


Article

The Reading of the *Mencius* by Korean Confucian Scholars: Rhetorical Exegesis and the *Dao*

Min Jung You 

Institute of Korean Studies, School of History, Zhejiang University, Hangzhou 310000, China; mjoyou700@gmail.com

Abstract: When Joseon Korea scholars were interpreting the *Mencius* (孟子: K. Maengja or Mengzi), they were focusing on its content and on its rhetorical elements at the same time. For a given commentator, selecting various rhetorical features (such as grammatical and lexical specificities) meant to read the *dao* 道 (K. *do*) of the *Mencius* in a fashion different from the one expounded by other scholars. In this article, I examine the relationship these commentators were establishing between the textual patterns of the *Mencius* and the encompassing reality, *dao*, as understood by this latter work. Specifically, I focus upon the works of two Joseon scholars—Yi Hwang 李滉’s *Maengja seogui* 孟子釋義 and Wi Baekgyu 魏伯珪’s *Maengja chawi* 孟子劄義. Through their reading, I notably attempt to (a) describe how rhetorically oriented exegeses had been maturing throughout this era; and to (b) elucidate how Korean commentators, through their rhetorical commentaries, put forward interpretations that differed from the ones propounded by the orthodox tradition as exemplified by Zhu Xi.

Keywords: *Mencius*; rhetorical exegesis; *dao*; Confucianism; Joseon Korea; Yi Hwang; Wi Baekgyu



Citation: You, Min Jung. 2022. The Reading of the *Mencius* by Korean Confucian Scholars: Rhetorical Exegesis and the *Dao*. *Religions* 13: 976. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13100976>

Academic Editor: Benoît Vermander

Received: 2 September 2022

Accepted: 11 October 2022

Published: 17 October 2022

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1. Introduction

Just as the Christian Bible in the West was both a sacred scriptural body and a model for literary inspiration and patterns, in pre-modern East Asia the reading of the Confucian Classics focused on their spiritual truths as well as on their stylistic elements (Jiang and Jiang 2011, p. 213). To an even greater extent than the other Classics, the *Mencius* (孟子: K. Maengja or Mengzi) was read not only as a sacred text containing various metaphysical arguments, but also as narrative prose consisting of dynamic persuasive techniques and diverse literary ornamentations: *Mencius* was regarded as having been not only a Sage but also a *vir bonus dicendi peritus* (a good man skilled in the art of speaking).

Since the canonical *Mencius* may prove to be artfully composed, with coherent passages designed to convey particular messages to the reader, the stylistic elements of the text serve to uncover the Sage’s plot hidden in the text. Readers can easily notice what appear to be conflicting truths within the same sentence, often rendering the text highly obscure. This difficulty has led interpreters to attempt to elucidate the text’s teachings of the *dao* 道 (K. *do*) through explaining Mengzi’s art of argumentation.

A rhetorically oriented exegesis is a reading that interprets the Classics based on their “fundamental textual features” (K. *munui* 文義; literally, the textual meaning). It approaches a piece of writing through its literary style—the oratory, sentence usage, structure of sections, etc., or it examines their *topoi* or *loci* through the art of embellishment and/or persuasion. Such rhetorically oriented exegeses are found throughout the exegetical traditions of East Asia, just as literary criticism has existed as a hermeneutic methodology for the Bible in those of the West. Although terminological differences exist in the recent scholarship, recognizing “rhetoric” as a hermeneutic methodology for interpreting the Classics in the Sinographic Cosmopolis,¹ including Joseon Korea, has gradually gained

more scholarly attention both in the East and the West (Denecke 2010; Dong 1997; Gong 2008; Li 2011; Rusk 2012; You 2019; Zhang 2017).

In the Sinographic sphere, the three parts of rhetoric are: (1) K. *eose* 語勢, the term referring to both an aesthetic element and to the “mood” of the text; (2) K. *eobeop* 語法, a structuring element of the text; (3) K. *eoui* 語義, the intention, emotion, and perception of the writer (You 2018, p. 513). Reading the *Mencius*, the scholars of Joseon Korea paid more attention to the third, *eoui*, than scholars of Qing China and Edo Japan. They had a greater tendency to interpret the spiritual and ideological implications of the text through its rhetorical elements, etc., rather than just providing the appreciation of its expressions or analysis of its structural aspects.

This hermeneutic feature can be viewed as a result of the fact that “the Joseon dynasty is the first and only East Asian regime to be established under exclusive neo-Confucian auspices (Kalton et al. 1994, p. xix)”. Neo-Confucians tend to read the Classics from a moral and philosophical perspective; “Neo-Confucians were not greatly interested in history or literature, except to the extent that they could put them in service of their own program of moral cultivation (Bol 2018, p. 2)”. That is to say, the Neo-Confucians of Joseon, by and large, looked at the stylistic elements of the text insofar as they were revelatory of the author’s thought and spiritual outlook.

Rhetoric and philosophy are clearly interconnected, but there are no a priori answers to the question of which of them comes first. The purpose of this article is to evaluate the intertwining of these two disciplines within the exegetical tradition of pre-modern Korea.

For that purpose, I will firstly investigate how Joseon scholars found in the ancient expression *susaibgiseong* 修辭立其誠 (“Refining one’s word/establishing one’s sincerity”—see below) the ground upon which to develop a Korean concept of rhetoric (Part 2). Next, I will examine the rhetorically oriented exegeses of the *Mencius* propounded by the two Joseon scholars—Yi Hwang 李滉 (1502–1571)’s *Maengja seogui* 孟子釋義 and Wi Baekgyu 魏伯珪 (1727–1798)’s *Maengja chauui* 孟子劄義. I will notably scrutinize how they read the *dao* of Confucianism via the unearthing of stylistic elements of the text. Yi Hwang is a representative Confucian scholar of the early Joseon dynasty. His thoughts on Confucianism greatly influenced contemporary scholars, throughout the Joseon period. His *Maengja seogui* is considered the first Korean midrash on the *Mencius*, and includes a uniquely Korean-style gloss, the so-called K. *gugyeol* 口諭 (literally, oral edicts). Wi Baekgyu is a Confucian scholar of the late Joseon dynasty. His interpretation of the Classics was centering on the rhetorical features of the text to a greater extent than other scholars of Joseon had been doing. His *Maengja chauui* is regarded as the most comprehensive rhetorically oriented exegesis of the *Mencius* in the exegetical tradition of Korea (Part 3). Last but not least, I will uncover how rhetorical interpretations took distance from the “orthodox” tradition, comparing Wi Baekgyu and Zhu Xi’s commentaries (Part 4). By describing how rhetorically oriented exegeses of the Joseon matured, how differences in the thinking of the commentators made them emphasize contrasted rhetorical strategies, this article contextualizes rhetorically oriented exegesis within the interplay between rhetoric and thought: it highlights how the two dimensions were mutually shaping each other in the exegetical tradition proper to the Joseon period.

