwa* examination held on the occasion of King Hyŏnjong's enthronement in 1660.⁴ All of these scholars seem to have experienced a break between the ideal of moral cultivation in the spirit of the true Confucian way and the duty they had, as Confucian scholars, to serve the state and the people (the others) whom they should always place above themselves and their personal interest.

The classic heritage

Korean scholars from Chosŏn are not the only Confucians confronted with this dilemma about entering government service versus following their individual path in learning the Way. Debates on one's moral duty to actively serve the state are present since the time of Confucius and are often set forth in the *Analects*. Confucius' political career is one marked by at least one withdrawal from the public post he held. According to the *Shiji*,⁵ in 501 BC, Confucius was appointed to the minor position of governor of a town in the state of Lu. Later, he rose to the position of

³ See Edward Chung, *The Korean Neo-Confucianism of Yi T'oegye and Yi Yulgok*, p. 29.

⁴ For Yun Hyu and Pak Saedang see M. Deuchler, 'Despoilers of the way', in *Culture and State in Late Chosŏn Korea*.

⁵ *Historical Records* 史記, Sima Qian (~94 BC).

Minister of Crime. The *Shiji* and also *the Zuo Zhuan*⁶ tell us that Confucius left the state of Lu, his homeland, in 497 BC. He travelled to the neighbouring states of Wei, Song, Chen and Cai where he offered advice. At age 68, he returned to the state of Lu. Whether he held an official position upon his return is unclear; it seems that he advised various government officials, without being officially appointed himself. In the *Analects*, he is presented as teaching to his disciples towards the end of his life and although the problem of retiring from public service is not a recurrent one, it is the object of at least two of his discussions with them. Every single person in the Confucian society has a predestined social role that he should fulfil, the ruler should be a ruler, the minister a minister, the father a father, the son a son. As such, the social duty becomes implicitly a moral duty. Nevertheless, Confucius points out that there are times when it is morally allowed and acceptable to give up one's social-moral duty. He says that as with everything else, public service is also governed by moral laws, which should enforce the presence of the Way (*Dao* 道) in the society. The true Confucian scholar, the one that possesses Mindfulness (*Ren* 仁), has the ability to decide about government service by keeping in mind that the government on earth should mirror the Way of Heaven (*tian dao* 天道). As such, if the state fails to follow the heavenly model, then the scholar has the right and the duty to withdraw from public service.

The Master said:

'If you are strong, trustworthy and fond of learning, you can remain firm in your love of the Way, even in the face of death. Do not take up residence in a state that is troubled, and leave the state that is disordered. If the Way is being realized in the world, then show yourself; if it is not, then retire to reclusion. In a state that has the Way, to be poor and of low status is a cause of shame; in a state that is without the Way, to be wealthy and honored is equally a cause for shame'.⁷

⁶*The Commentary of Zuo* 左傳, traditionally considered a commentary of the Spring and Autumn Annals Chunqiu 春秋.

⁷*Analects* 8.13:
子曰：「篤信好學，守死善道。危邦不入，亂邦不居。天下有道則見，無道則隱。邦有道，貧且賤焉，恥也；邦無道，富且貴焉，恥也。」

Although simple in theory, things are not so straightforward. Confucius himself did not abide by his theory. He left the state being afraid of retaliations from his adversaries after having failed in his political-administrative plans of restoring full authority of the state to the ruler by dismantling the fortifications of the city strongholds belonging to the three families, which held the political power in the state of Lu. However, he did not officially resign at that time. We know from the *Shiji* that he did resign later. The official reason for his resignation was apparently that the Duke of Lu committed a ceremonial impropriety by neglecting to send to Confucius a portion of the sacrificial meat that was his due. However, this was only a pretext, the reason for his resignation was that the Duke of Lu failed to attend his official duties, thus, despising the fundamental rules of Confucian teachings and bringing shame on Confucius for serving such a ruler. So, Confucius left his office and the state of Lu and in the *Analects* we have the justification: a true Confucian does not run away from public service, but is not part of an apparatus of bad government. He abides by the moral duty and that process is resumed by Xun Zi (479–221 B.C.E.) in a passage based on the *Analects*:

