Special Feature

The Modernity of Nineteenth-Century Korean Confucianism: A Focus on Perceptions of World Geography in Choe Hangi's *Jigujeonyo*

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The Review of Korean Studies Volume 13 Number 3 (September 2010): 31-50

Introduction

For Joseon Korea, the nineteenth century was a time of great crisis marked by arrivals of foreign ships, persecution of Catholicism, corruption of the ruling class and peasant rebellions. As they entered the nineteenth century the three countries of East Asia—China, Korea and Japan—were shaken by the growing advances of the West. Choe Hangi's lifetime was therefore marked by the choice between opening up and closing to the West.

In Joseon society, one's status has an important impact on one's trajectory in life. Before the discovery of trustworthy documents, some even speculated that Choe Hangi's background was that of *jungin* (middle class people). Although he lived all his life within the walls of Seoul, there is no single record indicating that he exchanged views with other scholars. Choe Hangi is not referenced in other scholars' writings either (Kim 1990:57). All we can find is that Choe wrote the introduction to Kim Jeongho's *Cheonggudo* and he was mentioned a few times in Yi Gyugyeong's *Ojuyeonmunjangjeonsango*. Thereafter, a discovery of documents pertaining to his family and life proved that Choe Hangi indeed was a member of the *yangban* class. According to Kim Yongok's research, however, although a *yangban*, Choe's family appears to have been far removed from the center of power.

According to the information gathered so far, Choe Hangi was born in 1803. His father was Choe Chihyeon of the Saknyeong Choe family and his mother was a daughter of Han Gyeongli of the Cheongju Han family. He was adopted by his uncle Choe Gwanghyeon as soon as he was born. Both sides of Choe Hangi's family traditionally lived in Gaeseong, and his family relocated to Seoul sometime between the late eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century. Choe Hangi's family failed to produce even a single *saengwon* or *jinsa* examination passer for eight generations until his great-great-grandfather and great-grandfather passed *mugwa* examinations (the military service examination).

Choe Chihyeon, his birth father, was intellectually gifted and famous for his talents. While he competed for the civil service examination a number of times, he never passed it. In 1812, when Choe Hangi was 10 years old, Choe Chihyeon died at the age of 27. His foster father Choe Gwanghyeon passed the *mugwa* examination in 1800, and his rank reached that of *Tongjeong*

daebu. After retiring from the bureaucracy, he moved back to his hometown, Busan-dong of Gaeseong. He built a building called *Gwigyeongdang* and spent rest of his life exchanging poems and scholarship with other Gaeseong scholars such as Kim Heon'gi and Han Gyeongri (Gwon 1999:25-47).

One source that reveals personal details of Choe Hangi is Yi Geonchang's *Hyegang Choegongjeon*. According to this source, Choe Hangi was such an avid reader that there was not a book imported from China that Choe did not read. He used all of the family's wealth buying and collecting books, and continued to reside in Seoul despite the fact that his family fortunes were running out. He insisted on living within Seoul's boundaries, believing that it was the easiest place to collect books and therefore expand his intellectual horizons.

Although Choe Hangi had opportunities for office, he chose not to pursue them. Important figures such as Jo Inyeong, Hong Seokju, and Jeong Giwon all sought to appoint Choe Hangi, but he persisted instead in pursuing a life of scholarship.

Choe Hangi passed the *saengwon* examination in 1849, and later received the prestigious post of *Tongjeong hamje cheomji jungchu busa* through memorialization. He died in 1877 at the age of 75. Seventeen years later, he received the posthumous post of *Daesaheon seonggyun jeju*. He was buried in the Nokbunri neighborhood of Seoul (today's Nokbeondong). His funeral was held April of the following year at Hadomyeon Manhyeonri of Goyang, and his grave was relocated to Gaeseong where his ancestors were also buried.

The aim of this research paper is to examine Choe Hangi's *Jigujeonyo* in order to study turn-of-the-century perceptions of world geography during the final days of Joseon Korea and to examine the circumstances under which aspects of modernity arose out of traditional Confucianism. First, his philosophical perspective of geography is analyzed with a focus on his *Giron* and *Hwaldong unhwa*. Second, the content from *Jigujeonyo* relevant to the earth and world geography are extracted and interpreted. Third, the level of understanding of world geography in late nineteenth-century Korea is examined and the social conditions extant during the process of modernizing from traditional Confucianism are analyzed. Lastly, the abovementioned details are categorized and the geographical perspective which appears in Choe Hangi's *Jigujeonyo* is analyzed in light of aspects of

modernity in nineteenth-century Korean Confucianism.

