



Moderate Intuition

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Some years ago, a student of Harvard Divinity School called Paul Munzen seriously became a Buddhist. In his book called [From Harvard to Temple Hwakyel], he says that he found the truth in Buddhism through a Great Korean Zen Master called SeungSahn who had visited Harvard.¹⁾

A Strange Conversion to Buddhism

Paul asked a very simple question to the Master:

“Sir, What is life?”

The Master answered him:

“Do not think about your life too seriously. Go for a cup of coffee.”

Paul was shocked by the answer but not satisfied and asked another question:

“Sir, What is truth?”

The Great Master answered him again:

“Do not think about truth. Only be enlightened by ‘don't-know mind.’”

Paul was really surprised not because the answer was silly, but because it was amazingly simple and also beyond logic. After some time later, he accepted Buddhism without great struggle because he was already fed up with critical studies at Yale and Harvard, and especially he was tired of formalized Christian life.

He is one of the persons who escaped from reason, and have gone “back to the before mind” or have committed himself intellectual suicide. Nowadays, his name is known as HyunGak rather than as Paul. He is one of leading Zen Buddhists and religious pluralists both in Korea and in the United States.

It is true that one of the epochal affairs of the 20th century is the meeting of Christianity

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and Buddhism as Arnold Toynbee correctly reported. Actually, the impact of Eastern thought on Western thinking and the exchange of East-West philosophies started centuries ago. But I personally think that one of the tragic incidents of the 21st century is the meeting of the Western 'dialectic non-reason' and the Eastern '*Moderate Intuition*'. These two combined world-views are producing many ugly problems in Asia as well as in Western countries. One of the problems is the worldwide religious pluralism.

The basic philosophies of SeungSahn and HyunGak chiefly come from not only Buddhism but also the mixture of older major religions of Asia. As Alfred North Whitehead said, "Those three ideas are religions as well as philosophies; the history of philosophy in the East is parallel to the history of the three religions called Taoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism."²⁾

The three major old religious philosophies have profoundly influenced the minds of the Easterners for more than two millennia and it's now urging the Westerners' progress. Therefore, to understand Eastern mind and today's religious trend we should first discuss those three religion-philosophies. Let me begin with Taoism.

(1) **Taoism**

Bertrand Russell once talked about the function and value of the Taoism in this way: "The function of Tao is well expressed in three words: production without possession, action without self-assertion, and development without dominion. The three categories called 'possession', 'self-assertion' and 'dominion' are virtues that the Western people have been seeking for a long time."³⁾

As Russell correctly understood Taoism, Tao is considered the truth that is true to the following categories: Politically, Tao is a form of anarchism. Cosmo-logically, Tao is the ultimate source of all existence. Ethically, Tao is the ground for morality, and epistemologically, Tao is the moderate and skeptical truth.

Tao is literally equivalent to the Greek "*he hyedos*" which means 'the way'. But it is not easy to translate the exact concept of Tao into English, because it is an extremely complicated idea. For example, Tao can be understood as 'The Way', 'the Rationality', 'the Supreme Reason', 'the Divine Being', 'a Way of the Sages', 'How Things Happen', etc. Today, Tao is often interpreted as 'the Ultimate Reality'. As you see, the nature of Tao in itself is indescribable, imperceptible and unknowable. It is, as a phenomenon, a mode of being rather than a positive being.⁴⁾

The ultimate reality is 'anything goes'

Can you tell me what is the opposite of *good* according to your world-view? You may answer: *evil*. But in Taoism, the opposite of *good* is *non-good*, which does not imply 'lack of

good' as in the Greek understanding or any 'result of sin' as in the Christian understanding, but only *things that are non-good* or *things that are not beautiful*.

Taoists believe that good is 'a continuity of beauty', and evil is 'an extension of dislike'. In their world-view good and evil cannot exist independently but only coexist as continuous phenomenon. There is no ethical evil, but only non-good in Taoism because the world is regarded as both good and evil. This is mainly because of their concept of truth. Let me explain it in this way:

In his book *Tao Teh Chin*, LaoTzu (604? B. C.) says, "There is nothing better than moderation. The student of Tao is free from his own ideas. Tao is as accepting as the sky, as consistent as the sunrise, as solid as a mountain, as flexible as a bamboo in a breeze."⁵) The images of sky, sunrise, mountain and bamboo hardly seem to fit together, but one very clear image fits together, which is that truth is moderation or *anything goes*.