2. The Intertwining of Rhetoric and Philosophy—Joseon Scholars’ Reading of *Susaibgiseong* 修辭立其誠

The English word *rhetoric* derives from ancient Greek and is defined in various ways. Lu (1998, p. 2) writes that the term most commonly refers to the artistic use of oral and written expressions; in 21st century East Asia, it generally only applies to the art of textual ornamentation.² However, in the Sinographic sphere, the traditional meaning of *rhetoric* encompasses both persuasive skills and techniques of embellishment.³

The first occurrence of a Sinographic term roughly conterminous with “rhetoric”, namely K. *susa* 修辭 (Ch. *xiuci*; literally, “refined words”) can be found in the *Book of Changes* (*Yijing* 易經):⁴

The superior man (K. *gunja*, Ch. *junzi* 君子) advances in virtue, and cultivates everything within the sphere of his duty. His whole-heartedness and good faith are the way by which he advances in virtue. He refines his words (K. *susa*, Ch. *xiuci* 修辭) and establishes his sincerity (K. *ibgiseong*, Ch. *liqicheng* 立其誠), and thus dwells in the sphere of his duty.⁵

The connection between rhetoric and philosophy has been discussed since ancient times both in the East and the West. In the case of the West, starting with Cicero (B.C.106–B.C.43) and down to the recent work of Paul de Man (1919–1983) and beyond, scholars have argued that rhetorical patterns and ideas are inextricably linked. In the case of the East, it is unlikely that there is a systematic account on the relation between rhetoric and philosophy. As the Confucian teachings, however, place a greater emphasis on the moral impact of speech, the aforementioned passage “K. *susaibgiseong* 修辭立其誠” of the *Book of Changes* has provided thinkers with a basis for theorizing the connection between these two dimensions.

Broadly speaking, the interpretations of the expression *susaibgiseong*, can be divided into two lines. Line (1): the section “refining words (*susa* 修辭)” and the one “establishing his sincerity (*ibgiseong* 立其誠)” are in a *parallel* relationship. Line (2): the section “refining words” and the one “establishing his sincerity” are in a *causal* relationship. That is to say, perceptions differ as to the relationship between artfulness and thought depending on whether the passage is read as “refining words and establishing his sincerity” or as “after establishing his sincerity, he is able to refine his words”.

In a sense, both the former and the latter readings are similar in that “establishing one’s sincerity” is interconnected with “refining words”. Line (1), however, suggests that the purpose of refining words is to establish one’s sincerity, indicating that “refining words” is useless if such operation does not illuminate the *dao* of Confucianism. On the other hand, Line (2) considers that establishing one’s sincerity is a prerequisite for refining words, meaning that the one who cultivates his heart-mind will naturally improve his compositional skills. In this view, even though the writers do not focus on stylistic techniques, as long as they understand and practice the *dao* of Confucianism they will be able to convey to the reader what they do intend to convey. In the latter interpretation, philosophy influences rhetoric to a greater extent than it is the case in the former.

In pre-modern China, the latter interpretation—understanding the relationship between philosophy and rhetoric as causal—prevailed over the former (Zhou 2014, pp. 3–21). A clear representative of this tendency is Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200-K. Ju Hui-, a Chinese scholar who eventually defined orthodox Neo-Confucian thought in East Asia). Zhu Xi notably said that “if you fully understand things and affairs and have a peaceful mind, you can be good at speech”.⁶ In Joseon Korea, reading philosophy and rhetoric as a causal relationship was also dominant. For example, Gwon Geun 權近 (1352–1409) interprets the phrase *susaibgiseong* in the following way:

“Guarding against depravity, he preserves his sincerity” expresses things in terms of the heart-mind; “By attention to one’s words, one establishes one’s sincerity” expresses things in terms of [external] realities and affairs. In doing so, the inner and the outer mutually cultivate each other. If someone expresses things in terms of the heart-mind, real patterned-principle will be securely retained. And so, the original text, thus says “*chon* 存” (preserve). If someone expresses things in terms of [external] realities and affairs, real virtue will be applied in the right place. And so, the original text, thus says “*lip* 立” (establish). One who ‘preserves’ follows [his] inherent nature (*bonyeon* 本然) and maintains it; One who ‘establishes’ achieves what is appropriate (*dangyeon* 當然) and extends it. (Gwon 1995, vol. 87, p. 12)⁷

Gwon Geun contributed to the embedding of Neo-Confucianism in Joseon, and his interpretation of the Classics was widely referred to by many scholars of that period. Among the existing sources, his work *Juyeok cheongyeollok* 周易淺見錄 is the oldest midrash

on the *Book of Changes* in Korea (Yim 2021, p. 46). In his annotations on *susaibgiseong*, we find Gwon Geun's understanding of the two traditional concepts of "rhetoric": First, Gwon Geun sheds light on "establishing sincerity" rather than on "refining words", which means that the main purpose of writing is not to display artfulness but rather to deliver the Confucian truth. Second, Gwon Geun argues that stylistic techniques are closely related to self-cultivation. This means that writing is an expression of what is in one's mind, so once one has achieved spiritual maturity one's compositional skills will naturally be advanced. Through these two dimensions, Gwon Geun stresses the centrality of conveying the omnipresent Confucian truth (in other words, the *dao*) in writing rather than perusing the colorful ornaments of the text. In his commentary on the *Book of Changes*, Yi Seeung 李世應 (1473–1528; a scholar of the early Joseon) also argues that establishing sincerity is a prerequisite for stylistic techniques (Yi 1995, vol. 87, p. 572).⁸

When the English word *rhetoric* was translated into the Sinographic term *susa*, Yi Taejun 李泰俊 (1904–?; a novelist of Joseon) described the traditional concept of rhetoric as follows:

There have already been compositional techniques from the ancient times. Originally, both Eastern and Western concepts of rhetoric are derived from persuasive skills, not techniques of embellishment. Since language came before writing and eloquence was developed before the invention of a printing machine, both the Sinographic term *susa* and the English term rhetoric started with the meaning of persuasive skills. (Yi 1998, p. 23)⁹

Yi Taejun stressed the fact that rhetoric began in ancient East Asia as a set of "persuasive skills" rather than of "techniques of embellishment". Yi's point was that rhetoric fundamentally started from logical, persuasive ideas, not artful ornamentations. In a similar vein, during the late 19th and early 20th century, Sinographic terms such as *susa nonbyeon* 修辭論辯 and *byeollon* 辯論 were also applied as translations of the English term *rhetoric* in Joseon Korea. That is to say, the traditional Korean concept of rhetoric contains the idea that the author's plot/concerns are indwelling in a specific pattern of rhetoric, indicating that rhetoric and philosophy are closely interconnected.