Choe Hangi's Theory of *Gi* and *Hwaldong unhwa*

Choe Hangi sought to examine and explain nature, humanity, and society through his concept of *gi*, and therefore is often referred as a *gi* philosopher. *Gi* philosophy seeks to systematically understand and explain the world using the concept of *gi* (Geum 1998:431-432). However, the *gi* concept is not easy to understand for those living in modern times because it is philosophically different from dichotomous Western ways of thinking. Instead of being applicable to only one side of the totality such as material and idea, and spirit and flesh, *gi* encompasses both sides. *Gi* acquires an additional dimension of complexity due to its varied usage over the past two millennia. *Gi* became a philosophical concept through the influence of Daoism during the Song and the Ming eras (Geum 1998:434-435). So, what is the *gi* that Choe Hangi refers to?

> It fills the universe and is steeped in every single object. It coalesces and dissipates. There is not a single thing that is not *gi*. There is only *gi* of the heaven and earth before my birth, and *gi* with a form only comes into a being with my birth. With my death, it reverts back to being formless. (Choe 1836c)

Examining the abovementioned statement, Choe Hangi's theory on *gi* appears to be identical to the traditional view in the sense that every single thing in the universe is seen as being filled with *gi*. Traditional *gi* theorists categorize all things into "things" and "the main body of *gi*." "The main body of *gi*" is formless and cannot be perceived through senses. "The main body of *gi*," which never lives or dies, has the characteristics of emptiness, quietness, and purity. All things, which are temporary existences, have the characteristics of actuality, movement, and impurity. Taking a step further, traditional understanding sought to explain all natural phenomena as well as humanity through the differences, values, and harmonies of *gi*. However, Choe Hangi believed that the traditional understanding of *gi* stems from metaphysics and is far removed from actual natural phenomena or a

scientific perception of things. Believing that his theory on *gi* stems from scientific achievements, he argued that it was different from the traditional notion. He believed that the characteristics of *gi* are proven in his time through actual experiments.

> Recently, formats of gi are clearly revealed in all experiments with machines… (Choe 1836:173)
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> …
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> The reason why water does not go into the bucket when you cover the top surface of the water jar is because it is filled with *gi*. It is the first proof that *gi* has a form and traits. … Tightly stacked up air of the bubbles shoot out bullets, which is the fifth proof that air is releasing its power. Degrees of the heat and cold fluctuate with the cold and heat, which is the six proof that *gi* contracts in cold and expands while hot. (Choe 1860b)

Choe Hangi argued that all *gi* is material. *Gi* can be physically perceived through its shape, taste, sound, and touch. Although there are types of *gi* that are shapeless—such as fire and sky—hot, dry, and humid, they are all described as perceivable.

> There are two types of *gi*: *gi* of form and *gi* of *unhwa*. The earth, moon, sun, star and all other matters are *gi* of form, and rain, sunlight, wind, snow, cold, hot, dryness, and humidity are *gi* of *unhwa*. The former is formed by the coalescing of the latter. What is big lasts and what is small dissipates. It is the way with *gi* of *unhwa*. Although *gi* of form is readily recognizable, *gi* of *unhwa* is difficult to detect. That is why the ancients distinguished the two as material and immaterial. … When a hot thing and a cold thing collide, a loud noise and sparks of fire are produced. That is the proof of how *gi* of *unhwa* is material. (Choe 1857b: 49)

Gi of form and *gi* of *unhwa*, as discussed by Choe Hangi, have similarities with what modern climatology refers to as climatic element and climatic factor. Climatic elements such as temperature, wind, rain, snow, sunlight are equivalent to Choe's "*gi* of *unhwa*," and physical and readily perceivable climatic factors such as altitude, distribution of land and water, landform are

similar to Choe's "*gi* of form." Although they are not identical as concepts, there are recognizable patterns in the logic of their explanation.