The gentleman knows that whatever is imperfect and unrefined does not deserve praise. And so he repeatedly recites his learning in order to master it, ponders in order to comprehend it, makes his person so as to dwell in it, and eliminates things harmful to it in order to nourish it. He makes his eyes not want to see what is not right, makes his ears not want to hear what is not right, makes his mouth not want to speak what is not right, and makes his heart not want to deliberate over what is not right. [...] power and profit cannot sway him, the masses cannot shift him, and nothing in the world can shake him.⁸

Through self-cultivation, based on the constant study of Confucian classics and on personal training of one's mind-heart (*xin* 心) towards perfect balance, the scholar achieves that state of virtue above the mundane, which enables him to judge things equidistantly and fulfil his role of making the Way prevail in the world without seeking any profit from this, thus, fulfilling the Confucian desideratum of 'utter substance and grand function' (全體大用 *quan ti da yong*).

⁸ *Xunzi*, Ch.1, translated by Eric L. Hutton in *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy*, edited by Philip J. Ivanhoe and Bryan W. Van Norden, p. 252.

Divergent views on the social role of self-cultivation and “sage learning” in Chosŏn

The Confucian scholars of Sung China and Chosŏn Korea found the norm of applying this understanding of one's moral duty of self-cultivating for his own sake and for the sake of the others in a phrase from the beginning of the *Great Learning* (*Da Xue* 大學). The public role is assumed by a scholar-official or by the ruler, according to three principal rules:

The way of the Great Learning lies in manifesting luminous virtue, renewing the people, and resting in the utmost good.⁹

Following these guidelines, the Confucian tradition from Song onwards, based on many of Zhu Xi's comments to the Great Learning, has identified and extensively discussed two important and interrelated aspects of scholarship: the investigation of things (*gewu* 格物) and the practice of self-cultivation (*xiuji* 修己). They are also key elements of what Confucian scholars called “sage learning” (*shengxue* 聖學), which implies the idea of one's moral duty and has to be for a public purpose (the greater good).

Taking the thesis of the “sage learning” as the core of his teachings, T'oegye advocated for the power of self-cultivation through moral practice for the restoration of the social harmony and the Heavenly order. In other words, he emphasized the importance of the Confucian model of social engagement. Confucius said that ‘Man can make the Way great – it is not the Way that makes the man great.’¹⁰ That is why for T'oegye, the self-cultivation is not only a scholarly task, it is a way of life and a process of spiritual formation and transformation. Endowed with spiritual implications, the practice of self-cultivation becomes thus for T'oegye the true Confucian Way. And it is a group of processes such as ‘expanding knowledge through the investigation of things’ (*gyeokmul chiji* 格物致知), ‘making one's thoughts sincere’ (*seong eui* 誠意), ‘rectifying one's mind-heart’ (*jeongsim* 正心) and ‘cultivating one's own body’ (*susin* 修身). By abiding in all of these, the Confucian scholar is able to put sage learning into practice in all his activities, be it private study or public duty. The role of the scholar in T'oegye's view is clearly expressed in his

⁹大學之道在明明德，在親民，在止於至善。

¹⁰ Analects 15:29 人能弘道，非道弘人。

exchange of letters with Nammyōng Chosik (1501-1572). One such letter was sent by T'oegye to Nammyōng in 1553, to encourage him to accept the position of *Chōnsaengsōjubu* to which he had just been appointed. At the time, T'oegye was the Head of Sōnggyun'gwan Academy.