Artful expression is derived from the intention of conveying and establishing belief; logical expression stems from one's true belief. Additionally, one's true belief leads to establish one's sincerity through continuous effort. Rhetoric and true belief, thus, are not separated but closely intertwined. This conviction was even firmer in pre-modern Joseon Korea, where the Neo-Confucian literary idea that the aim of literature is to transmit the *dao* (K. Muni jaedo, Ch. *Wenyi zaidao* 文以載道) was more predominant than in other East Asian countries.

For Joseon Confucians, the *dao* is indwelling in the rhetorical patterns of the Classics. They believe that achieving the Confucian truth is more important than enhancing artful writing skills. Influenced by this view, many scholars of the Joseon period have attempted to define Sagehood through an analysis of the stylistic elements of the *Mencius*.

3. Explaining the *Dao* of *Mencius* with a Rhetorical Perspective—The Cases of Yi Hwang and Wi Baekgyu

In the previous section, we uncovered the traditional Korean concept of rhetoric, which encompasses both persuasive skills and techniques of embellishment, indicating that this concept closely intertwines rhetoric and philosophy. Influenced by this view, the Joseon scholars tried to read the *dao* of the Classics from their stylistic patterns. In this section, we will further examine the connections and the tension between rhetoric and philosophy through the prism of the rhetorical annotations on the *Mencius* made by two scholars—Yi Hwang and Wi Baekgyu. In this way, we will be able to perceive how the rhetorically oriented exegeses of the Joseon progressively matured.

3.1. Yi Hwang's *Maengja Seogui*

Among the existing sources, Yi Hwang's *Maengja seogui* is the oldest midrash on the *Mencius* in Korea (Ham 2017, pp. 119–20). The *Maengja seogui* played a pivotal role in the publication of “the Vernacularized Classics—*Maengja* (K. *Maengja eonhaebon* 孟子諺解本, translation by Park 2019)”. This work is one of the state-created Korean editions of the Confucian Classics. These editions mightily contributed to the fact that Confucianism became the state religious ideology of the dynasty, as they were supplying definitive vernacularized Korean annotations (called “vernacularization” by Kornicki (2018) and Pollock (2006)).¹⁰

In the *Maengja seogui*, Yi Hwang internalizes the existing Korean vernacular readings and annotations of his predecessors, including Zhu Xi, and suggests his own interpretations of the *Mencius*. The *Maengja seogui* consists of two parts:

- (1) The original text with Korean gloss—so-called K. “*gugyeol*”: *Gugyeol* is a hangul grammatical glossing that provides a vernacular paraphrase of the Sinitic original. This part shows the existing vernacular readings of phrases in the *Mencius*.
- (2) Yi Hwang's annotations written in literary Sinitic: Yi Hwang first presents how he understands the *gugyeol* of that time and sketches textual meaning of the passage. He then explains Mencius's spiritual thought as connoted in the original text and provides his extratextual interpretations in order to deepen the comprehension of his readers.

As Park (2019, p. 145) has noted, *gugyeol* is one of the unique tools for vernacular reading of Sinitic texts in pre-modern Korea: “The term *gugyeol* refers both to a system of vernacular reading by gloss and also to the glosses themselves (the term is sometimes used interchangeably with *to*). As a system of vernacular reading, *gugyeol* uses a grammatical transcoding algorithm that shows the reader how to parse a literary Sinitic text in the Korean language. It is comparable to Old English interlinear glossing that helps readers rearrange the word order of a Latin text into English”.

Gugyeol, for the most part, hinges on grammatical analysis of the Sinitic sentence. The cultural and linguistic habitus of the time was reflected in this Korean-gloss reading of literary Sinitic: quite naturally, Korean scholars were making use of self-effecting language in order to recontextualize Sinitic texts through their vernacular language. Accordingly, Yi Hwang's analysis on the *gugyeol* of that time unravels the structural elements of the original sentences and decipher Mencius's purpose and the teaching of Confucianism.

His commentary work on the *Mencius* consists of 195 sections. Among them, twenty sections include his rhetorically oriented exegeses—there are ten sections on [K] *eose* (i.e., on the aesthetic elements or the mood of the text); four sections on *eobeop* (the structuring element of the text); and six sections on *eoui* (the intentions, emotions and perceptions of Mencius). In fact, Yi Hwang was giving the term *eose* a meaning similar to the one of the term *eoui*. On the whole, one may estimate that most of his exegeses interprets the *Mencius* through its stylistic elements. In this section, we will examine three representative examples to unveil how Yi Hwang evaluates Zhu Xi's commentary as well as the existing *gugyeol* of the Joseon period on the basis of the emphasis he puts upon the “mood” of the text.¹¹

First, in *Mencius* 2A2, which explains how to nourish the “vast, flowing *qi*” (K. *hoyeon-jigi* 浩然之氣), Mencius says: “[Such *qi*] is born from the accumulation of righteousness; incidental acts aren't enough. [Author's translation]” (是集義所生者, 非義襲而取之也 K. *sijipuisosaengja*, *biuiseubichwijjiya*) The *gugyeol* of the time interprets “*sijipui* 是集義” of this passage as “it is <produced by> the accumulated righteousness. 是 |義 |集 ㅎ ·야”¹² Yi Hwang goes against this *gugyeol* by developing the following argument:

Now looking at the text, we should change the existing *gugyeol* into a new *gugyeol* “義를集 ㅎ ·야” (accumulating righteousness). It is impossible that those who nourish *gi* 氣 (vital energy) firstly have the accumulation of this *ui* (righteousness) and naturally emanate the heart-mind of the vast, flowing *gi* (*hoyeonjigi* 浩然之氣). The two words “*jipui* 集義” truly refer to the state of the accumulation of

purposeful practice. How can righteousness be naturally accumulated on its own without any effort? Without looking back on the stylistic features and the intended meanings of the original text, many scholars of the day are so afraid of being entangled with the selfishness of comparisons and expectations that they insist on the above aforementioned *gugyeol*. (Yi 1989, vol. 35, p. 6)¹³

In Yi Hwang's time, the existing *gugyeol* interprets the word "jip 集" as a past tense "accumulated (*moyeo* 모여)". Yi Hwang criticizes this *gugyeol* for not looking carefully at the "mood" of the writing. He argues that, if we follow this reading, it will mislead readers into thinking that righteousness (*ui* 義) can be accumulated without any individual effort and then naturally move on to the next/or final stage, achieving vast, flowing *qi*. Yi Hwang suggests that the word "jip" refers to a present-progressive tense "accumulating (*moa* 모아)", and "jipui 集義" should be interpreted as "accumulating righteousness". His reading indicates that righteousness is not achieved suddenly or spontaneously but is the result of constant full-fledged effort.

Gaozi 告子 (ca. 420–ca. 350 BCE, K. Goja, a controversial thinker who debated with Mencius) argues that righteousness exists in the external world. Yi Hwang, however, emphasizes that righteousness exists not in the external but is imbedded in our inner nature, and that the original intention of Mencius is to encourage us to cultivate this disposition through constant practice. He argues that righteousness is not acquired through social learning; rather, our innate nature guides us along the way.