We have a proverb in Korea, which says, "Angled persons always get hit". It is true that you might be criticized or attacked by your opponents if you take sides or extremes in your society. The idea of moderation or *anything goes* in Taoism was designed for the middle way just like Aristotle's 'the Golden Mean' in the West was designed to avoid excessive positions.

Anything goes is not about making easygoing compromises with every thought. It is the best wisdom the old sages found not only for survival in the political jungle, but also for daily cunning in this dangerous world.

When LaoTzu shouted, "Tao is Tao, Tao is Tao no more," he meant that the moment you succeed in defining Tao, you find that Tao is not the Tao as defined, because the reality of Tao keeps ever changing. It provided a skeptical concept of truth and on going doubt about the truth.

Tao is the permanent truth, but that which changes moment by moment. Westerners used to look for unchangeable and everlasting truth, while Taoists searched for the changeable yet permanent truth. If there is no defined unchangeable truth, the permanent truth cannot be the truth of *no-change* or *changelessness*. There is only *permanence*, but only as *the continuity of change*.⁶)

Therefore, there is no room for unchangeable truth in Taoism while Christians believe there is absolute truth. And there is no clear distinction between good and evil in Taoism while Christians believe there is clear distinction between good and evil.

Not for Understanding but for Embodying

Can you understand what is the Tao? May be not. As you imagine, Tao is not to be understood, but to be embodied. Understanding may be your own way for knowing the truth, but not for knowing the truth of Tao. Taoists provide at least three ways to embody the truth,

1) *Let intuition guide you.* Taoists do not trust their logic, but trust their intuition. They believe that reason and logic are too artificial and manipulative. LaoTzu said once: "When what is happening in learning isn't clear, do not work too hard to figure things out. Instead, relax and let the eye of your mind see what is happening. Let your perceptions and intuition be your guides."⁷⁾

2) *Emptying the heart.* Taoists say that emptying the heart is crucial in embodying Tao. 'Emptying' in Taoism is not 'vacancy of space' but 'making potential room for truth'. So that emptying the heart is not 'self-denial of sinful natures' as in Christian life or 'anti-intellectual' as in Western philosophy. Rather, it is a purity of heart that is not poisoned with unnecessary and artificial knowledge. They emphasize simplicity of life, and calmness of indifferent attitudes towards concerned situations. Purity, simplicity and calmness constitute the nature of emptying the heart.

3) *Taking no action.* If anything 'shows off' or creates 'competition', it is regarded as an artificial and manipulative action. Korean Taoists, Kim Young Oak judges such actions as "hypocritical, self-righteous and partial."⁸⁾ So that taking no action does not mean 'idleness' or 'doing nothing'. It means rather 'doing no artificial and manipulative action'. Because taking no action keeps you from any artificiality and manipulation, it is one of the best ways for knowing the Taoist truth.

(2) Buddhism

There are some truths and mysteries especially in the *Four Noble Truths* of Buddhism: 1) Man's existence is full of conflict, sorrow, and suffering. 2) All difficulties and pain are caused by Man's selfish desire. 3) There can be found freedom that is the *Nirvana*. 4) The *Noble Eight-fold Right Path* is the way to this liberation.

But the idea of '*right*' in Buddhism is often misunderstood because it appears as 'righteousness or justice' in Chinese character, but not an absolute concept of 'right or wrong' as in Christianity. I, myself, misunderstood the political phrase, "Follow the right path" simply as 'keep the justice' until recently.

Not Absolute Right but Moderate Right

Buddha (Siddhartha Gautama Buddha 566?-480 B. C.) himself described the *Eight-fold Right Path* as follows: "A man should seek the middle path between self-indulgence and self-mortification. This middle path consists of right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right mode of living, right endeavor, right mindfulness, and right concentration."⁹⁾

As Buddha clearly states, the word *right* here does not stand for the absolute or antithetical

'right'. The *right* stands for the *middle way*, which is no other than moderation and synthesis. So that Right Paths should be interpreted as a moderate and relative paths.

It is something like a harp. When Buddha went out and met a harp player, the harp player asked him a question: "Sir, what is moderate life in this world?" Buddha answered, "Moderate life is something like a harp that creates beautiful melody when the tunes are suitable."¹⁰ 'Suitable' simply means not too tight, not too loose but just right. That is the middle way or right path.

Again, in Buddha's book called *The Avatamska Sutra*, Buddha said, "Do not be consumed with lust and unenlightened behavior. Also, do not practice asceticism or too much suffering, which is not holy or righteous. If you could turn away from the two extremes, that is the moderation or the middle way." Buddha himself saw that only the middle way could bring peace and harmony in the world, and that is the way to put an end to the conflict and war between the two extremes.

