

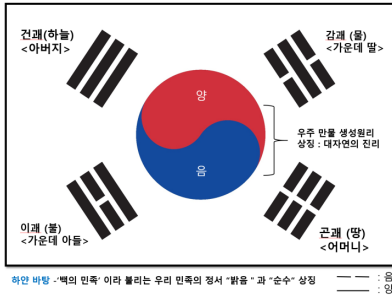
동양철학 4. 유교 ‘성리학 3’ - 주리론(主理論) and 주기론(主氣論)

Two Diverging Paths in Neo-Confucianism

1. 이/리 and 기 Are Inseparable (理氣不相離, 이기불상리/리기불상리)

<천문장리>

주역에서 온 “괘” = 음과 양의 변화를 조합하여 나타내는 총 8가지의 괘 중에서 4가지만 쓰임.



This principle states that ‘이/리 and 기 cannot be **[integrated/separated]**.’

• 이/리(理) : The universal principle that governs all things; the fundamental laws of existence.

• 기(氣) : The material force that constitutes the **[tangible/intangible]** world.

Every object and phenomenon in the universe contains both 이/리 and 기 —

이/리 provides structure and order, while 기 manifests in **[theoretical/**

material] reality. **Although [similar/distinct/distinctly], they are always [independent/interdependent].**

Examples

• The Flow of a River : A river flows from high to low. The law of flow(이/리) is **[universal/specific]**, but without water (기), the flow itself would not exist.

• Human Nature and Emotions : Humans possess an innate moral nature(이/리), but emotions and desires(기) can **[clarify/obscure]** it.

Thus, **이/리 cannot function without 기, and 기 cannot exist without 이/리.**

2. Between 이/리(理, Principle) and 기(氣, Vital Energy),



During the Joseon Dynasty, Confucian scholars grappled(해결책을 찾아) 고심하다 with a fundamental question : ‘Between 이/리(理, Principle) and 기(氣, Vital Energy), which is more fundamental?’

Although 주자(朱熹) had argued in his 이기론(理氣論) that 이/리(理) and 기(氣) are **[separable/inseparable]**, later scholars took **[similar/differing]** positions on their relative importance.

Some believed that 이/리(理) is the ultimate foundation and that 기(氣) merely follows its guidance, forming the school of 주리론(主理論, Primacy of 이/리). Others argued that 기(氣) is the fundamental substance and that 이/리(理) merely serves as its governing principle, leading to 주기론(主氣論, Primacy of 기(氣)).

This debate became one of the most significant philosophical **[consensuses/controversies]** in Neo-Confucianism 성리학 during the Joseon Dynasty.

3. 주리론 (이데아계) : 이/리(理) as the Ultimate Foundation

주리론(主理論) asserts that ‘이/리(理) is the fundamental essence of all things, and 기(氣) merely follows its order.’ One of its key proponents was 퇴계 이황(李滉, 1501-1570), a leading Confucian scholar in Joseon.

퇴계 이황(李滉) argued that 이/리(理) represents the fundamental law of the universe and that everything in existence moves according to this order. **He believed that human moral nature is also determined by 이/리(理) and [that/what] self-cultivation**자기수양 **through scholarly moral discipline and study is necessary to restore one’s inherently good nature.**

Based on this idea, he developed the Theory of **[Mature/Mutual]** Activation of 이/리(理) and 기(氣) (理氣互發說 이기호발설). He acknowledged that 기(氣) must ultimately be regulated by 이/리(理). This implied that humans are **[inherently/culturally]** moral beings and must **[strive/starve]** to maintain their virtue.

퇴계 이황’s ideas had a profound influence on Joseon society.

- Politics and education were centered around Confucian ethics and morality.
- The civil service examination system과거제도 required mastery of 주자’s Four Books(사서집주 四書集註).
- Personal moral cultivation was emphasized as a key aspect of one’s **[nature/culture]**.

[Therefore/However], this approach had limitations. While it upheld용호하다 **[theoretical/practical]** ideals, it often neglected **[theoretical/practical]** solutions to real-world현상계 problems. As Joseon society became increasingly **[simple/complex]**, the limitations of 주리론 became more **[apparent/obscure]**.

4. 주기론 : 기(氣) as the Fundamental Reality

In contrast, 주기론 argues that ‘기(氣) is the fundamental substance, while 이/리(理) merely governs it.’ Its leading advocate in Joseon was 율곡 이이(李珥, 1536-1584).

율곡 이이 contended주장하다 that 이/리(理) is merely a metaphysical concept, **[in which/whereas]** 기(氣) is the actual substance that constitutes reality. He believed that human nature is not **[varied/fixed]** but **[varies/fixes]** depending on one’s 기(氣).

This idea led to his Theory of Universal **[이(理)/기(氣)]** and Specific **[이(理)/기(氣)]**. He asserted that **[이(理)/기(氣)]** is a universal principle that applies everywhere, but solving real-world problems requires dealing with **[이(理)/기(氣)]**.

[Thus/Yet], practical governance and social reform were crucial. **Rather than focusing solely on [moral/social] ideals, he emphasized policy-making and institutional change as [ends/means] to improve [morality/society].**

올곡 이이's ideas had significant political implications:

- He advocated for the Ten-Thousand Troops Proposal(십만 양병설 十萬養兵說), warning of potential **[invasions/compromises]** and emphasizing military preparedness준비/전비.
- He pushed for government reforms and the modernization of education to make learning **[more/less]** practical.
- His ideas later influenced the 실학(實學, **[Ideal/Practical] Learning**) movement, which **[praised/criticized] Neo-Confucian rigidity and promoted [ideal/pragmatic] approaches to governance.**

However, because Confucian moral values dominated Joseon society, 주리론(主理論) remained **[more/less]** influential than 주기론(主氣論). **[Therefore/Nevertheless]**, its emphasis on **[ideal/practical]** and realistic solutions gained prominence중요성 in the later years of the dynasty.

5. 주리(主理) vs. 주기(主氣) : Relevance적용 to the Modern World

The debate between 주리론(主理論) and 주기론(主氣論) was not just a philosophical dispute: it represented a clash between idealism이상주의 and pragmatism실용주의/현실주의.

- 주리론(主理論) emphasized moral values and the importance of cultivating human **[virtue/vice]**.
- 주기론(主氣論) focused on real-world solutions and the need for systemic reform.

During Joseon, 주리론(主理論) dominated the intellectual and political landscape. However, as society evolved, 주기론(主氣論) gained **[friction/reflection]**, influencing later reformist개혁적인 movements such as 실학(實學, Practical Learning).

Even today, this debate remains **[relevant/irrelevant]**:

- Should we **[prosper/prioritize]** moral ideals, or should we focus on solving real-world problems?
- Is ethical leadership more important, or should governance be based on **[morality/efficiency]** and practicality?
- Should personal self-cultivation take **[precedence/regression]**, or should we **[prosper/prioritize]** social and institutional reforms?

These questions extend beyond **[physics/philosophy]**; they shape how we approach politics, education, and leadership in contemporary society.

Ultimately, the Neo-Confucian debate over 이(理) and 기(氣) is not just about the past — it continues to offer profound insights into the challenges of modern life.