However, it is indeed obvious that Choe Hangi considered both his concept of *gi* and the traditional concept of *gi* to be a system that can be explained through "*gi* of form" and "*gi* of *unhwa*." He summarized the movement of *gi* as *Hwaldong unhwa*. The character *hwal* refers to its life, *dong* to its mobility, *un* to its circularity, and *hwa* to its changeability. *Hwaldong unhwa* reveals itself as four characteristics of cold, heat, dryness and humidity, and they are quantifiable realities. The position that this assertion can be proven through scientific experiments is indeed new and differs from the traditional understanding of it. However, Choe Hangi nevertheless believes that his explanation has universal applicability for all things in the universe.

Although certainly not without flaws, his concept of *gi* was nevertheless used by Choe Hangi to achieve universality in sensual perception. He went a step further by quantifying them and presented it as an objective methodology of perception. Such work is meaningful and is closely related to the acceptance of Western science. In particular, he located his *gi* in *Hwaldong unhwa* through an explanation of the Earth (No 2005:75-76).

Jigujeonyo and Perceptions of World Geography

World geography is dealt with in the later part of volume one through to volume eleven of the Choe Han-gi's work *Jigujeonyo*. Starting in particular with the *haeryukbun'gye* section, the regional geography of each nation around the world is discussed from a geographical perspective. The content of this section aims to explain the diversity of geographic conditions in the world. It is filled with categories and quotes from geography texts written in classical Chinese such as *Jikbangoegi*, *Haegukdoji*, and *Yeonghwajiryak*, with some additions of his own (No 2005:124-125).

The Earth as a Whole

In *Jigujeonyo*, before dicussing the details of regional geography, Choe Hangi introduced the division between land and sea. Land comprises approximately

two-fifths of Earth's surface, and the sea approximately three-fifths. He divided land into four continents: Asia, Europe, Africa, and America, and Australia and Oceania. He lists five oceans: the Pacific, Atlantic, Indian, northern Arctic and Antarctic (Choe 1857c). This organization is roughly identical to the system used today, which divides Earth's surface into five oceans and six continents. The descriptions of the biggest ocean, the Pacific, are detailed. He talks about how it was named, how the Americans used the Pacific to buy tea, and how the whaling ships crossed it.

> The Pacific covers the east of Asia to the west of North and South America. It is China's great sea. The Westerners called it the "Pacific" because of its placid waves. Its surface is the largest. It covers almost half of the surface of Earth. According to the Americans, crossing this ocean to China's Guangdong province to buy tea can be about 30,000 *li* shorter in distance compared to the other route, but the sea route is difficult and places where water and food supplies can be acquired are rare due to its size. However, the crossing of it recently became popular. (Choe 1857c)

Choe Hangi also displayed a sense of objectivity in explaining its size using longitude and latitude.

> The earth's longitude and latitude have long existed, as the ancients established them. Longitude and latitude are necessary in determining size, location and direction. They are also necessary in measurement. The characteristics of the polar opposites, the weather in summer and winter, the lengths of day and night, and the differences in the ebb and flow of tides all can be factually explained. (Choe 1857d)

Choe Hangi claimed that, once natural phenomena can be explained with *Unhwa dori*, unscientific and supernatural factors will inevitably disappear. By *Unhwa dori* he mostly likely meant changes in climate and atmosphere. Since scientific predictions on changes in weather and atmosphere can greatly aid everyday lives, Choe also insisted that unscientific and ambivalent explanations are simply wrong. In so doing, Choe warns against the blind worship of nature prevalent at the time.

> We have to wait for the future enlightenments. Our explanations will fail sooner or later if we are to explain the mysteries and peculiarities of Earth with a mysterious and peculiar mindset. All mysteries of the world will be revealed. How could the world be made of mysteries from the start? There is only *Unhwa dori*. (Choe 1857c)

On the other hand, he explained how people can reach all places by traveling the ocean and provided concrete examples. We can tell from this that the use of sea routes was becoming increasingly widespread, and it implies that everyone knew that Earth was spherical. The faith in such assertions is supported by records. By introducing the record of a man who circumnavigated the globe, Choe proved that the land and sea together form Earth's surface.

> Accustomed to the sea routes, ships of the West take only about eight or nine months to circumnavigate Earth from left-to-right and right-to-left. They are therefore able to go to all lands. (Choe 1857c; Choe 1836d)
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> …
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> The land, with the sea, forms a single spherical entity. (Choe Hangi)
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> …
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> Before *jeongdeok*, a Portuguese man Gano (de Gama) returned after circling Earth. It became clear then that Earth is round. A century later, a spherical model of Earth was introduced to China. … From that point on, the concept of a spherical earth as well as Earth's rotation and revolution became firmly proven in all accounts. (Choe 1857e)

Individual Regions and Nations of the World

In his *Jigujeonyo*, Choe Han-gi broadly categorizes the world continents into four. Looking at his descriptions of each, his highly detailed description of Europe shows Choe's particular interest in areas that had advanced before others of his time.