The second example derives from the debate about the lines of Mencius 4A1 (上無道揆也, 下無法守也 K. *sangmudogyuyya*, *hamubeopsuyya*), interpreted by the *gugyeol* of that time as meaning: "If the upper [level] [i.e., the prince] has no principles by which he examines [his administration], then the lower [level] [i.e., the ministers] has no laws by which they keep themselves [in order]. 上이道로揆티아니호면下 法으로守티이니호야" Yi Hwang disagrees with this *gugyeol* for the following reasons:

Now looking at the text, if we are grounded in the textual mood of the *Collected Commentaries on the Mencius* (K. *Maengja jipju* 孟子集註), we will follow the interpretation of this *gugyeol*. Reading such a passage, however, we should not adhere to the *Collected Commentaries*. We should smoothly follow the stylistic features of the original text and interpret it as meaning: "the upper has no principles by which he examines, and the lower has no laws by which they keep themselves. 上이道로揆홈이업스며下 法으로守홈이업서". (Yi 1989, vol. 35, p. 11)¹⁴

The existing *gugyeol* regards the section "the upper has no principles by which he examines 上無道揆也" and the section "the lower has no laws by which they keep themselves 下無法守也" as describing a cause-and-effect relation, interpreting it as a "If (...) then (...)" 上이道로揆티아니호면下 法으로守티이니호야" Challenging this annotation, Yi Hwang points out that this *gugyeol* is born from Zhu Xi's interpretation: "Since there are no principles by which the upper examines, there are no laws by which the lower keep themselves. (Zhu 1983, vol. 7, p. 276)", rather than from the original.¹⁵

Following the hints that the stylistic elements of the original text provide us with, Yi Hwang argues that the phrase "the upper has no principles by which he examines" and the phrase "the lower has no laws by which they keep themselves" are separate events and describe a "parallel relationship". That is to say, since there is no grammatical connection between these two phrases, there is no ground to regard these two events in terms of "causality". Yi Hwang's viewpoint recognizes that the lower is an independent *subject* in the practice of the *dao*, while Zhu Xi's causal view indicates that the lower is just an *object* influenced by the moral behavior of the upper level. Zhu Xi's interpretation expressed the socio-political belief that the moral competence of an individual is determined by his/her social status. Conversely, Yi Hwang's understanding of the Confucian truth implies that everyone possesses equal moral capacity regardless of his/her social status.

As a third example, let us consider the lines of *Mencius* 4B19 (由仁義行. 非行仁義也. K. *yuinuihaeng. bihaenginuiya*), which the existing *gugyeol* was interpreting as meaning: “[Shun] walked along the path of benevolence and righteousness, he did not pursue and practice benevolence and righteousness. 義 由 仁 義 行 故 不 行 仁 義 也.” Yi Hwang criticizes this *gugyeol* in the following way:

Now, looking at the text, since recent scholars are unwilling to engage in purposeful practice, the existing *gugyeol* interprets in this way and just follows the natural meaning. Not only does this not capture the inversion of the text but it is also inadequate in regard to the principle of morally proper conduct (*uiri* 義理). We should interpret these lines as “he pursued benevolence and righteousness and took action. 仁義로由 仁 義 行 故 不 行 仁 義 也.” The *Collected Commentaries on the Mencius* says that “benevolence and righteousness are already rooted in the heart-mind, 仁義已根於心” which means that the heart-mind of the Sage is benevolent and righteous by nature. It also says that “all actions emanate from this. 所行皆由此出” The word “this (*cha* 此)” in the expression “from this (*yucha* 由此)” refers to benevolence and righteousness. Since benevolence and righteousness are in our heart-mind by nature, all actions are pursued and come from benevolence and righteousness. Just as our body has ears and eyes by nature, so after the ears and eyes come in contact with all the things and affairs, we can see and hear them. Thus, if someone says “*yuimogisicheong* 由耳目而視聽”, we should interpret it as “through/owing to the ears and eyes, we see and hear. 耳目으로말 由 仁 義 而 出.” How can this be read as “the ears and eyes see and hear? 耳目이말 由 仁 義 而 出.” (...) If someone says “benevolence and righteousness come forth, 由仁義而出” it is just like saying “the ears and eyes pursue it, 耳目이由之” which means that there is something other than the ears and eyes, through which someone sees and hears. In a similar vein, if someone says “benevolence and righteousness pursue it, 仁義由之” it means that there is something other than benevolence and righteousness, through which someone practices. The initial intention of the existing *gugyeol* was to prevent [the readers] from being averse to having a mind [turned towards] purposeful practice, but conversely, it dismisses [the existence of] benevolence and righteousness and says these are [just] what the Sage does. Is this permissible? All those of the present age who wish to clarify their teachings are like this; so, we must look at it carefully. (Yi 1989, vol. 35, p. 12–13)¹⁶

Saying it otherwise: the *gugyeol* of that time was understanding the syntax of the sentence “*yuinuihaeng* 由仁義行” in *Mencius* 4B19 by positing that the doublet “benevolence and righteousness [Ch. *renyi* 仁義]” is the subject of the sentence and that there is no object in it. Such *gugyeol*, is likely to lead to misunderstandings, as the object—i.e., what benevolence and righteousness pursue and practice—is obscure. Pointing out that the existing *gugyeol* misjudges the mood of the original text, Yi Hwang says, that the two words “benevolence and righteousness” serve as objects, not as subject, and thus the phrase “*yuinuihaeng* 由仁義行” should be interpreted as “he pursued benevolence and righteousness and took action. 仁義로由 仁 義 行 故 不 行 仁 義 也.” In addition, working from the textual features of the sentence, Yi Hwang preaches the Confucian doctrine that benevolence and righteousness are inherent in our heart-mind, and that human beings are the subject who practice these two virtues. That is to say (and as was stressed already by the preceding example), benevolence and righteousness are not obtained by social learning; rather, we are born with them, and we continuously cultivate our original nature by ourselves.

3.2. *Wi Baekgyu's Maengja Chaui*

Wi Baekgyu's Maengja chaui is a work representative of the thought and method of the author. It interprets Confucian truths through textual rhetorical features—such as dictions, sentence structures, and the mood of the original text: reading the *Mencius*, *Wi* recontextualizes the author’s intention through the structural elements and/or mood of the text.¹⁷ Yi Hwang was already displaying a similar approach in his commentary of

Mencius, Wi, however, shows a greater awareness of the literary aspects of the *Mencius* and he elucidates the intertwining of the rhetorical patterns and of the author's argument to a much greater extent than his predecessor was doing. This will now be shown by looking at three examples.

First, Wi Baekgyu uncovers the intertwining between the notions of familial affection (K. *chinchin* 親親) and the idea that benevolence is innate through the study of the rhetorical patterns of the original text.

