

Late Choson Scholars' Views of European Religion and Science

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There have been many recent studies of the 'Western Studies' of various scholars of the Choson period. The topic has acquired greater importance since the recognition of Sil-hak (實學) as the major academic trend of the period, because those scholars who were involved in 'Western Studies' were usually engaged in Sil-hak as well. By now it seems to have been generally established that the extra attention the Sil-hak scholars paid to Western science was one aspect of their desire to adapt their scholarship to the pressing demands of reality.

The works published so far can be divided roughly into two groups: those investigating the origins of the Christian Church in Korea¹⁾ and those dealing with the introduction of modern European science to Korea²⁾. The first group usually emphasises the indigenous characteristics of the establishment of the Christian Church in Korea; the latter, with the exception of a few papers of recent date, are solely concerned with identifying the elements of Western science dealt with by Sil-hak scholars. On the whole, there has been a certain limit to the efforts of both groups to grasp the historical contexts of these phenomena.

I should like to suggest two perspectives from which these historical contexts could be approached. In the external context, what we need to understand is the meaning Western Studies had as an impact coming from outside: how did the Jesuits represent which part of European civilisation, and then how was it refracted through its accommodation to China? In the internal context, exactly what did it mean in the society in question to be engaged in Western Studies or to accept Western religion? There are some recent studies of similar questions which merit mention here.

1) 朴鍾鴻, 「西歐思想의 導入・批判과 攝取」・『亞細亞研究』Ⅷ-4, 1965.

李元淳, 「安鼎福의 天學論 考」『李海南博士 華甲紀念論叢』, 1970. 「朝鮮後期 實學者의 西學意識」『歷史教育』17, 1975.

金玉姬, 「西學의 受容과 그 意識構造」『韓國史論』1, 1973 等

2) 朴鍾鴻, 「崔漢綺의 科學哲學」『亞細亞研究』Ⅺ-3, 1969.

李元淳, 「職方外紀와 慎後聘의 西洋教育論」『歷史教育』11-12, 1969.

李龍範, 「李翼의 地動說과 그 論據」『震檀學報』34, 1972.

全相運, 「湛軒 洪大容의 科學思想」『李乙浩博士停年紀念實學論叢』, 1975.

小川晴久, 「洪大容의 宇宙無限論」『東京女子大學 比較文化研究所紀要』38, 1975. 「18世紀의 科學과 哲學의 사이」『東方學誌』, 1978.

朴星來, 「韓國近世의 西洋科學 受容」『東方學誌』, 1978. 「丁若鏞의 科學思想」『茶山學報』1, 1978.

「Hong Tae-yong's Idea of the Rotating Earth」『韓國科學史學會誌』1, 1979.

The works of Nathan Sivin³⁾ and Jonathan Spence⁴⁾ provide good examples of the pursuit of the external context. Sivin clarifies the way in which various European models of the universe were introduced to China by Jesuit missionaries and what significance they bore for Chinese intellectuals of the time. Spence concentrates on the mnemonic art, which was the subject of the Ji-fa (記法), one of Matteo Ricci's earliest books in Chinese, and which opened a new path to the understanding of his methods.

The pursuit of the internal context is well exemplified most recently by Jacques Gernet⁵⁾ and G. Elison⁶⁾. They both deal chiefly with the anti-Western literature of China and Japan in the seventeenth century, and both have surpassed the previous studies which deal with the same materials in reconstructing the coherent views of the Chinese and Japanese authors. Such achievements would not have been possible without extremely determined minds, since these materials usually have the tendency to exaggeration and oversimplification shared by all kinds of propaganda.

These studies into the Chinese and Japanese cases offer good points of reference, and it seems to be high time to make a more comprehensive study of Korean materials of a similar kind. The comments of seventeenth and eighteenth-century Korean scholars on Western Studies⁷⁾ have a great potential value as a clue to the understanding of the East-West contact through the Jesuits, all the more so because they were less affected by practical concerns than their parallels in the neighbouring countries. The Western Studies movement in Korea was free from any direct involvement of Jesuit missionaries or any serious political problems until towards the end of the eighteenth century.

The comparatively neutral attitudes of the Korean scholars led to a number of interesting results. Favourable remarks about the rationality and effectiveness of Western studies are inserted here and there even in the most adversary treatises, making it easy for the readers to see exactly in what esteem the writers held the subject. Furthermore they did not make a fundamental discrimination between the religion and the science contained in the Jesuit publications but applied the same Confucian principles in evaluating and refuting them, revealing their attitudes to the basic principles and methods of the Western science introduced.

Another significant result was the immobility of the version of religious doctrines as specified in the published books. The missionaries were not present to make further explanations or modifications. It is possible, therefore, to make out a standard unmodified Confucian response to the 'accommodationism' of the Jesuits by studying the comments of the Korean scholars. Furthermore, as their pursuit of Western Studies was neither prompted nor suppressed by any kind of material

3) Nathan Sivin, "Copernicus in China" *Colloquia Copernicana* II, 1973.

4) Jonathan Spence, *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci*, New York: Viking Penguin, 19

5) Jacques Gernet, *China and the Christian Impact*, Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1985.

6) George Elison, *Deus Destroyed*, Cambridge (Mass.): Harvard U.P., 1973.

7) 李夢寅, 「於干野談」

李晔光, 「芝峯類說」

李 瀾, 「星湖僊說」

愼後帖, 「西學辨」

安鼎福, 「天學考」 「天學問答」

洪正河, 「實識證疑」

forces, their studies were based purely on their own interests and their comments on their own opinions. Those who were most antagonistic were those who had been interested enough to take the trouble to study the Western ideas carefully, and their discussions usually show a high level of understanding. The relationship between the then current Confucianism and the introduced Christianity is manifested as vividly nowhere else.