Dalai Lama once explained about this moderate concept of truth as follows: "We believe that nothing is unchangeable. Buddha himself once said that 'The things which are made always will be changed'. But there is one and only one unchangeable thing. That is *Sunya*."¹¹

Everything can be changed except Sunya. The Sunya literally means 'nothingness'. The Sunya cannot be changed because it is neither 'being' nor 'non-being', but 'being' and 'non-being' at the same time. Therefore, Sunya has no actual reality, no absoluteness and no unchangeable concept of truth in it. In Buddhism, truth is moderation or the middle way nothing but 'nothingness'.

Not Self-denial but Self-discard

Do you know how many ways you can be saved from your sins? Christians may answer, "Only one way, by believing in Jesus." But there are many liberating or enlightened ways in Buddhism, however I shall give you two of the most well known Indian ways and two Koreans ways:

1) '*Nirvana*'. It literally means 'put out the fire' or 'cast away the fire'. The best way to liberate or enlightenment yourself is to put out the fire of all your human desires, or cast away of the human desires. It's not the 'self-denial' of sinful natures as in the Christian life, but the self-destruction or self-discipline of all kinds of human desires such as eating, sleeping, resting, etc. There are so many Buddhists who have not spoken a word for 10 years, and never lain down or slept for 8 years on a bed, and have spent all of time in the mountains.

2) '*Anatman*.' It literally means 'self-discard' or 'self-dismissal', so it is a spiritual state of nothingness and a causal reality of meditation. If you apply it to your meditation, you should get high on the "Don't-know mind" or "Back to the before mind." Again, Anatman is not

the 'self-denial of sinful natures' as in the Christian life, but 'self-discard' or 'self-dismissal' of human natures. It is eccentric, pessimistic, and ascetic, like the Gnostic in the early church.

3) *Theory of Peace and War*. The greatest monk-scholar in 7th-century Korea, WonHyo (617-686), applied the concept of moderate liberation to his 'Theory of Peace and War.' He explained his theory as follows: If two objects, identical in some ways and yet different, are considered equal, there will be internal conflict. However, if they are considered different, there will be external conflict between the two. Therefore they should be said to be neither equal nor different.¹²⁾

4) *The Negative Union*. It means seeking a higher-order union through contrasting different ideas. First deny the existence of two contrasting realities, and then look for a middle way between the two. In finding out the middle way or a unified moderation or dialectic truth, one should not look at only one side, but rather think of the entirety as one big concept. Choi Min Hong says it comes from the idea of the nature of 'no-two' and avoids bearing any contradiction on ideas or religions.¹³⁾

(3) Confucianism

We have a strong tradition that "The men of virtue are quick to adapt themselves to circumstances." Confucius (K'ung Fu-tzu, 552-479 B.C.) encouraged this kind of behavior in his book *Moderation*: "A man of virtue conforms to moderation, while a little man opposes moderation. Moderation for a man of virtue is to behave appropriately for the time, and moderation for a little man is to feel no shame in being a little man."

Mencius (Meng-tzu, 372?-289? B. C.), one of Confucius's best students, interpreted a man of virtue as 'a person who takes a serious view of the time'. Here the 'time' means 'circumstances' that varies with time and place. 'Middle' refers to 'the middle way' or 'Moderation' without settling down anywhere.

Not absolutes but situational middle

Why is a man of virtue quick to adapt himself to circumstances? Because a man of virtue takes the situational middle seriously, while a little man takes the extremes or absolutes. Therefore, in Confucianism, a man of virtue is a person who is impartial and conforming to whatever situation he might be in.

ChuHsi (Chu-tzu, 1131-1200), an important Chinese scholar of Neo-Confucianism, interpreted that "moderation is never inclined to anything. For any affair, moderation is neither excessive nor deficient. It is an ordinary practice, which can be a norm anytime and anywhere."

Kim Hak Ju, a Korean scholar, interpreted moderation in a more clear way: "There can never

be absolute good or evil in the practice of moderation. The distinction between good and evil is relative rather than absolute. Therefore, even the act of moderation itself is neither absolutely good nor absolutely evil. Even in evil there is good intention, and even in good there is seed for evil."¹⁴⁾

Morohashi Tatsuzi, a Japanese scholar, correctly interpreted moderation this way: "The moderation of Confucius is not only moderation between matters, but between being and nothing, pleasure and suffering."¹⁵⁾ As you see, the moderation, or middle way is the only true truth in Taoism, Buddhism and Confucianism. If you against it you are a foolish little man.