What King [Xuan] of Qi needed to do was simply to extend [the realm of] the benevolence (*in* 仁) that our heart-minds innately possess. Earlier, Mencius followed up by a saying, "How does one do this. . . ?" (*hayeo* 何與) so as to move the King to question thoroughly [his purported inability to act benevolently toward his people]; he then talks about extending benevolence (*chuin* 推仁). Since nothing is closer to benevolence than revering one's family members and loving one's children, he could not but use this [propensity] as a way to guide the king towards understanding. Mencius could have chosen many other metaphors about the relative ease or difficulty to complement the one he uses ("holding a mountain under one's arm and leaping over the sea" 挾山超海) but his choice of "bowing to an elder" (or "breaking kindling for an elder") 爲長者折枝 is truly a surprise. The level of reverence needed in order to easily bow to an elder is something that our heart-minds innately possess (. . .) After saying "[I] treat [my] elders as elders should be treated [in order to extend this to the elders of others]" 老老 and "[I] treat [my] child as the children should be treated [in order to extend this to the [treatment of] children outside one's family]" 幼幼 he goes on to say that "[King Wen's] example set an example for his wife" 刑妻 to fully illustrate in which way he was able to enlighten those living nearby him—and yet the root of bringing peace and order [to the entire world] is nothing more than this. (Wi 2000, vol. 9, p. 185b)¹⁸

Here, Wi Baekgyu comments on the opening and closing lines of one of Mencius's arguments in *Mencius* 1A7: "Your kindness is sufficient to reach animals, and yet no benefits are extended to the people. How is this permissible? (. . .) Now, your kindness is sufficient to reach animals, and yet no benefits are extended to the people. How is this permissible?"¹⁹

Wi Baekgyu interprets the mood of the original text in relationship with various types of rhetorical devices—such as questions, illustrative examples, rhetorical metaphors, and quotations—and he insists on the fact that the devices used in this paragraph indicate Mencius' intention: to explain to the king of Qi the notions of inherent benevolence and familial affection. These notions, as discussed by Wi, had been elaborated by Neo-Confucian thinkers.

Wi Baekgyu pays attention to the words "*hayeo* 何與 (How is this?)". Since benevolence is inherent in human nature, Wi argues that Mencius induces the king of Qi to be aware of his innate benevolence by repeatedly asking "How is this?". "How is this" is a rhetorical question that makes a point instead of eliciting a direct answer; it leads the listener to examine her/his true mind. Additionally, Wi Baekgyu claims that Mencius employs these rhetorical devices in order to inspire the king to better understand Confucian teachings. That is to say, the example provided by the sentence "to treat [my] elders as elders should be treated and to treat [my] child as children should be treated", the metaphor of "breaking kindling for an elder", and the quotation of the *Book of Song* (*Shijing* 詩經), all are drawn from the intention of Mencius to teach the king of Qi the Confucian belief that practicing benevolence begins and expands from the "nearest family".

Second, Wi Baekgyu explains the notions of inherent heavenly pattern-principle (K. *cheolli* 天理) and the naturalness of human desire (K. *inyok* 人慾) through the stress he puts over the tone of the writing:

After saying the word "*chu* 推" (extending), Mencius elucidates the method of extending. The word "*gwon* 權" (weighing) and the word "*tak* 度" (measuring)

are key for extending. Mencius asks the king of Qi to consider this, but how would the benighted king notice it in a flash? So, Mencius subsequently coolly and calmly explains; in particular, he uses the word “*eok* 抑” (perhaps) as his auxiliary word to continue. Prior to the phrase “I beg your Majesty to measure it 王請度之”, Mencius proves that the heavenly pattern-principle is inherent in the king’s heart-mind; below the phrase “Perhaps your Majesty 抑王”, Mencius identifies and rejects the human desires that are covering and blocking the king’s heart-mind. He employs the words “*heung* 興” (raging), “*wi* 危” (endangering), and “*gu* 構” (exciting) to frighten the king; he uses the word “*kwae* 快” (pleasant) in order to encourage and arouse the king and to ignite his original feelings. This is how a judge interrogates bandits. (Wi 2000, vol. 9, p. 186a)²⁰

In this passage, Wi Baekgyu comments on the following lines of *Mencius* 1A7: “By weighing, we know what things are light and which ones are heavy. By measuring, we know what things are long and which ones are short. This is true of all things, and especially so with the heart-mind. I beg your Majesty to measure your own heart-mind. Or perhaps your heart would be filled with delight only after you raise armies, endanger your subjects, and excite the resentment of the other princes?”²¹

Wi Baekgyu claims that the oratory of Mencius not only exhorts but also excites the mind of the king of Qi. First of all, Wi asserts that Mencius uses a smooth tone to encourage the king of Qi to recognize the heavenly pattern-principle in his heart-mind. Second, like an arrow shooting a tiger, Mencius utilizes a succinct tone to stimulate the listener, the king of Qi, to recognize his initial feelings, the original human desire in his heart-mind. In other words, the two phrases “I beg your Majesty to measure it” and “Perhaps your Majesty” includes the writer’s plot to uncover the natures of heavenly pattern-principle and human desire. To sum up, through his stress on stylistic patterns, Wi Baekgyu illuminates the Neo-Confucian belief that the heavenly pattern-principle is inherent in human beings and human desire is a natural feeling.

Third and last examples: Wi Baekgyu carefully discloses the structural elements of the text, such as diction, explaining that feelings have a tendency toward goodness, the so-called K. *jeonggyeonghyang seol* 情傾向說:

Mencius says that “From the feelings [he can experience], a man is capable of becoming good. 其情則可以爲善” This is an apt remark. Even the tyrants Jie and Zhou 桀紂 know how to love when their sons are born, how to feel pain when they cut their skin, and how to feel sorrow when someone dies. If they sincerely extend this heart-mind, they will be able to fully achieve benevolence. This is the meaning of “the feelings can be good”. Mencius does not say “the human nature is good (*seongseon* 性善)”, but says “the feelings (*gijeong* 其情);” he does not say “the feelings are good (*gijeongseon* 其情善)”, but firmly says “the feelings then (*jeongjeuk* 情則)” and “can (*gai* 可以)” [become good]. Mencius speaks in a euphemism and quotes roundly to awaken everyone to the fact that there is a thread of goodness of the heaven-conferred nature (*cheonseong* 天性) within us. Mencius’s initial intention is not to strongly argue that the nature of the two tyrants is good. (Wi 2000, vol. 16, p. 353a)²²

Wi Baekgyu is commenting here on the following lines of *Mencius* 6A6: “From the feelings [he can experience], a man is capable of becoming good. This is what I mean in saying that human nature is good”.²³

In Zhu Xi’s view, the passage “From the feelings [he can experience], a man is capable of becoming good (乃若) 其情則可以爲善” grounds the theory of the goodness of human nature (*seongseon seol* 性善說). Zhu asserts that “feelings are the movements of human nature (*seong* 性). Such human feelings can only be good and cannot be malicious, and from this we can see that human nature is originally good. (Zhu 1983, vol. 11, p. 328)”²⁴ What we need to keep in mind is that this opinion is derived from Zhu Xi’s metaphysical beliefs, not from the stylistic patterns of the original text.