His itemized description of Africa shows Choe's interest in the little-known continent. Even his descriptions of far-away America tend to be detailed in comparison to his descriptions of Asia.

The regional categorization other than Europe, which is left blank, consists of the following:

» Asia: China, two states of East Asia, each nation of the Southern Seas, each nation of the South, each nation of Southeast Asia, India, four nations of western India, each part of the west;
» Africa: northern Africa, central Africa, eastern Africa, western Africa, southern Africa, and the African islands; and
» America: frozen lands of North America, North America under British rule, the United States of (North) America, individual nations of South America, South American islands.

Asia

He described the nine nations of Asia mainly using the characteristics of climate.

» Japan: mild and it never snows more than 1 foot.
» On Ryukyu (Okinawa): the roofs (of houses) are made artificially low so that the strong winds from the sea will not blow them off. The places the king and foreign embassies stay have tall roofs, and they are tied to poles with straw ropes to withstand the winds.
» Vietnam: It is so consistently warm that frost and snow cannot be found. The plants and trees are green.
» Thailand: There's no snow and frost in this country, as the weather is always summery. It continuously rains for a half of year (April to September) and the other half is mostly dry. Farming can be done throughout the year, so they can harvest two to three times a year.
» Brunei: Because of the extremely hot weather, one must avoid the sunlight by bowing one's head down and sit facing the water in the midday to avoid endemic disease.
» Java: It is extremely hot due to its location immediately south of the equator. It is filled with flowers and trees. It rains in the spring and the fall is mostly dry. The land is extremely fertile, and therefore the crops grow well.

» India: while the weather in its northern regions is balanced, the South is extremely hot due to its location near the equator.
» Afghanistan: It is located in between India and Iran. It is extremely hot and rains a lot.
» Iran: The winters and summers are mild. The land is fertile, the weather is warm, and there is not much rain.

Europe

His explanations here are made using accurate quantitative measurements of longitude, latitude, width and distance. It is interesting to see descriptions of European climate using *hwangdo* and *heukdo*. Areas in northern Europe immediately south of the North Pole are described as frozen places permanently covered in several feet of snow and ice.

Generally speaking, physical geography is described in greater detail than human geography in describing regional particularities. Descriptions of individual European nations are as follows:

» Russia: the nights are long, and the days are short. The *gi* is extremely cold, and the snows quickly harden once they fall. Once cold hits pedestrians, their blood vessels freeze. When they enter into the warmth of a house from outside, their ears and noses fall off. They therefore must wait outside and wet their body with water so that their body will rejuvenate before going into a warm place.
» Sweden: It is extremely cold. Its northern part is made of sand, rock, and swamp with most of it being wasteland. It gets fertile as one goes south. It has a long coastline, and an abundance of mud makes the land difficult to farm. The daytime gets longer as one goes south, to a maximum of nine hours a day. Winters at its northern tip have long nights and short days. For 75 days one cannot see the sun. During the summer, daytime gets longer and one cannot see the moon for some 75 days. The number of mosquitoes multiplies until they are like dust. It gets cold when it snows.
» Denmark: Summer in its southern region has a long daytime, approximately 69 degrees (around 17 hours). The longest is

82 degrees. In the north, for half the year there is constant daylight and for the other half it is always night time.

» Poland: Its weather is very cold.
» Germany: It is extremely cold in the winter. Its people are good at making warm houses, so the house can be kept warm with only a bit of fire.
» Italy: The weather is genial and the land is fertile. Crops, flowers and trees are plentiful—it is therefore called a paradise.
» Belgium: The weather is warm and mild. The land is fertile.
» France: The weather of its northwestern region is a bit cold.
» Spain: The Pyrenees mark its northern border. The *gi* of its land is a bit cold. The Mediterranean is on its southern border. Hot air from central Africa blows in during the summer time. As this place is the highest place in Europe, it gets plenty of winds. People here do not light a fire even in the winters.
» Portugal: The weather of its northwest is a bit cold. The summer of its southeast is very hot.
» England: It is extremely cold due to it being next to the North Sea. The weather is unstable. One day could be quiet and clear, while the next could be cloudy. The summers are not hot.