In my humble judgment, to refuse the government office is tantamount to neglecting the bond between king and subject. Who can do away with this great moral bond? [It is said] the ancient scholars were, too, prudent in taking office because it was hardly possible to prepare civil examination without disturbing their [moral] minds, and to do a trivial job [albeit recommended] would not be honorable. Either case would tend to spoil a scholar's moral integrity. Your case is different, however. Since you have been recommended by Confucian scholars in rural areas, it would not be so disturbing as taking it through the civil examination, and since you are immediately be appointed to the sixth-grade office, it would not be so despicable as taking a trivial position.¹¹

Nammyōng did not accept the position. In T'oegye's view, his continuous refusal to accept public appointments almost advocated for non-participation in public life, not fulfilling the Confucian moral duty, which attracted T'oegye's strong criticism, who once even accused Nammyōng of being a Daoist! Nammyōng's refusal to accept public dignities and the memorials he wrote to the king, sometimes very direct and critical, remind us that sometimes the Confucian scholars resorted to Confucius' arguments that there are instances when distancing oneself from public service (and the king) is accepted. Following this logic, Nammyōng is highly critical of scholars like T'oegye who stayed in government during the reigns of King Chungjong and King Myōng-jong. When he resigned from official position he had held in the Tansōng province for a very short time, he wrote an extremely direct and critical memorial to King Myōng-jong, stating:

[Your] corrupt government has undermined the root of the state, displaced the decree of Heaven, and caused the hearts of the people to be estranged from government. [...] In spite of this extremely deplorable situation, however, officials in lower positions are indulged in dissipation and debauchery, whereas officials in higher positions are obsessed with extending their personal gain while swaggering in the court. None of them think seriously about how to rectify this dismaying situation. Our state is

¹¹ *T'oegye Chōnsō* 191, translated by Sungmoon Kim in 'Confucian Charisma and the True Way of the Moral Politician' in *The Review of Korean Studies*, 7:3, 2004, p. 217.

like a fish whose belly is decaying.¹²

As pointed out by Kim Sungmoon, for Nammyōng, the good government of the people, (or *Daxue's* 'prevailing of the way') is more important than the duty of the scholar to serve his king due to the inseparable bond between them, the first of the five cardinal bonds in Confucianism: king – minister, father – son, husband – wife, elder brother – younger brother, friend – friend.¹³ In spite of the apparent differences in opinion regarding the Confucian scholar's way of public involvement, it seems that both scholars were advocating for the scholars' role and importance in the governing exercise, but the ways they envisioned for this task were different. However, it seems that both T'oegye and Nammyōng had great reverence for Cho Kwangjo Chōngam (1482-1520), and they might have both taken his statement to their hearts: 'Sarimpa scholars are devoted to public affairs, not taking care of themselves. They try to practice righteousness, not being afraid of consequent calamities'.¹⁴ However, their interpretation of this iconic view on the role of the scholars is definitely divergent.

The ambiguity of how and when a scholar should enter government office and when one can leave his office was cause of many discussions among Confucian scholars from Chosōn. In spite of all the scholarly arguments invoking the Confucian classics, it seems that there are no clear rules, that many things are contextual and that many of the scholars of Chosōn viewed the public duty and the individual duty of self-cultivation as two separate things. In spite of urging Nammyōng to take up official position, T'oegye had many times refused appointments himself or retired from government positions he held. Having passed the state examinations with honours in 1534, T'oegye was appointed to 29 government positions, but he retired from office many times. A few of the times, he was forced into retirement, when his critiques of the corrupt government were too vehement, other times he left office due to illness or to dedicate himself to the study of the Confucian classics and to self-cultivation. He

¹² Sungmoon Kim, op. cit., p. 218.

¹³ In fact, according to Zhu Xi, the original relationship between the king and the subject was based upon righteousness 義 (*yi*), to which timely judgment is central. Hence, the subservience of a subject, originally a virtuous Confucian scholar, to the king could not command absolute value but rather would depend on the peculiarity of the situation and personal moral judgment'. Sungmoon Kim, op.cit., p. 221.

¹⁴ Chamchangwansigyei, *Jeongamjip*. Vol. 3. in *Korean Philosophy – Sources and Interpretations*, ed. by Youn Sa-soon, Ch. 4, p.385.

held a few magistrate posts in the provinces (he was in turn governor of Danyang and of Punggi province), and he was also called back to court from retirement. He rose to the position of Head Instructor of the Sungkyunkwan Confucian Academy in 1552 but did not stay long in that high dignity either and later declined other prominent offices such as that of Minister of Rites (*yechop'ansa*). This contradiction between what T'oegye sustains and what he does is also visible in the letters he exchanged with Kidaesūng Kobong (1527-1572), who having recently passed the state examinations and having immediately afterwards accepted a public post, writes to T'oegye, seeking his advice on his troubling dilemma of considering giving up public service in order to dedicate himself to scholarship:

'I eagerly yearn for royal permission from the king to return to my native village and rediscover my previous scholarly endeavors. However, I do not know if such a request will come into fruition. I am guessing you have left your government post and are recuperating. Even if you forbid yourself from becoming lax regarding your affections for the king, you must be experiencing more leisure time, quietly living in the forest. I truly envy you'.¹⁵

In his answer to Kobong, he warns him that entering government service should be very seriously pondered and the decision to do so should not be taken lightly and once the public post is accepted, the scholars should know that it comes with great responsibility. On the other hand, T'oegye thinks that one that rushes into public service cannot be genuinely interested in the study. T'oegye's view on the "perils" associated with public service are not fundamentally different than those of Nammyōng. He too thinks that there are scholars-officials who sway away from the Confucian way by seeking personal profit or fame and for whom official duty is only a way of reaching their vain goals.

In the beginning I did not know that the present world was so different from the world of the past and that we were different from the Chinese. I did not know scholars would forget the proper moral principle for entering and leaving government posts, that no cases existed of scholars voluntarily leaving their government posts, and that scholars

¹⁵*T'oegye and Gobong Write Letters* by Kim Young-doo, Letter from Gobong to T'oegye, Letter #4, 1558-1561, p. 8.

would add increasingly to the superficiality of their names.¹⁶

Regardless of how they understood the way of the scholar, the role was the same for T'oegye as for Nammyōng and other *sarim* 士林 scholars: the practice of 'righteousness and principle' (*ūiri* 義理) in order to 'remedy social ills and corruption',¹⁷ because 'learning of righteousness and principle' (*ūirichihak* 義理之學) and 'integrity' (*chōrui* 節義) are ultimately defining principles for Korean Confucianism, and not only for Korean Confucianism.

Two views on the purpose of Confucian scholarship in Tokugawa Japan

Although different from China and Korea, in terms of state or government service, Japan and Japanese Confucian scholars are also confronted with the same dichotomy. There is no civil state service examination like in China or Korea, nor a system for public selection of magistrates and state employees in Tokugawa Japan, but Japanese scholars do take up public roles and assume official positions around feudal lords (*daimyō*). And just as in all of the Confucian cultural area, in Japan too there is interest in Confucian study, and for Confucian social ethics – the individual self-cultivation for the good of the society. Such issues were the topics of investigation and discussion for many Confucian scholars in Japan, starting from the early years of Neo-Confucianism and with its representative figures of Fujiwara Seika and Hayashi Razan.

For Fujiwara Seika, the Great Learning was the epitome of the role of scholarship since he wrote that 'there is no Confucianism outside this work'.¹⁸ His interpretation of the *Great Learning* from his cardinal work *Daigaku Yōryaku* 大学要略 (The Epitome of the Great Learning¹⁹), which encompasses also commentaries on Zhu Xi's view on the *Great Learning*, goes along the same lines as the texts of T'oegye, whose works he was familiar with; the public role is assumed by one (be it ruler or minister) according to the Three Guidelines set in the *Daxue*: manifesting luminous virtue (*zai ming mingde* 在明明德), renewing the people (*zai shinmin* 在新民), and resting in the utmost good (*zai zhi yu zhishan* 在止於至善).

¹⁶ Id., Letter #6, from T'oegye to Gobong, pp.13-14.

¹⁷ Id., p.378.

¹⁸ In *Daigaku yōryaku*, in *Sources of East Asian Tradition*, p. 134.

¹⁹ Translated also as 'Digest of the Great Learning', in *Sources of Japanese Tradition*.