On the other hand, Wi Baekgyu argues that this passage expounds the theory of a *tendency* towards goodness deduced by the observation of human feelings, not the theory of the goodness of human nature. The ground of his claim is in the “diction”, the oratory of the original text. What Wi argues is that the words “*gijeong* 其情” (one’s feelings) and “*gai* 可以” (can) imply that feelings have a tendency toward goodness. He points out, in detail, that if Mencius wanted to insist that “human nature is good”, he would have said “human nature (*giseong* 其性)” instead of “the feelings (*gijeong* 其情)”; if Mencius wanted to express a definitive meaning rather than an inconclusive meaning, he would have said “the feelings are good (*gijeongseon* 其情善)”. This is how Wi suggests a view opposite to the one propounded by Zhu Xi through the textual elements of *Mencius*.

4. One Eternal Text, Two Contradictory Truths

In the previous section, we examined Yi and Wi’s rhetorical commentaries, depicting how these interpreters decipher the stylistic features of the original text in order to explain Confucian truths. Through this, we observed how, from Yi of the early Joseon to Wi of the late Joseon, the rhetorically oriented exegeses had intensified and matured.

As mentioned in the preface of his work (Wi 2000, vol. 9, p. 186b),²⁵ it is likely that his relentless focus upon the fundamental textual features, so-called, *munui*, led Wi Baekgyu to illuminate the principle of morally proper conduct, so-called *uiri*, through its rhetorical elements more than any other Joseon scholars: “I shed light on the textual reading of the text to unravel the encompassing reality, the *dao*”.

Though there are slight differences in the text from one version to another, the canonized *Mencius* is treated as the original, eternal text. It is intriguing that rhetorical commentaries capture different stylistic elements from the same sentence for extracting from the text contradictory truths. Likely, rhetorical patterns affect the reading of the interpreter; however, at the same time, the interpreter’s own plotting devices also affect the decoding of the rhetorical patterns as he expounds his own beliefs about the truth he means to unveil.

In this section, we will have a look at the rhetorical commentaries of Wi Baekgyu and Zhu Xi to see how their spiritual thought is engaged in their reading of the rhetorical patterns of the *Mencius*. Wi suggests views on the Confucian truth that differ from the orthodox interpretation of Zhu Xi by analyzing the stylistic patterns of the text:

Because in the beginning of the passage the king mentioned profit (*yi* 利), at the end of this passage, Mencius holds up benevolence and righteousness (*inui* 仁義). He then repeats the phrase “Why must your Majesty speak of profit?” Again, Mencius’s excellent eloquence surprisingly enlightens the listener (. . .) Mencius’s main achievement is making clear [the nature of] righteousness and profit, thereby bringing salvation of the Warring State period. To do this, Mencius mentions, in the first chapter, “Why must your Majesty speak of ‘profit?’ My only topics are benevolence and righteousness”. (Wi 2000, vol. 9, p. 183a)²⁶

Wi Baekgyu is here commenting on the following lines of *Mencius* 1A1: “Why must your Majesty speak of ‘profit?’ My only topics are benevolence and righteousness (. . .) Let your Majesty also say, ‘Benevolence and righteousness, and let these be your only themes.’ Why must your Majesty speak of ‘profit?’”²⁷ He sheds light on why Mencius mentions the keywords “benevolence and righteousness”. Over the same lines, Zhu Xi highlights a different rhetorical pattern as to why Mencius asks the king not to speak of “profit”. (Zhu 1983, vol. 1, p. 202)²⁸ Wi Baekgyu and Zhu Xi highlight different grammatical and lexical aspects of the same sentence, and their respective views about profit and human desire inspire their different rhetorical annotations.

Wi Baekgyu positively evaluates profits as follows:

The distinction between a gentleman, a petty person, and a hegemon is only a distinction between righteousness and profit; nevertheless, “profit” is not something external to the heavenly pattern-principle. The scent and flavor of ear, eye, mouth, and nose, the comfort of body, the wealth of goods, the prestige of

the position, and the longevity of the descendants all belong to profit, which is the nature of the heavenly pattern-principle. (Wi 2000, vol. 9, p. 182b)²⁹

Wi Baekgyu claims that human desires belong to the heavenly pattern-principle so that seeking profit is part of the nature of human beings. In contrast, Zhu Xi warns that it is harmful to seek profit since it goes against the heavenly pattern-principle (Zhu 1983, vol. 1, p. 202).³⁰ Additionally, Wi Baekgyu says that the core content of *Mencius* is about illuminating the meaning of benevolence, righteousness, and profit (Wi 2000, vol. 9, p. 183a–83b),³¹ while Zhu Xi asserts that the main content of *Mencius* is about preserving the heavenly pattern-principle and eliminating human desire. Wi Baekgyu has a relatively neutral perspective on profit, which departs from the orthodox Neo-Confucian notion that seeking profit should be avoided since it is harmful to human beings.

Considering the Neo-Confucian notion that “benevolence and righteousness originate from the heavenly pattern-principle, and seeking for profit stems from human desire”, Wi Baekgyu’s attitude as to looking for profit is derived from his thoughts on human desire. Wi does not consider human desire as inherently bad since he understands “desire” in terms of “wishes”, as differentiating the word “*yok* 欲” [wish] from the word “*yok* 慾” [desire].³² In the same token, he regards the mouth’s love of food and the nose’s love of appealing scents not as inherently bad but as expressions of the nature of human beings. In contrast, Zhu Xi considers human desire as intrinsically evil. According to Zhu, human desires, such as the mouth’s preference for good tastes, must be regulated, since they can easily become nefarious.³³

Wi Baekgyu says that human desire is included in the heavenly pattern-principle, while Zhu Xi argues that human desire diverges from the heavenly pattern-principle. These contrary views of Wi and Zhu imply that the interpreter’s plot is applied to his/her rhetorical annotations. For instance, the interpreter’s view leads him to emphasize different grammatical or lexical features of the sentence from *Mencius* 1A1 that we have quoted above.