Africa

Africa is described as a place of heat and endemic diseases due to its geographic location stretching north and south around the equator. Africa is also noted as the most inferior continent in terms of nature, geography, and inhabitants. His categorization of African geography into northern, central, and eastern regions does not differ from our contemporary practices of today. He explained each nation of Africa as the following:

Northern Africa

» Egypt: A dry place without shadows cast by trees on the ground. It has little rain and a vast desert.
» Ethiopia: The land is fertile and the climate is mild. Only the area near the Red Sea is hot and dry. It is cloudy from May to October, and heavy rain takes place approximately half of the time. Traveling during this time is therefore difficult.

» Libya: The land is extremely hot. It is hot in the day and cold in the night.
» Tunisia: The land is humid and hot
» Algeria: The climate is mild. It has frequent earthquakes.
» Morocco: The summers are extremely hot and there is little wind from the sea. The desert exudes hot air and is filled with high and steep ranges. The climate is mild.

On the other hand, central Africa is described as a place where heavy winds could darken one's view, and sediments of blowing of sands form dunes. Pedestrians die gasping or fall down while having difficulty breathing. Camels are used as the method of transportation, and camels' blood is used as liquid when they cannot find water. He discusses and describes the oases of desert routes, "like tiny islands in the sea, these green oases with water springs dot the desert. The travelers rely on them."

He also explained nations of eastern Africa mentioning its environments and characteristics. He writes of western Africa as a place with numerous lakes that the equator cuts across. It is also described as having plenty of plants and trees. Harmful fog is bad for one's health, and there is light rain in the early morning. The environments are described as largely inadequate—foreigners could catch endemic diseases and easily die. Southern Africa is described as a place with an extremely hot climate. Descriptions of each nation are as follows:

Eastern Africa
» Somalia: The *qi* of the land is hot, and it is dry due to a general lack of rain.
» Kenya: There are lots of endemic diseases due to its hot climate.
» Tanzania: Numerous endemic diseases make it a difficult place to reside.
» Malawi: The heat of the land makes it a difficult place to live.

Western Africa
» Equatorial Guinea: It is extremely hot due to its location next to the equator. Sometimes pedestrians die of thirst and

dehydration. It is cloudy from May to September, and a lack of rain during the rainy season will result in famine.

» Gabon: It is also hot due to its location south of the equator, and it is similar to Equatorial Guinea.

Southern Africa

» Namibia: The *qi* of the land is mild, and it is not as hot as in the north.
» South Africa: Mild and filled with plants and trees. The northern half consists of desert. When rising winds combine with the clouds, bad energies accumulate.
» Madagascar: The land is extremely hot, and around half of the population resides on the coasts. Foreigners cannot withstand the local endemic diseases.

America

For countries on the American continent, he also sought to describe and locate them precisely (Choe 1857g).

The northern edges of North America are described as consisting of cold and frozen wastelands, similar to the northern borderlands of Asia. It gets warmer as one goes southward. Each region of the United States is located north of *bukhwangdo* and has similar climates to those of China. The Caribbean region is south of the equator and therefore very hot. However, it is described as not as hot as Africa. It is also without endemic diseases, allowing immigrants to live through their adulthood. The heat decreases as one move southward. By Patagonia, the cold weather is not different from the northern edges of Asia. Its southern extremes are close to the South Pole, and are therefore filled with ice and without people and livestock.

The northernmost region of North America, surrounded by the Arctic Ocean, is described as an area with high humidity and cold weather. The region is depicted as having snow even during the summer months and frozen by the autumn. Lakes and seas of the region are portrayed as layers of "silvery" icebergs, and the two winter months are said to be a season of long nights during when both men and animals shiver in the cold. The two months of May and June are described as a season of long days and short nights and a time when the snow melting causes giant icebergs to float

around the seas like hillocks, placing sailing ships in danger of destruction. Choe's descriptions are both accurate and vivid.