‘When you ask to which one of the three you should apply yourself first, my answer is that our Confucian teaching is a teaching of the “complete substance and great functioning (*quanti dayong* 全体大用).” Therefore, when the substance - that is, the “utmost good” - is there, the functions - that is, “luminous virtue” and “having affection for the people” - will necessarily also be present. You rest in “the utmost good,” and the transforming and nurturing of the people will spontaneously be achieved; this is how you “manifest luminous virtue.” The clarification of human relationships, which are “luminous virtue,” begins with “having affection for the people.” Yao’s merit reached all bordered by the Four Seas, but that was because he started from “having affection for the people.” In his case, however, we are talking about a sage. Even though an ordinary scholar may do everything he can, he will not be able to enter by practicing this discipline. For ordinary scholars, the discipline to which they should apply themselves and by which means they can enter is *gewu*.²⁰

Seika clearly delimitates the sage kings of the past (like the mythical emperors Yao and Shun) from the “ordinary scholars”, just like classic Confucians did. For Confucius, sagehood and the qualities of a sage are applicable only to heroes of the golden past and are unachievable by ordinary scholars. He avows that he is himself a “mere transmitter” of the Way, an interpreter and commentator, but not a sage. The Neo-Confucians of Song China, particularly Zhu Xi, have brought this ideal closer to man, by rethinking the idea of the sage (*sheng ren* 聖人) and sage governing. For Seika, the ruler has a middle position between that of the sage kings and the scholars, he should follow the model of the sage kings, for which the starting point is ‘having affection for the people’, but should not ignore the scholarly ways of cultivating oneself, for which the starting point is the ‘investigation of things’ (*gewu* 格物). Scholars must also fulfil their public duty. In his letters to his disciple Hayashi Razan (1583-1657), Seika is very strict about this and even proposes punishments for the ones who do not do so, in spite of the fact that he himself avoided direct participation in public life. Seika was one of the scholars who had influenced Tokugawa Ieyasu (whom he met before the latter became *shogun*) in his political thought and social strategies, but he did not officially join the Ieyasu court nor acted as an official advisor in spite of the many times he was offered this role, distancing himself from the political arena in a

²⁰ From *Daigaku Yōryaku* translated by Richard Bowring in ‘Fujiwara Seika and the Great Learning’, *Monumenta Nipponica* 61.4 (Winter, 2006), p. 451.

way similar to Nammyōng Chosik in Chosōn Korea. Nevertheless, Seika understood that the role of the scholar related rather to the “formation” of a ruler than to the active participation in political life. As such, he acted as advisor to *daimyōs* with an interest in the study of Confucianism (such as Kobayakawa Hideaki and Akamatsu Hiromichi),²¹ and lectured, having understood the importance of shaping morally accomplished elites. The seeds for this kind of thinking might have been planted by Fujiwara Seika, but the effects were probably best visible in the beginning of the 19th century. The *bakufu* leader Matsudaira Sadanobu (1758-1829) had a project of preparing public servants by means of moral training. The curriculum that Matsudaira advocated was based on the standard texts of Zhu Xi, especially the Four Books and the *Elementary Learning* (*Xiao Xue* 小學). He also instituted examinations to offer official recognition of one’s training for government service. ‘His education had been in the Zhu Xi schools, and he acted in accordance with the fundamental premise of that teaching: that the whole political and social order rested on sound education in public morality sustained by individual moral and intellectual cultivation as expressed by Zhu Xi as “self-discipline” [as the key to] the governance of humankind’ (*shūko chijin*).²²

Hayashi Razan (1583-1657) was Fujiwara Seika’s disciple and just like his master before him, he dedicated himself to the study of Confucianism after having been trained in Zen Buddhism. He also served as advisor to the elites in the beginning of the Tokugawa *bakufu*, but unlike his master, he served as tutor and adviser to the first *shoguns*. Razan followed his master in taking responsibility for the formation of morally achieved leaders and for the education of scholars. So much so that he established the private Confucian academy *Shohei-ko*, which became the official institution for Confucian education of the Tokugawa shogunate in Edo, the heads of which (with the exception of Razan himself and his son Gahō) were all descendants of the Hayashi family.²³

Assuming an official role at the request of the *shogun* was not without intellectual and moral struggle for Hayashi Razan. Like a true Confucian scholar, he was also torn between his love for study and moral self-cultivation and his duty to the government, which at times he felt were in conflicting terms, as he confessed to his master Fujiwara Seika.