Ki-first-Li-after or Li-first-Ki-after?

Historically, the theory of moderation was developed side by side with the concept of 'the Great Ultimate'¹⁶⁾, which is also embroidered on the national flag of Korea, and the Theory of Li and Ki. It is a dualism that divides and categorizes all existence into two inseparable components, Li and Ki. (Li and Chi in Chinese) Li is the formative element (basic principle, normative logos), while Ki is the energizing element (material force, energetic power).

The Chinese scholar of Neo-Confucianism, ChuHsi believed that Li and Ki are independent of each other and yet inseparable, since Li cannot exist concretely without Ki, and Ki would be but formless and directionless energy without Li. He made an ethical and psychological code called 'the theory of the four truths and the seven sentiments' based on the theory of Li and Ki.

ChuHsi categorized that the four truths are the benevolence, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom, and the seven sentiments are joy, anger, sorrow, fear, love, hate, and lust. And he believed the four truths always good, are originated by Li, and the seven sentiments which are good and bad, are originated by Ki.

1) *Emotion*: ChuHsi believed in 'Li-Ki dualism' and empiricism rather than in the idealism that Ki is prior to Li. He believed empirical sense comes before ideological reason because in conceiving the truth and fulfilling the self-moral establishment, reason is not the best way. Emotion is the best way because reason is always influenced by the human greed but pure emotion always lead to the most pure and high truth.

2) *Fasting of the mind*: When ChuHsi valued the emotions and experiences over logic and reason, he stressed that the best way of becoming the men of self-moral fulfillment is 'fasting of the mind'. It is sillier to the 'escaping from the reason' in West. He insisted that true knowledge is to be based on the senses only. That viewpoint led to looking inward rather than outward, moral principles rather than metaphysics, and a dualistic view rather than one of an integrated world.

On top of this idea, two distinct schools of Neo-Confucian epistemology developed in Korea

three centuries later. The thinker who stressed the primacy of Li was ToeGye (1501-1570), and the one who gave emphasis to Ki was YulGok(1536-1584). They became a foundation for much of later Korean idealism and empiricism. Exceptional for the East, ToeGye was strong idealist. ToeGye believed that "The four truths are always good, and are originated by Li; Ki follows after. The seven sentiments are always good and bad, and are originated by Ki, and Li follow after. In conceiving the four truths, Li comes first and Ki follows after, but in feeling seven sentiments, Ki comes first and Li follows after." In this ToeGye's position is called the theory of Li-first-Ki-after.¹⁷⁾

Conclusion

1) *Terminology*: Terminologies and sources look very different from those of the West, but the central idea of Moderate Intuition of the East is none other than the dialectic and relativistic concept of truth, the methodology employed is largely emotional and non-reasonable.

As far as I understand the concept of Western truth used to be absolute in the past, but nowadays it is relativistic and pluralistic. And the methodologies for knowing Western truth were either idealism or empiricism in the past. But nowadays, what counts more is non-reason, or just cool feelings, according to post-modernism.

2) *Dichotomy*: "The entity of the Eastern Thought is earnestly realizing the endless logical dichotomy"¹⁸⁾ between the principles of the Um and the Yang, between the natures of Li and Ki, the relationship of object-subject, and also between the epistemological methodologies of reason and experience.

It is true that "Eastern mind is a synthetically rather than analytical or antithetical."¹⁹⁾ It is rather both/and than either/or. It is not only rational but also intuitional and emotional. Kim Young Oak once delicately defined this intuition and emotion as "creative feeling", which means 'logical sentiment' or 'reasonable feeling'.

3) *Illogicality*: This Eastern Mind may appear to you as illogical and non-sense. However, Kim Ha Tae hardly defends the Eastern mind as follows: "It is not illogical but hyper-logical. It is a philosophical trick of contradiction."²⁰⁾

According to Kim Ha Tae, "The logic of illogicality serves two purposes: 1) Logic of illogicality recognizes that the ordinary logical interpretation of reality can never yield a unified point of view. 2) Logic of illogicality is better than ordinary logic in explaining the paradox found in practical philosophy."

4) *Compromise*: Both dialectic non-reason and Moderate Intuition have been developed to solve the historical and academic conflicts, but both ideas wonderfully compromise the conflicts rather than resolved the problems.