Descriptions of individual nations are as follows:

» Canada: The coldness of its land is similar to the northern regions of China. The weather is extremely cold, and snow remains on the ground from October to March.
» United States: The distinction between cold and heat are clear in its northern and southern regions. It gets cold as one goes up north, and it gets warmer as one goes down south. The northern region depends on the weather for farming, and as the southern region is close to the water it fears heavy rain. Its northern border is about 35 degrees away from the North Pole, while its southern border is about 65 degrees away. Its southern border is about 25 degrees away from the equator. The length between its northern and southern borders is about 30 degrees, which allows its categorization into three regions.
» Mexico: The northern part of it is a bit cold, and coastal regions in the south are very hot. The temperature drops in the interior as the altitude rises, and the weather becomes mild at an altitude of around 4,000 to 5,000 feet.
» Guatemala: Its western borders are extremely hot, while the eastern border is mild. Although habitable, there are frequent earthquakes.
» Colombia: It is extremely hot in the coasts, and its water and soil are harmful to man. It gets milder as one move to the interior, making it habitable.
» Argentina: The land is very cold. Its weather is similar to that of northern regions of North America.

Geographic Perspective of Jigujeonyo

Choe Hangi explained movements and circulations such as Earth's rotation and revolution as something connected to the way of life. He therefore explained the reciprocal relationship between man and nature as deeply

interrelated. Earth's movement and circulation are seen as a logic that reaches heaven, influencing the way of life.

> The way of heaven and the way of man are related in both their origins and results. How would they not have patterns? *Unhwa* of Earth occurs due to the interactions of a number of stars. The way of life is shaped by Earth's *unhwa*. (Choe 1857h)
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> All instances in the world have a foundation that sets the standard as well as the origin. How can you determine the origin without *gi*? How can you determine the standard without the way of life? (Choe 1860c) …Through the realm of a single *gi*, all matters and people of the world unites into a one body. The eternal way of life must be introduced so that people of the past, present, and future are part of my life. (Choe 1860d)
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> …
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> Politics must be based on the *gi* of the universe. Politics without it is base. However, over-researching it without knowing much about it, as well as conducting politics while considering the *gi* as something that cannot be proven is also anachronistic. Therefore, academia must establish the ground in which *gi*, politics, and academia must cooperate and reinforce each other. However, *gi* is something that can only be realized through accumulation of experience, and is different in different millennia. If a bit of *gi* is revealed, the same amount of politics is revealed and the same amount of academia is revealed. If a larger bit of *gi* is realized, the same amount is again realized in politics and academia. (Choe 1857f)

The abovementioned quotes are good displays of the relationship *Gihwa unhwa* has with providence of the universe and the way of life. They constitute perhaps the most irrational part of Choe's perception of geography, which is otherwise marked with a strong sense of objectivity and scientific evidence. While it would be possible to figuratively say that rules and patterns are also necessary in life – as they are in the order of the universe, Earth's movements, and the changes in seasons – force, in the sense of inevitability or a direct relationship, is indeed far-fetched. On the other hand, however, that he sought to present evidence on the shape of Earth based on previous research and experiences, and attempted to explain the logic and providence of the universe through locations of the sun and moon and movements of constellations, evidences an objective scholarly attitude

on the part of Choe Hangi. Explaining the logic of the universe cannot be accomplished by a few scholars. Such a goal must be approached using accomplishments of the past. This opinion of Choe is appropriate.

Choe Hangi already knew of the importance of gathering knowledge through a direct and actual survey of geographic distances, distribution of sea and land, and locations of longitude and latitude. He also knew of the difficulty of determining whether or not results were accurate without making forecasts based on records and on maps and models of the shape of Earth.

Conclusion

The nineteenth century was a time of confusion and crisis. Traditional Confucianism, long the pillar of the Joseon society, was under threat. A number of intellectuals including the *sirhak* scholars sought to respond to the crisis by various means. At the same time, the nineteenth century was a period of potential and dynamism that could overcome the crisis and prepare for the new future. Academically, Joseon society was ready for new intellectual endeavors due to the internal build-up of scholarly achievements. The influence of the Qing *kaozhengxue* and intellectual currents that actively responded to socioeconomic problems shaped the nineteenth century as one of the most intellectually diverse and vibrant, with many accomplishments.

Such accomplishments can be detected in the field of geography. The well-known case of Kim Jeongho and the more recently recognized Choe Hangi are good examples of such accomplishments. The two men have accomplished great syntheses of mid-nineteenth-century Joseon geography. Kim Jeongho's *Taedongyeojido* and *Taedongjiji* are widely recognized as the great synthesis of Joseon mapmaking and geographical treatises. Choe Hangi's *Jigujeonyo* can also be seen as a systematic and practical synthesis of geographical treatises that integrated available contemporary knowledge on world geography. Although not from the ruling stratum, the two men were able to collect up-to-date information and produce maps and geographical treatises on Joseon as well as the world.