To be specific, both Wi and Zhu could have pondered over the word “*K. ha* 何 (why)”, intended to cast a doubt, or yet over the words “*K. yiyiui* 而已矣 (only)”, a determiner, or oxymoron, or parallel syntax, or antimetabole, etc. Such questions were touched upon by other scholars: for instance, Niu Yunzhen 牛運震 (1706–1758) of Qing China sheds light on the fact that *Mencius* repeats these phrases while slightly altering the grammatical order.³⁴ Hirose Tansō 廣瀨淡窓 (1782–1856) of Edō Japan, on the other hand, focuses his analysis of the same rhetorical pattern on the mere fact that the sentence is uttered twice within one section.³⁵

However, Wi illuminates a rhetorical device that emphasizes the fact that *Mencius* welcomes “benevolence and righteousness”, and Zhu spotlights a rhetorical pattern that makes clear that *Mencius* rejects “profits”. That is to say, the different perspectives on human desire steer the attention of our commentators to different stylistic features of the same sentence. It is not just a matter of syntactic ambiguity. Their beliefs about the truth are reflected in their rhetorical interpretations. This reminds us of the *Book of Changes* sentence according to which “refining rhetoric is derived from establishing one’s sincerity” discussed in the previous section. The rhetorical pattern seems to influence the reader’s interpretation of the Classics, but the reader’s thought also affects her/his reading of the stylistic patterns of the original text.

5. Conclusions

Aside from its complex textuality (it contains critiques, satires, and an early appropriation of ancient East Asian wisdom), the *Mencius* also represents a quantum leap forward in human moral and intellectual understanding. In the Sinographic sphere, there was a belief that textual rhetorical strategies reflect the core thinking of *Mencius*, an idea based on the ancient idea that rhetorical procedures had to be based on sincerity (*K. susaibgiseong*). Influenced by this view, rather than appreciating *Mencius* as a literary text, Joseon scholars tried to read the rhetorical pattern of the text in such a way as to uncover the fundamental

truths of Confucianism. This paper has examined this phenomenon through a rhetorical reading of *Mencius* by two representative scholars—Yi Hwang of the early Joseon and Wi Baekgyu of the late Joseon.

As has been uncovered in this paper, their rhetorical interpretations have two significant features. First, from Yi Hwang to Wi Baekgyu, the analysis of rhetorical patterns has intensified. Yi Hwang mostly mentions the structural elements—e.g., the issues of active or passive voice and causal or parallel relationships. Wi Baekgyu, on the other hand, pays attention not only to the structural elements but also to the mood of the text. He points out more specific rhetorical features such as a rhetorical question and analyzes it in more detail than Yi had done before him.

Second, from Yi Hwang to Wi Baekgyu, the connection between the rhetorical pattern and the interpreter's plot intensified to a greater extent, since Wi displays a full-fledged effort to recontextualize the Sage Mencius's logic and speculation by reading the structural elements and/or mood of the text and providing detailed explanations. That is, Wi Baekgyu reflexively takes the rhetorical approach as a hermeneutic methodology.

Yi Hwang, by and large, deciphers early Confucian notions, such as the intrinsic nature of human beings and the importance of continuous efforts for enacting the Confucian *dao*, through the rhetorical patterns of the *Mencius*. On the other hand, Wi Baekgyu mainly decodes the Neo-Confucian notions, such as the heavenly pattern-principle and human desire, as well as the early Confucian ideas in his rhetorical annotations. At this stage, early Joseon scholarship had begun to recognize the Neo-Confucian notions, while late Joseon scholarship fully grasps them, takes some distance from their traditional understanding, and develops its own Neo-Confucian ideas, showcasing their fertility. In this light, Wi Baekgyu's rhetorical interpretation not only diversifies Neo-Confucian ideas but also frames the discussions happening within the Joseon Confucian landscape.

Another implication of this study is that the stylistic pattern of the Confucian canon guides the reader's interpretation of the text, but, vice versa, an interpreter's plot often influences his reading of rhetorical patterns. We examined this issue by contrasting the rhetorical commentaries of Wi Baekgyu and Zhu Xi. Wi and Zhu are attentive to different rhetorical aspects of the same sentence of *Mencius* 1A1. They both pretend to be merely shedding light on the fundamental textual features of the text (rather than developing their own views) when reading *Mencius*. However, their rhetorically oriented exegeses resonate with their thought and with the context in which their writing was occurring. For instance, in the days of Wi Baekgyu, the Korean reality-focused School (the so-called *silhak* 實學 intellectual current) was prevailing, which made Wi more receptive to human desire in its concreteness than Zhu Xi could have been.

In a sense, rhetorical commentaries are conceived and written from within the reader's spiritual orbit. Interpreters reflect their beliefs in their reading, and are not strictly bound by the sources. Their interpretations can always be criticized for their subjectivity, as being driven by their own beliefs about what they perceive as the ultimate truth unveiled by the text. Still, the dynamics exhibited by rhetorical interpretations was derived from a syntactic unity—the very text of the *Mencius*—a fact that refers to a fundamental and often debated question: Can an absolutely objective, unintended reading of a textual source ever take place? At the very least, the attentive reading of our Korean commentators has shown how subtle the interplay between a text's rhetorical patterns and its reinterpretations can be.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Acknowledgments: My thanks go to the three anonymous reviewers for their precious comments and suggestions.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

¹ For the concept of “Sinographic Cosmopolis”, see (King 2015).

² (1) Korea—National Institute of Korean Language (*Gungnip gugeowon* 국립국어원).

Available online: <https://stdict.korean.go.kr/search/searchView.do> (archived on 24 August 2022)

(2) China—Baidu.

Available online: <https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E4%BF%AE%E8%BE%9E/175591?fr=aladdin> (archived on 7 August 2022)

(3) Japan—Weblio.

Available online: <https://www.weblio.jp/content/%E3%81%97%E3%82%85%E3%81%86%E3%81%98> (archived on 7 August 2022).

³ Applying the Western concept of rhetoric to non-Western texts is a controversial issue. Indraccolo (2014) argues that it is possible to apply the concept of rhetoric only if we keep the meaning of rhetoric fluid. If so, as Weber (2014) insists, though Western scholarship has long tried to provide a clear definition of the term *rhetoric*, a broader and more abstract definition is needed for cross-cultural research. Moreover, we need to determine ordinary concepts of rhetoric as developed in the Sinographic Cosmopolis, because there was no single Sinitic term that exactly matches up with the Greek (or English) word *rhetoric*. By analyzing the etymology and previous interpretations of *susa*, Jeong (2006) and Kim (2004) claim that the traditional meaning of *susa* encompasses both embellishment techniques and persuasive skills. Further discussion may be needed, but this is the traditional concept of rhetoric I employ in this article (You 2019, p. 505).

⁴ For the etymology, previous interpretations and three elements of the traditional concept *susa*, refer to (You 2019, pp. 36–43).

⁵ 君子，進德修業。忠信，所以進德也，修辭立其誠，所以居業也。 Translation of *Book of Changes* from (Legge 2015) with modifications.

⁶ 事理通達，而心氣和平，故能言 (Zhu 1983, vol. 8, pp. 173–74).