'Moderate Intuition' developed to solve the universal and human conflicts about two

millenniums before Georg W. F. Hegel began to dream of the idea called "dialectics", but instead produced many more problems.

5) *Consequences*: The consequences of Moderate Intuition are enormously painful: no criteria exist for the truth, no clear moral standard, no social ground for justice and no religious absolutism. Instead, culture of shame developed rather than sense of guilty, harmony of forces rather than 'checks and balance' and reputation rather than solid basis for good and evil.

One of the tragic consequences is religious pluralism in the world. When approaching Christianity, people come up with either 'monistic pluralism' or 'pluralistic pluralism'. I'm afraid this new trend is now in a revolutionary process in every corner of our pluralistic society.

- 1) HyunGak, From Harvard to Temple Hwakyae, pp. 3-15.
- 2) Alfred North Whitehead, Religion in the making, Macmillan, p.4
- 3) Bertrand Russell, The problem of China, p.194; Kim Young Oak, LaoTzu & 21 C, Tongnamu, Vol.1, p.135
- 4) James Legge, The Texts of Taoism, Dover, pp.14,15
- 5) Pamela K. Metz, The Tao of Learning, Mindle, p.148
- 6) Kim, Young Oak, LaoTzu & 21C, TongNamu, Vol.1, pp.106, 107
- 7) Pamela K. Metz, The Tao of Learning, Mindle, p.122
- 8) James Legge, The Texts of Taoism, Dover, Vol.1, pp.64, 90
- 9) Charles Van Doren, A History of Knowledge, Ballantine Books, p.22
- 10) HanGyerai Daily Newspaper, 23. 9. 2000
- 11) Kim Young Oak, Dohol Talks with the Dalai Lama, Tongnamu, pp.664-666
- 12) Choi Min Hong, Philosophy of Han, Sungmoonsa, pp.23-39. If there are some blossomed flowers and withered flowers, which flowers are beautiful ones? You may say "the blossomed flowers are beautiful." But truth is not. Why? Because the concept equalis applied to distinguish equality from difference, and the concept differentis to distinguish difference from equality. But splitting difference or removing equality cannot obtain the distinction. Equality does not annihilate difference; therefore it cannot be said to be equal. Difference does not annihilate equality; therefore it cannot be said to be different. Equality exists only because it is not different, and difference because it is not equal
- 13) Choi Min Hong, Philosophy of Han, Sungmoonsa, pp.23-39
- 14) Kim Hak Ju, Moderation, Seoul National University Press, pp.203-20.
- 15) Morohashi Tatsuzi, Confucius, LaoTzu, Buddha, EatAsia, pp.192-5
- 16) Pung Wu Ran, History of Chinese Philosophy, Khachi, p.533-544. 'The Great Absolute' or 'the Great Ultimate' is considered 'the entity of the cosmos' and 'the origin and ground of all things.' It is similar to Plato's idea of 'good' and Aristotle's idea of 'god'. Confucius and Mencius laid the foundation of the idea, but it was ChuHsi who gave an interpretation of it as "the sum total of Li of the heavens and the earth, in which there is no direction, place, form, or position. Pung Wu Ran, a modern Chinese philosopher, agreed with ChuHsi and went on to put it in a poetical way: "The Great Ultimate is moonlight falling upon the rivers." He meant that no one knows what the Great Absolute or the Great Ultimate exactly is
- 17) Carter J. Eckert, KiBaik, Lee, Young Ick Lew, Michael Robinson, Edward W. Wagner, Korea Old and New A History, Ilchokak(Seoul, 1990), pp. 151-152; Kim Young Doo, ToeGye and KoBong write letters, Sonamu, pp.353-486,oeGyelaborated the concept ofLi a little further, based on the theory that was already established by ChuHsiLi as a formative element (basic principle, normative logos). He viewedLias the fundamental basis for everything, only, in whichKimoves around. He said, "Material objects exist outside of the mind, and theirLi is recognized through contact with material objects." The way one recognizesLi, according to ToeGye, is mainly through reasoning rather than experienceBut after arguing with his disciple KoBong for 8 years, ToeGye developed his ideas furtheroeGyecame to the conclusion as follows: In conceiving the four truths,L comes first andK follows after, but in feeling seven sentiments K comes first an Lifollows after.
- 18) Park Dong Hwan, Heart of East and Mind of West, pp.3-5
- 19) Ryu, Kee Chong, Christianity Meets Eastern Philosophy, p.27
- 20) Kim Ha Tae, East-West Philosophy, Jongrobooks, pp.20-23