²¹Richard Bowring, ‘Fujiwara Seika and the Great Learning’, in *Monumenta Nipponica*, 61/ 4, 2006, p. 444.

²²*Sources of Japanese Tradition*, volume 2, p. 549.

²³*Sources of East Asian Tradition*, volume 2, pp. 138-140.

I feel as if I were opting more and more for fame and profit, as if I were hastening to get myself a flying neck shackle. It is shameful. It is terrible.²⁴

The inner conflict is somehow simplified by Razan and reduced to following the Confucian rule of not seeking profit, but of cultivating oneself and studying for the sake of knowledge and for being able to fulfil one's role in the world. In serving the governing authority, Razan enjoyed privileges that led to a bountiful life, which he felt was taking him away from following the Way and from pursuing Confucian sagehood.

Although as to outward circumstance, I have no cause for complaint (who, at my age has seen so much of the world and has such an excellent library at his disposal?), yet I feel lonely and misunderstood. I am urged to conform to people who have no understanding of my skills and aspirations; what is worse, I do conform. Great literary figures of former times maybe felt the same and perhaps turned Daoist precisely for that reason. However I do not want to follow their path. I want to follow the Confucian sages. But that course implies an obligation to act according to my convictions, and that I find myself unable to do. The strain caused by this conflict is showing in me and affecting even my literary talents.²⁵

Hayashi Razan's hesitation towards his role is one that is rather metaphysical. He is concerned with the Confucian Way, with the moral ideal of sagehood and he questions whether a true Confucian should enjoy a privileged life. He does not seem to have reserves vis-à-vis the governing methods or political decisions of the *shoguns* he serves. In a letter to his master, Fujiwara Seika, he confesses that he finds happiness in being in the service, then at Ieyasu's headquarters in Sunpu,²⁶ although he regrets not being able to improve his scholarship and not having proper Confucian scholars around him. His solution to make peace with his own consciousness is to believe that by holding a position close to the governing power he is fulfilling his moral duty as a Confucian scholar.

Conclusions

This struggle of understanding one's moral duty shows that Japanese Confucians, just like Korean ones, understood that the Confucian ideal of

²⁴ *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, p. 53.

²⁵ *Id.* p. 52.

²⁶ '[...]now I am in Suruga. Every morning and every night, when I look up, I see Mount Fuji rising above the clouds. How can this not be happiness?' in *Sources of East Asian Tradition*, vol.2, p. 136.

self-cultivation was not a simple and straightforward process and that it involved subtle mechanism and processual thought forms beyond the simple dichotomy of individual education and public duty. As such, moral duty (as part of the sagehood process) was applicable to both areas, being rather a 'narrow ridge between spiritual individualism and ethical socialism'.²⁷

In Chosŏn Korea, in a letter addressed to Confucian scholar-official Nam Sibŏ, T'oegye tried to reconcile individual cultivation and public duty in the following way:

First and most of all, your thinking should transcend ordinary worldly things such as hardship and mastery, the gained and the lost, honor and dishonor, benefit and harm, and so on, and then ensure that the illuminating mind is not hampered by [any of] these.²⁸

According to T'oegye, the moral duty of the Confucian scholar lies in following the Way at a deeper level of understanding (unavailable to non-scholars), achievable through the investigation of things, which allows him to act in such a way that the original harmony between human order and cosmic order is re-established. In this, self-cultivation plays a key role as the connecting "ridge" between the inner and the outer moral duty, and should not be seen either as isolated self-control or as collective social sanction.²⁹ It appears though that in spite of the fact that theoretically Confucian scholars from both traditions connected the inner and outer moral duty in their actions as public figures, be it by direct involvement in the governing of the country (T'oegye, Razan) or just indirectly by contributing through educating and training Confucian scholars (Nammyŏng, Seika), there were times when they all sanctioned the loss of this connection between individual transformation and social duty.

²⁷ Tu Wei Ming, *Humanity and Self-Cultivation*, p. 22.

²⁸ *Chasŏngnok* 1 in Edward Chung, *A Korean Confucian Way of Life and Thought*, p. 34

²⁹ Id. 25.

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