⁷ 閑邪存其誠，以心而言，修辭立其誠，以事而言，內外交相養也。以心而言，則實理其所固有，故曰“存”。以事而言，則實德在所當勉，故曰“立”。存者因其本然而守之也。立者盡其當然而致之也。

⁸ 立誠為修辭之本，則聖人之戒慎乎。

⁹ 문장작법은 이미 있었다. 동양의 수사나 서양의 레토릭은 애초부터 문장작법은 아니요 변론법에 있었다. 문장보다는 언어가 먼저 있었고 출판술 이전에 변론술이 먼저 발달되었으니, 수사법이니 레토릭이니 다 말하는 기술로서 시작한 것이다.

¹⁰ For the concept of “vernacularization”, see (Kornicki 2018, pp. 28–33; Pollock 2006, pp. 19–30).

¹¹ For more examples of Yi’s rhetorical commentaries on the *Mencius*, refer to (You 2019, pp. 157–81).

¹² Translation of *Mencius* from (Legge 1960) with modifications.

¹³ 今按，當云“義를集호야”. 義氣者，固不可先有集合此義，以生浩氣之心。然“集義”二字，實是積累工夫之處，豈都不容着工，而義自然來集乎？正緣諸生怕涉計較期待之私，故不顧文勢義意，而為此說耳。

¹⁴ 今按，據《註》文勢，則似當如此。然此等處，不可太拘《註》文，當平順本文語勢，

¹⁵ 云“上이道로揆호이업서며下이法으로守호이업서”。

¹⁶ 由上無道揆，故下無法守。

¹⁷ 今按，此亦畏涉工夫，故如此釋以就自然之意，不顧文勢之倒置義理之乖舛也。當云“仁義로由호야행호신디라”. 蓋《集註》“仁義根於心”云者，乃先言聖人之心仁義本具之意，而係之曰“所行皆由此出”，是“由此”之“此”字，正指仁義而言。惟其仁義本具於心，故所行皆由仁義而出，猶耳目本具於身，故所接皆由耳目而視聽也。故如說“由耳目而視聽”，當曰“耳目으로말호아마視聽”矣，豈可曰“耳目이말호아마視聽”乎？(…)曰“仁義로由之”，則是所由以行者，別有他物，而非仁義也。然則為此說者，本欲務避有心工夫之嫌，而反去仁義而言聖人之所行，其可乎？近世諸公欲精訓說者，每如此，不可不察。

¹⁸ For details of Wi’s rhetorical commentaries on the *Mencius*, refer to (You 2018, pp. 509–18; You 2019, pp. 208–23).

¹⁹ 齊王所當為，只是推吾心固有之仁而已，上文連說“何與”，使王十分喫疑，將說與“推仁”。而仁莫近於敬親愛子，則不可不以老老幼幼，為自牖之約。凡事物可與挾山超海，輕重對舉者，不啻多矣，而必以為長者折枝為言，誠是意外也。蓋為長折枝之易，是吾心固有之敬也。(…)既言“老老幼幼”，又繼以刑妻，儘切己曉人。而治平之本，元不外此。

²⁰ 今，恩足以及禽獸。而功不至於百姓者，獨何與？(…)今，恩足以及禽獸，而功不至於百姓者，獨何與？

²¹ 既說出“推”字，因曉以推之之法，“權”“度”即推之訣也。雖請度之，昏王豈能豁然省悟。遂拖出一端冷說話，忒將“抑”字為發語辭，【“王請度之”以上，證曉王心固有之天理，“抑王”以下，挾斥王心蔽固之人慾。】“興”字“危”字“構”字，令人心悚，“快”字勒激齊王，使輸本情。便是治盜官決案問目。

²² 權然後，知輕重，度然後，知長短。物皆然，心為甚，王請度之。抑王，興甲兵，危士臣，構怨於諸侯然後，快於心與。

²³ 孟子曰：“其情則可以為善”，儘名言也。雖桀紂生子則知愛，扶膚則知痛，當死則知哀，苟推是心，仁不可勝用也。是其情可以為善者也。不直曰“性善”而已，而曰“其情”，不直曰“其情善”，而必曰“情則”，又必曰“可以”，宛轉立言，回護惹引，使人人回認腔子中有天性一線之善也，初非梗把桀紂之性壓喚為善也。

²⁴ 乃若其情則可以為善矣，乃所謂善也。

²⁵ 情者，性之動也。人之情，本但可以為善，而不可以為惡，則性之本善，可知矣。

但今讀者不解文義，徒誦音釋，不達於文者，烏能知義理哉。欲救今日之弊，先論以文義，使讀者玩味悅釋。

- 26 起頭因王言而先舉利，結尾因己言而先舉仁義。仍以何必利翻蹴了。口氣英爽一，令人悚悟 (...) 明義利、救戰國，子輿之大功。故以“何必利”、“有仁義”為《孟》書首章。
- 27 王何必曰利？亦有仁義而已矣 (...) 王亦曰仁義而已矣。何必曰利？
- 28 夫子罕言利，常防其源也 (...) 故孟子言仁義而不言利，所以拔本塞源而救其弊，此聖賢之心也。
- 29 君子小人王霸之分，只是義利之分，而利字亦非天理外事也。耳目口鼻之得臭味，身體之得安逸，財貨之富厚，位望之尊榮，子孫之長久，即所謂利，而天理之當然也。
- 30 此章言，仁義，根於人心之固有，天理之公也，利心，生於物我之相形，人欲之私也。循天理，則不求利而自無不利，徇人欲，則求利未得而害已隨之，所謂毫釐之差千里之繆。
- 31 明義利救戰國，子輿之大功。故以何必利有仁義，為孟書首章。此兩書記載者之深意也。
- 32 賢人君子讀經典而窮理盡性，希聖知天，欲之真而大之者也。其次為文章立名立言，欲歿世不朽者，雖小之矣，而猶非妄也。漢唐以下文士大家皆是也。未至科第之欲，墮人情性，則遂舉世僥倖而為妄矣。讀書者初不體察聖賢所欲之本旨，但摘句掇字，以為時文而已，則其欲加之心而為慾。遂為僂身悖俗之情，而聖人經典，還為無用之物矣 (Wi 2000, vol. 5, p. 2).
- 33 世路無如人欲險，幾人到此誤平生 (Zhu 1781, vol. 123, p. 436); 伏願陛下自今以往，一念之萌，則必謹而察之，此為天理耶？為人欲耶？果天理也，則敬以擴之，而不使其少有壅闕 (Zhu 1781, vol. 123, p. 684). Both Wi Baekgyu and Zhu Xi acknowledge the existence of human desires, but they differ in that Wi does not think that human desire should be regulated. For a detailed analysis on Zhu Xi's view on human desire, see (Ohama 1983, pp. 222–30).
- 34 倒轉作結，妙極斬截。○突然轉關，突然收住，文勢盤旋飛動 (Niu 1803, vol. 1, p. 1b).
- 35 倒用前句。呼應有法 (Hirose 1925–1927, vol. 1, p. 1).

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