At a time of persecution against Catholicism as well as the closed door policy, Choe Hangi lived all of his life in Seoul, the center of Joseon Korea,

and carried out his scholarship without many restrictions. While nineteenth-century Korea can be seen as chaotic in a way, it was nevertheless relatively open to new scholarship. This fact is indicative of the possibilities of opening the door to the outside world. As for the two most famous individuals in contemporary geography, while Kim Jeongho's work can be seen as a great summation of traditional geography, Choe Hangi focused on accepting and absorbing new geographic knowledge and its systematization.

Unlike other intellectuals, there was something radically new about Choe Hangi's scholarly attempt, as Choe's perspective was global and long-term. The key factor of Choe's thought is *Gihak*, which sought to use the old (Confucianism) as the fundamental base and the new (Western science) as the method of reform in analyzing the concept of *gi* (energy). His book *Jigujeonyo* can be seen as the concrete accomplishment of *Gihak*. *Jigujeonyo* is a work of world geography that concretized regional geography. A summary of the practicality and perception of the outside world of *Jigujeonyo* can be organized as follows.

First, *Jigujeonyo* is a work of world geography that sought to understand different regional geographic conditions on the basis of earth sciences. Choe accepted Copernicus's heliocentricism and expanded his concept of *gi* into the realm of cosmology.

Second, Choe Hangi, through his work, established "nature" as the "physical world" and "man" as the subject of cognizance and change. Through a communication between the nature and man, he sought to realize the "way of humanity" and establish the "society of unity." Such an argument is indeed forced, as the contents of politics, religion, academia, ethics, and laws are products of human livelihoods and not the product of the connection between the nature and physical world.

Third, Choe Hangi's *Jigujeonyo* sought to, at the level of epistemology, more accurately understand world geography using the knowledge of earth science. It therefore can be recognized as a practical work of world geography, accepting currents of modernization of knowledge.

Fourth, from today's perspective, it is methodologically significant that Choe sought a consistent, organic synthesis of humanity, society, and nature using his concept of *gi*. For the people of the present—who are often overloaded with information—it is useful to have an organic framework that can perceive complex reality using a consistent perspective.

Fifth, Choe Hangi's emphasis on practical utility is worth noting. While the *sirhak* scholars of Choe's times developed an interest in Western sciences from the perspective of *Dongdo seogi*, and *Kaehwa* thinkers busied themselves blindly accepting Western culture and institutions, Choe Hangi perceived Western technologies, institutions, and ethics from a practical perspective. He went a step further in seeking to establish a new field of thought by synthesizing the two. Choe Hangi's interest in world geography was developed through this logic—a world geography based on earth science.

The content and methodology of Choe Hangi's geographical studies is, of course, not as relevant today as it was back then. However, his interest in the new and different in establishing his innovative views and perceptions, his relative openness, his efforts in overcoming biases, and his attempt to establish a perspective on world geography based on recognition of the times and practicality can be interpreted as a "modern" scholarly stance.

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Abstract

The aim of this research paper is to examine Choe Hangi's *Jigujeonyo* in order to study turn-of-the-century perceptions of world geography during the final days of Joseon Korea and to examine the circumstances under which aspects of modernity arose out of traditional Confucianism. First, his philosophical perspective of geography is analyzed with a focus on his *Giron* and *Hwaldong unhwa*. Second, the content from *Jigujeonyo* relevant to the earth and world geography are extracted and interpreted. Third, the level of understanding of world geography in late nineteenth century Korea is examined and the social conditions present during the process of modernizing from traditional Confucianism are analyzed.

The content and methodology of Choe Hangi's geographical studies is not as relevant today as it was back then. However, his interest in the new and different in establishing his innovative views and perceptions, his relative objectivity and openness, and his efforts in overcoming biases are certainly worth noting. All of these display an important aspect of the process of modernization from traditional Confucianism.

Keywords: *Jigujeonyo*, *Hwaldong unhwa*, perceptions of world geography, modern aspects of Confucianism

Submission: 2010. 8. 18. Referee/Revision: 2010. 8. 31. Confirm: 2010. 9. 3.